



The Case of the Fire Inside

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The new year brings the all the joys and near-drownings of young love in The Case of the Fire Inside, the latest volume of Bad Machinery! Sonny meets a mysterious new girl who seems to have climbed out of the sea itself, while Mildred falls for the bad boy of Saturday detention. But can either of them succeed in the face of jealous exes, overprotective fathers, and the persistent tide of DESTINY? What is a "selkie"? Is a Morton's toe fatal? And can Dark Rotuss truly save the galaxy?

The Case of the Fire Inside Details

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From Reader Review The Case of the Fire Inside for online ebook

Brian says

John Allison is Best at Comics.

William Leight says

[Warning: mega-spoilers, because I want to complain about the ending.]

I've been obsessively reading John Allison for many years now, and with "The Case of the Fire Inside" I would say that *Bad Machinery*, already his best work, really hit its stride. Allison has always been a funny guy, but *Scary-Go-Round*, though still, in my opinion, well worth reading, lacked a certain amount of depth. Too many characters were more or less placeholders, or didn't quite make sense. Foremost among these was, as Allison himself essentially admitted in describing the genesis of *Bad Machinery*, Shelley, whose unchanging, preternatural good cheer and total lack of common sense worked in a way, but proved a limiting factor to the kind of stories he could tell. So for *Bad Machinery* he reorganized around a new set of characters, jumping forward several years from the end of *SGR* and focusing mainly on a group of 12-year-olds. Significantly, the only two main characters initially brought forward from *SGR* were Amy and Ryan, who were, by the end of the *SGR* run, it's most interesting characters, the ones who had grown and developed the most. And the choice to work with children also helped: kids, by definition, grow and develop. In fact, they become adolescents, and with "The Case of the Fire Inside" Allison tackles adolescence head-on. Cleverly, he does it by foregrounding Sonny, who had previously been the least distinctive of the group of friends at the center of *Bad Machinery*. Pleasant, easygoing, and unassertive, in the previous books Sonny largely seemed content to float along with things as they are. Of course, the thing about adolescence is that things don't — indeed, can't — continue as they were, and the book follows Sonny as he comes to grips with this fact. Since this is Allison, he naturally does so in the form of a supernatural mystery, this one involving a selkie (an excellent symbol of change, as they shed their skins to switch forms). Mildred's abortive romance with an older boy also gets swept into the selkie story, and Lottie provides a number of hilarious interludes. There's also the story of an older woman, on the edge of dementia, who takes in the selkie Ellen, straight from the sea, in the belief that she is her own daughter, and as an act of rebellion against her actual child's desire to put her in a retirement home. (We never learn this woman's name, she is referred to solely as "Ma".) This part of the story is extremely well done, in particular the ending, in which Ma, after sending Ellen back into the sea to her selkie family, walks into it herself. It's sad, but powerful because it works so well, with Ma's decision that she has nothing left to live for seeming tragic and plausible as well as noble, since in a way she is sacrificing herself for Ellen's happiness. Or at least, that's how it works in the original, online version. Unfortunately, according to the printed version's afterword, after that scene went online a lot of people wrote to Allison about how much they liked Ma and how sad it was, and he decided to change it so that she was also a selkie and was returning to her home in the sea as well. Not only does this push the bounds of credulity a little too far — one selkie is fine, two selkies is an acceptable coincidence, but to have every new female character be a selkie is too much — it doesn't make sense. If she could have gone back to the sea at any time, why didn't she? Why keep living in an increasingly filthy house, with the only thing she had to look forward to occasional visits by a daughter who finds her to be an embarrassment? And why didn't she mention this rather important fact to Ellen once it became obvious that Ellen was a selkie? More importantly, it destroys the power of Ma's action, robbing it of its meaning. If she was a selkie and could go back to the sea, of course she's going to do that, rather than continue her life as it is. What makes it so touching and sad in the online version is precisely the fact that, unlike Ellen (but like the readers), she doesn't have the selkie option available to her. But most of all, it completely undermines the point of the

story. As a selkie, Ellen represents change without being changeable herself: she must return to the sea because if she stays too long, she will become different and be unable to return (like Sasha, who has literally outgrown her skin and so lost the selkie side of her nature). But for the human characters, the story says, change is inevitable, even if not always welcome, and they must learn to accept it. Giving Ma a way out as Allison does runs completely counter to the entire theme of the otherwise carefully crafted and well-written story. While I appreciate that Allison wanted to listen to his fans, in this case they were just wrong.

Ryan Boros says

Sometimes, you should leave items on the beach
The secret lives of Selkies
A bit of melancholy in the end

Jon Fulkerson says

Allison has some of the best dialogue, and his panel composition is excellent.

Cale says

This is the second Selkie-themed graphic novel I've read in the past few weeks; weird coincidence. I'm a big fan of Allison's Giant Days series and have read at least one previous Bad Machinery volume. Fortunately the books aren't too serial-focused; I was able to follow almost everything with little trouble. However, the transition from web comic to book form doesn't do the pacing any favors. It still works, and there are still some brilliant moments, but it doesn't quite hold together as well as Giant Days does.

This volume focuses on Mildred and Sonny, who are both having romantic challenges in their lives - Sonny falls for a Selkie while Mildred is connecting with Lee and dealing with his ex Sasha. There are a wide variety of emotional beats played out, and some charming humor. The stories manage to tie together to a decent ending, and everything works out okay (for the most part). It's not the best of Allison's work, but it is an enjoyable diversion.

Jack Bates says

This was the first case of the Mystery-Solving Teens of Bad Machinery that I ever read, leading me spiralling into the worlds of Scary Go Round and Giant Days.

Here we find Linton and Jack becoming increasingly interested in girls, Sonny wishing he was still a kid, Mildred getting in trouble with a Bad Boy and Lottie being a force of nature. Luckily Shauna is a steadying influence.

When Ellen arrives unexpectedly at school unable to read or write but **very** good at swimming she causes all kinds of unusual events to unfold in Tackleford. Also Lottie is banned from every public swimming pool in Britain.

P. says

Allison has really hit his stride with these characters, and the books let the story expand beyond the weekly gag to full length narrative. (I mean, I'm not going back to compare the web archive to the book, but I think there are expanded parts)

Comics Alternative says

<http://comicsalternative.com/young-re...>

Jeannette says

After reading the previous volume, I was going to the library anyway, and I couldn't resist picking up this volume. For the first time, I saw generally where one of these stories was going to go, but that didn't take away from the fun at all. Again, it was so nice to see characters interact in different ways with each other, and the addition of romances was sweet. While I think I preferred the previous story in terms of humor, I really liked the plot and resolution of this story a lot.

jzthompson says

Probably the best of these Bad Machinery cases, the drama has become more thoughtful as the kids enter the choppy waters of adolescence and on the humour side of things there is a stronger emphasis on character and dialogue rather than surreal chaos. All the cases so far have had a strong sense of seasonality, and the chilly wintery colours, all cold grey rain, heavy green seas and tepid light, really set the melancholy tone. But what's really nice here is how... er... nice all the kids are. They help each other, they give and take advice, Jack and Linton are a little mean to Sonny early on so by the end of the story they apologise... these are all very distinct, but very decent characters. In future cases Allison starts to put the kids through the wringer, particularly playing on the class issues that become more problematic as you age, it's nice to go back to this case to remember why you have so much affection for these characters.

Kathy says

It is always a delight to hang out with this crew.

Kit Feral says

I really like these. Literally the only problem is the shape of the darn books! They were annoying before and are nearly impossible with a nine month fetus involved haha

Emily says

Much silliness ensues when the mysterious girl Sonny spots swimming in the sea starts going to their school. I love the hilarious dialogue and the zany sweetness of these books.

Keith Davis says

Sonny and Mildred get their first taste of love, not with each other thankfully because they are cousins. Unfortunately Sonny's first love turns out to be a seal in disguise, we have all been there I suppose. Mildred's budding romanticism is the fuel in this plot engine, but Charlotte as always is the goofy oil that keeps it running smoothly.

Morgan says

Amazing. Loved it.
