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# Swallow Me Whole



## Synopsis

Swallow Me Whole is an award-winning love story carried by rolling fog, terminal illness, hallucination, apophenia, insect armies, and unshakeable faith. In his most ambitious book to date, Powell quietly explores the dark corners of adolescence -- not the cliched melodramatic outbursts of rebellion, but the countless tiny moments of madness, the vague relief of medication, and the mixed blessing of family ties. As the story unfolds, two stepsiblings hold together amidst schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, family breakdown, animal telepathy, misguided love, and the tiniest hope that everything will someday make sense. Deliberately paced, delicately drawn, and drenched in shadows, Swallow Me Whole is a landmark achievement for Nate Powell and a suburban ghost story that will haunt readers long after its final pages. 2009 Eisner Award Winner for Best Graphic Album (New), Eisner Award Nominee for Best Writer/Artist and Best Lettering, 2009 Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist for Young Adult Fiction, Ignatz Award Winner for Outstanding Artist and Outstanding Debut, and official selection of YALSA's Great Graphic Novels For Teens.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Indy comic artist Powell, an Eisner-nominee, works full time with adults with developmental disabilities, which may have been an inspiration for Swallow Me Whole, a stand-alone graphic novel about two teenage stepsiblings with psychological problems. Ruth suffers from obsessive compulsive disorder and thinks she can hear insects speak, making it difficult for her to walk across grassy lawns but landing her a sweet internship in the natural history museum. Perry sometimes sees a tiny wizard who speaks to him about his destiny, which would be cute if this were a fantasy

comic; instead, it's sadly tragic since Perry recognizes the wizard as nothing more than a troublesome hallucination. It should be obvious from the start that things will not end well. Dark inks and elongated whispering word balloons carry us into Ruth's world of voices and missing time, while experimental paneling masterfully conveys the characters' inner worlds and altered states. Powell's ultimate message remains unclear: is this a cautionary tale reminding ill teens to take their medication(s)? Or should we take a hopeful message away from Ruth's tragic story, knowing that one need not give in completely to one's delusions? (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Grade 10 Up  
Powell has created a complex tale of two adolescent step-siblings struggling through the usual angst and discovery that occur during the teenage years. However, for Ruth and Perry, mental illness makes this time even more difficult. Ruth, who is at the center of the story, suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder and patterns of schizophrenia. Infatuated with insects, she keeps collections of them in jars in her room and is constantly arranging and rearranging them. She hallucinates that masses of insects surround her and fears stepping on any living thing. For Ruth, the simplest tasks present huge challenges. Perry fights his own demon as he tries to rid himself of a small wizard who persistently appears and makes him draw. The author's treatment of mental illness is realistic and sensitive. Readers are brought into the experiences of the characters and empathize with them. The relationships Ruth and Perry have with each other and with other family members are honest and lovingly portrayed. Every word in this graphic novel is carefully chosen, dialogue is realistic, and background "noise" masterfully done. Powell's detailed pen-and-ink drawings are well executed with lettering and images so brilliantly intertwined that they are one and the same. While the complexity and subject matter of *Swallow Me Whole* will not appeal to everyone, those teens who pick it up will discover a poignant story.  
Lara McAllister, Halifax Public Libraries, Nova Scotia Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Another engaging story from Nate Powell. Amazing and gripping...I recommend anything by this author. Some readers may be turned off by the black and white only artwork, but I find that to be part of the effectiveness of what Powell does.

Powell achieves something wonderful and fascinating in this graphic novel, using the resources of visual storytelling to capture psychological distortions in a compelling story about emerging

schizophrenia and OCD. Not many comics have tackled such subject matter (Epileptic, Marbles, a small segment of Fun Home, Spiegelman's "Hell Planet" episode, Mother Come Home), which is surprising given the capacity of the medium to invite readers into a character's subjective perception of the world. Perhaps Powell's novel will chart a course. Sensitive and compelling work.

I simply can't get enough of Powell's work. In a sea of graphic novels about dysfunctional families, awkward comings of age, and grappings with mental illness, this one has always stood above the rest, and I continue to read and enjoy it through the years. His work deftly conveys the angst and isolation of adolescence, and it makes my heart ache every time I read it. I come from a family with a history of schizophrenia, and so much of this story resonates with me. A moving, beautiful work.

A subtle depiction of the extremes we may all feel in the face of chaos or loss. Beautifully paced, intelligently, drawn. A book I will recommend to others both as art and because it helps make sense of both mental disorder and supposedly ordered lives.

Nice book really enjoyed it had to read for class I know no punctuation marks either I just wanted it to be quick

This book really helped me with my schizophrenia and I have made great strides because of this author. Nate is a great guy and even wrote to me fairly quickly when I contacted him with my story.

Swallow Me Whole is from Nate Powell, who has also illustrated John Lewis's *March*. This comic is about a pair of teenagers who endure hard times within their families. They are also seeing things that make their daily lives even harder. There is a one big problem with the artwork. The speech balloons are already rather small and often become even smaller. The result is that the dialog is often hard to read. I often had to rely on the Kindle e-book's zooming tool. On the other hand, though the artwork is somewhat cartoonish, it is heavily shaded and cross-hatched, and it becomes quite emotive. What can I say about the story itself? It's the kind of story that demands attentiveness yet heartily rewards it. The plot is simple but it effectively and sensitively shows a major part of these teenagers' lives. The things that they see and how they interweave with their days is conveyed quite well, bolstered by the appropriately surreal imagery. Consider this another recommendation as a thoughtful work of graphic fiction.

Interesting graphic novel about struggles with OCD and mental illness. This is why graphic novels are such a great medium for adult subjects. A bit on the short side, but it will make you think and question your own reality. Top Shelf is always a good bet - they put out some of the best graphic novels in the business.

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