

Quarantine Comix: A Memoir of Life in Lockdown

Rachael Smith

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Depression and a pandemic might not seem like promising fodder for a comic, but Rachael Smith's graphic novel *Quarantine Comix* captures the daily challenges of the creative life during the Covid-19 lockdown in the UK in an inviting, self-deprecating way.

For Smith, a self-employed comics artist, the quarantine feels isolating; she spends most of it with a housemate, her boyfriend, and a cat. Pining for her partner's company, her sense of time changes: "Why does April have 200 days in it this year??" On walks in the Yorkshire countryside, it's reassuring for her to see spring blossom; in a period of uncertainty, nature is still a reliable source of solace.

Most of the pages contain three to five black-and-white panels, with occasional full-color pictures bursting in like Technicolor video game scenes. Depression surfaces when Smith compares others' achievements to her own feelings of paralysis. In an effective extended metaphor for her mindset, she contrasts "Barky," an embodiment of the age-old black dog symbol for depression, with "Friendly," a white canine who dispenses kindness to neutralize the negativity. The imaginary pair vie for her attention. In one tableau, they latch onto opposite sides of her garment and start to tear it apart with their teeth.

The narrative reveals how emotions compound each other, as when Smith feels guilty for being despondent and giving into unhealthy habits—like doomscrolling and not changing out of her pajamas before Zoom meetings—when she knows that others are worse off. Once troubling situations are also put into perspective: "I miss Brexit," she laments. As lockdown regulations are altered, her coping mechanisms adapt, too. Wild swimming, being reunited with her boyfriend, and returning to part-time work in a café all help to improve her mood.

Quarantine Comix is a lighthearted graphic memoir about ordinary mental health struggles during an extraordinary time.

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