



Strong Female Protagonist: Book One

Brennan Lee Mulligan

Molly Ostertag, Illustrator

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A twenty-year-old ex-superhero attempts to rejoin the real world in this resonant graphic novel about growing up and forming an identity.

Strong Female Protagonist, a webcomic turned graphic novel, written by Brennan Lee Mulligan and drawn by Molly Ostertag, is an accurate relatable portrayal of a modern young woman figuring out that the world is not black and white—and that she cannot save it simply by punching supervillains in the face. The last bit is maybe not within the purview of the average twenty-year-old, but in the midst of a swirl of current events and fantastical happenings, the titular character's struggles feel all too real.

Alison Green, known to the world as Mega Girl, has a condition known as Autonomic Somadynamism that gives her super strength, invincibility, and the power to kick some serious monster butt all over multiple panels. In the backstory, she fought supervillains with a team of masked teenage superheroes called the Guardians. However, in a final confrontation with her nemesis, she was forced to see him as a person, not just as a one-dimensional evil villain. After that, her whole understanding of the world, and her own power within it, expands—and falls apart. She abandons the anonymity of her mask and (less successfully) the fighting, and she makes the decision to attend college instead.

Against the background of a continuous onslaught of monsters coming after her, and flashbacks to her past identity as a fighter, Alison attends classes and protests, reads books, and struggles with her grades. The story is set almost seamlessly in our world; however, because of its original format as a webcomic, some of the attempts to ground it in reality are jarringly a few years out of date. For the most part, though, Alison's struggles manifest as current and relevant problems with familiar emotional fallout. Mulligan and Ostertag have made a strikingly resonant sketch of what growing up looks like. For Millennials and anyone still figuring out how to find their place and motivation in the world, *Strong Female Protagonist* is a must read.

EMERSON M. FULLER (Spring 2015)

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