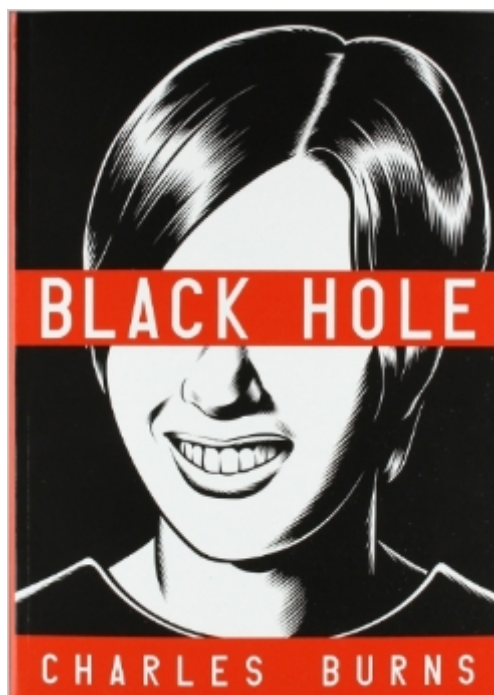


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# Black Hole (Pantheon Graphic Novels)



## Synopsis

Winner of the Eisner, Harvey, and Ignatz Awards  
The setting: suburban Seattle, the mid-1970s. We learn from the outset that a strange plague has descended upon the area's teenagers, transmitted by sexual contact. The disease is manifested in any number of ways — from the hideously grotesque to the subtle (and concealable) — but once you've got it, that's it. There's no turning back. As we inhabit the heads of several key characters — some kids who have it, some who don't, some who are about to get it — what unfolds isn't the expected battle to fight the plague, or bring heightened awareness to it, or even to treat it. What we become witness to instead is a fascinating and eerie portrait of the nature of high school alienation itself — the savagery, the cruelty, the relentless anxiety and ennui, the longing for escape. And then the murders start. As hypnotically beautiful as it is horrifying, *Black Hole* transcends its genre by deftly exploring a specific American cultural moment in flux and the kids who are caught in it— back when it wasn't exactly cool to be a hippie anymore, but Bowie was still just a little too weird. To say nothing of sprouting horns and molting your skin |

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Charles Burns, *Black Hole* (Pantheon, 2005) Really, the only thing I should need to say about Charles Burns' superlative *Black Hole* is "wow." And I'm not terribly sure I can say anything more; many professional reviewers have tried, and as good as the reviews have uniformly been, all of them have failed to capture what it is that makes *Black Hole* one of the best books, graphic or no, of the past half-decade (or more). When faced with such glorious failure, why not give it a shot? Set in

suburban Seattle in the mid-seventies, *Black Hole* centers on two high-school students, Keith and Chris, who know nothing about one another other than the they share a biology class. Keith, like most of the rest of his class, has a major crush on Chris; Chris thinks Keith is a really nice guy. The chapters alternate between the exploits (and points-of-view) of the two. Surrounding the tale of these two would-be lovers is the Bug, a sexually-transmitted disease (while one couldn't call it akin to pregnancy, given its 100% infection rate, Burns does have a few amusing moments where his characters liken it to same). People infected with the Bug are outcasts who live in a wooded area above Ravenna Park that Keith and his stoner pals call Planet Xeno (for no particular reason they can name). There are also weird goings-on in the woods (that will likely put you in mind of *The Blair Witch Project*). And then people infected with the Bug start to disappear...*Black Hole* is pitch-perfect in tone, pacing, and characterization. There's just a touch of nostalgia, though Burns never allows himself to fall into the trap of romanticizing the mid-seventies.

"I don't think I've ever read anything that better captures the details, feelings, anxieties, smells, and cringing horror of my own teenage years better than *Black Hole*. By the book's end, one ends up feeling so deeply for the main character it's all one can do not to turn the book over and start reading again." Chris Ware had heard about this book, but I really didn't know what it was about. Me, the adult, who loves to read, and sent me this book I ordered. Why, it is a comic book! I started to read, and I was captivated. This was meant for the teenager in all of us. The teenage years, we can't quite forget. For some of us, the best years of our life, for others, the alienating, lonely, isolating years of our teenage existence. Charles Burns started writing a comic book ten years ago that became a large three hundred and eighty plus paged book of teenage life. Done in black and white drawings with a story in first person, it tells us of "The Bug", a strange plague transmitted by sexual contact that affects and infects teenagers in Seattle in the 1970's. The teenagers are affected in different ways, for some it is a rash; for others it is the grotesque body parts that grow upon their bodies. But, for all, it is an isolating, alienating experience. No one who has "The Bug" will ever be accepted by society or ever be the same again. The anxiety of our high school years, the torment, the torture of words, by our peers. How can we forget? Well, we can't and "*The Back Hole*" brings this world home to us. Keith has a crush on Chris. He and Chris have sex with other people, and they both develop the plague, "The Bug". There is no education about this new "thing", there is no publicity to help make everyone aware of this new "thing".

Outstanding! Absolutely the best graphic horror novel ever written, and brought together in one book

that I literally finished in only a few hours. Then I had to go back, and peer once again at the wonderfully twisted graphic cells. Forget herpes and AIDS, this story is about a sexually transmitted disease that is sweeping through the teen population in Seattle WA during the 70's. Sure, it may be fatal, but when teenagers are so concerned about looks and cliques and fitting in, this little bug reaches into the core of their self esteem and strips it by making them become...freaks. Every reaction is different, from second mouths to boils to skin peels to total disfigurement. In an era of heavy greenery-smoking, a group of friends, including Keith Pearson, like to make their way to a private spot in the woods to get high. They find strange items, like a campsite of sorts. Keith is enamored by a girl in his biology class, Chris. But Chris has a crush on Rob Facincanni. At a party, Rob protests but Chris seduces him, only afterward discovering why he protested. Rob is one of "them", the 'diseased'. While Rob and Chris come to an understanding, Keith meets an affected girl names Eliza. Rob helps Chris to escape to the 'encampment', a place where the 'diseased' live in peace, in their makeshift camps. Keith tries to save Chris from the camps, but still feels Eliza pulling him to her. But really, can anyone be saved from this monstrous evil? Is hiding the best way, or would running away be better? How many of the diseased within the camp are also diseased in the mind? What will happen to Keith, Chris, Rob, and Eliza? Certainly, you will find it to be more than your average teen must deal with.

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