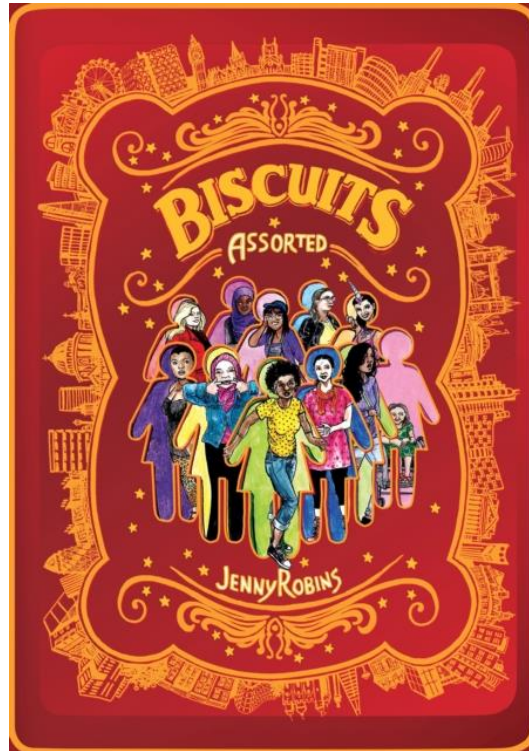




Biscuits (Assorted) by Jenny Robins

[Contemporary Fiction]



Come, meet some new friends. You'll feel like you've known them for years!

If my favourite part of this job is providing top-notch recommendations tailored specifically to readers' tastes, then perhaps the greatest pleasure of all is being taken completely by surprise by a graphic novel – debut or otherwise (and this is Jenny's debut) – which renders me wide-eyed with wonder and so slack-jawed after an hour or two aching with laughter that I cannot wait for someone new to walk through the shop door so that I can press the book fervently into their hands.

Current status...? Unequivocally ecstatic, thanks!

Jenny Robins's *BISCUITS (ASSORTED)* is a delicious, grin-inducing joy – as well as one of the most effortlessly accessible and all-inclusive celebrations of friendships that I've ever been blessed to stumble across.

Not only are there more sparkling rejoinders per page than any other comic I can think of – even John Allison's wit-ridden *BAD MACHINERY* – but I cannot think of anything quite like this in terms of its brief, episodic structure, which is extraordinary given how obviously winning it is in retrospect.

Over the course of 300 pages, many, many stories will unfold, served up in two- or three-page conversational snippets before we're led gaily away to see what some other women are up to. The book's dip-in, dip-out nature leaves its readers room to pause and to ponder, to smile and reflect. It's like hopping delightedly between tables down a pub populated by the most fascinating folk who are all up for brand-new experiences and a pretty decent crack.

I warn you right now that it's not without the occasional moment of quiet courage in the wake of tremendous adversity, but that courage is both as impressive and infectious as the fun. The contrast is all the more moving for it, and so deftly controlled.



Running throughout the book – between the brief bursts of evolving story – is an extrapolation of the cover’s cookie-cover motif as characters pop up and are spot-lit once, twice or several more times, with equally evolving and often satirical one-sentence “status summaries” appended. The idea being that we are all individuals who cannot be so concisely quantified, and are far more likely to surprise those we know than we are to conform uniformly either to some bizarre homogenous physical and mental shape or indeed our own characters, consistently, as perceived by others.

Right in the comic’s centre the individuals and their threads converge geographically on London’s South Bank during a feminist festival. Not everyone knows each other, of course, though some will be introduced, but each experiences the same time and place in different ways before taking those experiences away with them. Brilliant! Indeed *BISCUITS (ASSORTED) bursts* with a spirit of place – that place being London – in all its contrasting and often crammed together, higgledy-piggledy glory, with majestic full-page architectural collages providing additional chapter breaks.



The detail is rich and the textures quite worked but not overwhelming – this book is so full of space! Better still, the gestures are just-so, expressively, and each individual's facial reactions dance from gleeful or aghast to contemplatively serene. Although I do think Maya, perpetually on the phone while travelling by The Tube, is going to come away with a very stiff neck hahaha!

Released as recently as late 2020, Jenny Robins's BISCUITS (ASSORTED) has improbably leapfrogged, legs akimbo, over hundreds upon hundreds of other comics to find itself quite startlingly in my Top Twenty Favourite Graphic Novels of All Time.

