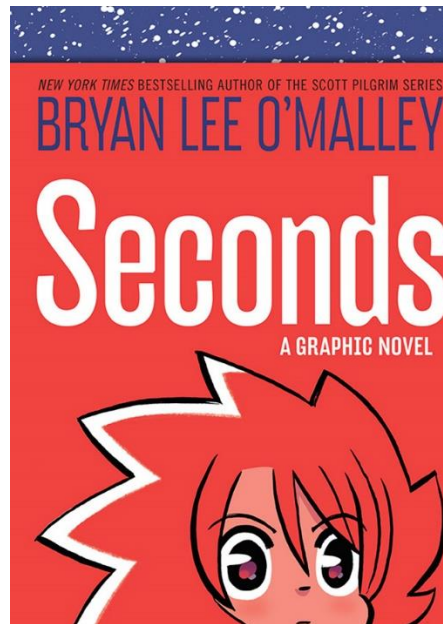




## Seconds by Bryan Lee O'Malley

[Comedy]



From the creator of SCOTT PILGRIM, a cautionary tale for those re-playing past saves on Playstation rather than cracking on with the rest of the game. You could extrapolate that to real life, probs.

Katie used to be head chef at Seconds, an acclaimed restaurant on top of a hill. Its imaginative menu and impeccable cooking makes it as popular as ever but Katie's mentally moved on. She has her heart set on starting a new restaurant in a building empty for ages and dilapidated as hell. Its old stone building oozes character and Katie can picture it with a grand wooden staircase, an ornate chandelier and an open kitchen run by bright, energetic staff serving the very best cuisine to an adoring public. Reality check: its renovation is way behind schedule and gobbling up money.



No matter. Katie's still executive chef at Seconds and she basks in the adulation of diners; the waiters are lucky if they can get a word in. But this evening two things go wrong. Katie's ex comes out to eat in with a girl causing Katie to have a meltdown and stomp downstairs to argue with the new head-chef with whom she's having an affair. I know, right...? They're snogging in the scullery when they hear the clatter in the kitchen where an accident has left waitress Hazel's arms dripping in scalding hot fat.

*They were supposed to be supervising.* Katie feels awful. She is *wracked* with guilt. But then she remembers a dream... A girl with glowing hair and haunting eyes sat hunched on top of her dresser."If things go wrong," she said, "don't forget." Then she hops into the top drawer of that dresser.



Tonight Katie tentatively opens the top drawer of that dresser and discovers a box. In that box she finds a notebook titled 'My Mistakes', a mysterious red-capped mushroom and a card printed thus:

#### A SECOND CHANCE AWAITS.

1. Write your mistake
2. Ingest one mushroom
3. Go to sleep
4. Wake anew

Bleary-eyed, Katie dutifully follows the instructions... and awakens to find reality rewritten!

Katie *didn't* canoodle with Andrew so the accident *never* took place! Hazel is, extraordinarily, as right as rain! Everything's been corrected, everything's okay! Lucky, lucky Katie! Yippee! The End.

Except... Katie finds another stash of mysterious mushrooms and she simply... cannot... stop herself.

SECONDS is masterfully constructed with impeccable control. You'll see what I mean as everything increasingly unravels. Egotism becomes egomania and unlike so many protagonists Katie's self-awareness doesn't gradually grow. Instead – after what was essentially a compassionate, altruistic revision to save Hazel's literal skin – Katie loses sight of priorities, her sense of perspective and responsibility, and her comprehension of cause and effect: of ripples and repercussion. The strange glowing girl returns time and again with increasingly incandescent eyes that had me howling out loud!



The characters' fine fashion is all you'd expect from O'Malley, while inker Jason Fischer adds more intricate detail on the architecture. The site of Katie's second prospective restaurant is a star in its own right. Its brown brick and beige stone climb precariously towards a fourth-storey, castellated tower. The aerial views of the town are breathtaking, beautiful in greens, browns and antler grey under a late-afternoon winter sky thanks to colourist Nathan Fairbairn. The panel composition is much tighter with strict, straight-ruled borders – gone altogether are the bleeds – with some parts of the page unused altogether during moments of disorientation, waiting or 'what's happened now?'