



The War at Ellsmere

Faith Erin Hicks , Hope Larson (Illustrator)

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Juniper is the newest scholarship student at the prestigious Ellsmere Academy. She soon finds herself labeled a "special project," harried by stringent standards, and in the novel position of being someone's nemesis.

Luckily for Jun, she has an ally in the quirky Cassie, who tells her the story of Ellsmere's eccentric founders and the legend of the creature that roams the woods on the school's grounds. But can Cassie help Jun survive Ellsmere? Between queen bees and mythical beasts, Jun has quite the year ahead of her.

The War at Ellsmere Details

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From Reader Review The War at Ellsmere for online ebook

Lauren says

I really enjoyed reading this!

The War at Ellsmere focuses on Juniper, a girl who has got into a boarding school on a full scholarship. Once there, she meets Emily, a horrible bitch of a girl who wants to make Juniper's life a misery. The reason for this is simply because Juniper is from a poor background and does not have the privileged upper-class lifestyle Emily and her cronies enjoy.

At times, I really felt like smacking Emily, I mean she is a disgraceful human being and utterly detestable but, unfortunately, also highly accurate. I never went to an all-girls school but I can only imagine the sea of bitchiness that such establishments harbour (a mixed school is bad enough for bullying) but to single Juniper out because of her economic background is disgusting.

Anyway, Juniper is a great character because she isn't all self-pitying and doesn't allow Emily to get one over her and ruin her time at school. Plus, she has a great friend in Cassie (who is lovely).

The only drawback to this would be the ending. I personally would have ended it differently and I really wanted Juniper to triumph over Emily (she does to some degree but not as much as I would have liked) but hey ho; it's only a minor thing.

The illustrations are typical Hicks and the dialogue is great and incredibly realistic. Go check it out now!

Sam Quixote says

Juniper wins a scholarship to the prestigious Ellsmere Academy boarding school but soon finds herself at odds with the rich toff girls who see poor people as entertainment. The war between Jun and the Ellsmere mean girl posse begins!

The War at Ellsmere is yet another fantastic Faith Erin Hicks original! She's so good at writing believable, real characters that are effortlessly likeable. Jun is wonderful - a headstrong, clever and fiercely independent hero (think Daria but more vulnerable) - as is her roommate, the mousy Cassie (who reminded me a lot of Daisy from Giant Days), who develops over the course of the book from a meek and shy lonely girl into someone more confident and forceful.

The book doesn't have the most original story and the drama plays out fairly predictably but because the characters are so well realised, you're with them for the whole ride and the to-ing and fro-ing between Jun and Emily was more than enough to keep me invested. The magical realist finale was a brilliant touch and took the story to the next level. Hicks' black and white manga-esque art is very charming and expressive too.

All that said about the characters, the one critique I'd make is that Emily, the head mean girl, comes off as a bit too one dimensional. She's a villainous cardboard cut-out rather than a character we get to know, let alone understand her motivations and behaviour. I guess some kids are just lil fuckers but there's usually a reason and there wasn't one here. She's very underwritten.

Still, it's a minor criticism and for the most part I really enjoyed *The War at Ellsmere*. Like everything by this super-talented creator, it's a quality, well-written comic full of humour, heart and superb characters - definitely worth a look for Hicks and indie comics fans!

Jason says

One of the best prep school mean girls stories I've read thus far. Hicks sells her characterizations well while still delivering the thrill of seeing the misfit stand up to the bully. Is the climax jumping the shark? It was foreshadowed, so maybe not. And it robs the reader of any kind of real-world resolution inspiration. That said, *Ellsmere* offers a retreat from the reality that bullies often don't pay any price at all, and maybe allows the beleaguered a little strength to get through another day.

David says

Faith Erin Hicks's second professional graphic novel is much better than her first. While not very original, it's a charming little boarding school story about girl friendships and girl rivalries.

Juniper, aka "Jun," is a thirteen-year-old scholarship student attending *Ellsmere*, an elite boarding school, because she wants to be a doctor. She makes friends with her roommate, Cassie, who is the proverbial poor little rich girl, a sensitive and imaginative soul with negligent parents. And of course both of them run afoul of the local queen bee, Emily, who hates them instinctively for threatening to disturb the social order.

While the "war" between these tweens stays petty and predictable, they each behave like real people (well, real thirteen-year-olds), so Emily is as evil as a thirteen-year-old can be while still very clearly (to adult eyes) just being a snotty little brat. Albeit a very devious one with a likely future in politics. As a Republican.

The supernatural element that appeared at the very end was a kind of "Uh, what?" moment, but a graphic novel for kids can get away with that kind of out-of-nowhere weirdness.

I remain a fan of Hicks and her distinctive drawing style, and her sweet, spunky heroines.

Licha says

This is the second book I've read by Faith Erin Hicks and I have to say that I love the way she captures a teenager's life. The stories can tend to be a little cliché but she still manages to give them her own flavor. I love the way she immediately makes me fall for the characters and feel their pain and cheer for their triumphs.

She has once again managed to bring out the feelings of isolation of the main character but does so in a way where the character does not come across as weak. There's the feelings of abandonment by a parent, in this case, Jun's father died when she was young. The other book I read also dealt with a mother leaving her family behind. It makes your heart break for the MC.

Where she also succeeds, probably more so than with the main character, is with the outcast character. Both

in this book and the one I read before (*Friends With Boys*), she manages to steal the spotlight from the MC with her outcasted characters. My heart melted for these characters.

This doesn't get four stars because I really did hate how the rich character/mean girl got her way. Why can't an adult for once stand up for what she knows is true? Why does money always have to talk and why can't the adult admit this? Jun, the MC, is on a scholarship at a prestigious boarding school and immediately becomes the mean girl's target. Jun sticks up for herself, which makes Emily, the mean girl, set for vengeance with a passion. After lying on Jun twice, Emily gets her way and has Jun expelled. There's no fanfare about this; Jun is simply told she must leave. I get tired of this ploy where no one asks questions. It feels manipulative, allowing for the reader to feel helpless for the MC.

I still think this was a cute and quick read and I look forward to reading more of FEH books.

Sesana says

The War at Ellsmere is not exactly a groundbreaking graphic novel. The story is instantly familiar: a scholarship student at a ritzy school runs up against a snotty mean girl. There are any number of school stories built on this same framework, and Hicks doesn't do anything spectacularly novel with the plotline. We know from very early on how this will go, even if we don't know the specifics, and we aren't disappointed.

Where *Ellsmere* really excels is in the characters it builds. The girls in this book, including our protagonist and her slightly spacey friend, act and react like real girls. And, believe it or not, so does the bullying antagonist. Hicks does a great job of showing why Emily would be so set on maintaining status quo without going into preachy mode, and without giving her a too-good-to-be-true ending. I also appreciate that she doesn't try to paint Emily as the mean popular girl. I suppose those girls must exist, but my experience in school was that popular girls were popular because they were so well-liked, not because they were adept bullies, and that mean girls weren't popular outside their small cliques because they weren't likeable. That seems to be exactly what's going on with Emily, and I like that Hicks didn't fall into the popular=mean cliché.

That said, the ending brings in a strange mystical element that's completely absent for the rest of the book. I can go with it, but it came out of nowhere and wasn't even necessary. The plot was getting resolved on its own, thank you, and didn't need a dose of magic. It came out of nowhere, and I think the book would have been better, or at least no worse off, without.

Of course, I love Hicks's art. She's so good at giving her characters real expressions and distinct looks. Pair it with the writing, and the characters in her books become real people, even with her somewhat cartoony style.

So no, there's nothing strikingly original about this school story. It's just remarkably well done, with great art.

Mavence [semi hiatus] says

This graphic novel is a light read and I love how the art style fits perfectly with the whole theme of the story.

However, I do think that this projected a rather plain and typical representation of the tropes in this book. While this may be quite enjoyable for younger audiences, I think it didn't effectively left important points it wanted to convey. Also, I find the loose fantasy element to be unnecessary and ornamental for this book. This is a very typical graphic novel of an almost rags to riches high school story. It is quite good but not so good that it could leave an impression.

Meagan says

I can't remember if I added this to my reading list before or after I learned that Faith Erin Hicks would be working with Rainbow Rowell on a graphic novel, but either way that was my primary motivating factor for picking it up now instead of later. That, and my anxiety about reducing the size of my reading list.

This is my first experience with Faith Erin Hicks, and I liked it. I especially responded to the friendship between Jun and Cass. I don't think good friendships are put to paper as much as they should be. Sure, there's not much new ground here, and sure, it took a slightly odd turn toward the end, but it was perfectly enjoyable and quick. No complaints.

Abby says

Faith Erin Hicks has a very similar style to Brendan Lee O'Malley (Scott Pilgrim) -- blocky & manga-esque, but in her case you can actually tell the female characters apart, which is nice (that is one thing that kind of bugs me about SP). The set-up seems pretty familiar at first -- working-class scholarship girl goes to exclusive boarding school and immediately runs afoul of the reigning Queen Bee -- BUT Juniper, the scholarship girl, totally talks back to the mean girls and it is hilarious and delightful. This is what the Minx comics should have been. I'm only giving it 3.5 stars however, because I thought the whole incident with the magical beast in the woods at the end was unnecessary. What can I say, I am not a huge fan of magical realism.

Raina says

Pretty standard outsider-goes-to-boarding-school tale. There are bullies, there are grades, there is a mousey poor-little-rich-girl roommate. There's a mysterious story about the woods next door. I liked the illustration style and it entertained me for a night's reading, but didn't find anything particularly new here. The ending is above average, but I still wanted more.

Rach says

An enjoyable story about a girl who enters a boarding school and realizes she has more in common with the girls there than she anticipated. Oh, and there's a unicorn! My only wish would be that each storyline would have more depth. Obviously, it's hard to spend a lot of time on something when you have such limited space - 144 pages really isn't that many - but if it wasn't possible to increase the space, maybe it could have been more focused. For instance, we hear that Jun's father died when she was young, and she clearly has a lot of

pent-up emotions about that, but other than a look of longing at a picture and a brief conversation with her roommate, we don't hear much about how her father's death had affected her. Also, Jun and Cassie seemed to reach their goals with seemingly little effort. Jun wants a better grade on a paper, so she mentions studying more, and BAM! There's an A on the next paper. Jun encourages Cassie to write a story, they sit on a bed scribbling, and BOOM! Cassie wins the essay contest. Basically, I just wanted more, not because I didn't like what I read, but because I liked it so much, I wanted to know more about these girls and spend more time with them. I also really love Hicks' artistic style, and would happily read the rest of her work.

David Schaafsma says

This precedes and is not nearly as good as *Friends with Boys* but has her deft, manga-esque capturing of emotions with small gestures and lines... The story focuses on a girl who gets accepted at a prestigious private school for girls as a "scholarship" girl and is predictably bullied and predictably resolves things, all too easy. I really disliked the inclusion of a unicorn in the story. But I did like the two main girls.

Seth T. says

If young adult fiction suffers from one thorn in its literary side, it's disposability. Books in the demographic are devoured and forgotten with an ease that must wound all but the most circumspect authors. Works directed at the youthful stock and trade so heavily on tropes that they have passed from the realm of cliché into something ritual, a liturgy of familiarities. It makes sense, really. These are books aimed at a people who, by the laws that govern universal process, have only the barest experience of the world we all inhabit. Authors aiming to interest nascent adults need drum up narrative conflicts with which these readers will be acquainted—and let's be honest, the well of experienced conflicts will run a lot deeper for grown-ups than it will for nearly any fourteen-year-old.

It's not so much that teenagers are shallow (though many are), but their depth of experience certainly is. While I could have read and understood *Franny & Zooey* or *Savage Detectives* or *The Long Goodbye* as a freshman in high school, they certainly wouldn't have resonated with me in nearly so substantial a way as they did twenty years later. So those hoping to sell books to young audiences have a slender few options to choose from and the end result is a lot of books that are enjoyable enough but are generally just variations on a theme. Young adult literature is often therefore forgettable, disposable. It's not the stories that matter so much as the cheap thrill of the moment's entertainment. And this is even true of many wonderful examples of the demographic. It's true of *The War at Ellsmere*.

Between finishing *The War at Ellsmere* and beginning this review, I also read Raina Telgemeier's *Smile* and a couple volumes of Kaoru Mori's *A Bride's Story*. By the time I sat down to write, I could remember very little of what occurred in *The War at Ellsmere*. Here's what stuck: That it's a boarding school drama—girls' boarding school. That it's a typical outsider heroine-goes-up-against-the-queen-bee-type story. That it was enjoyable enough that I could swallow it whole over a lunch break. That I didn't regret reading it. And that I am now a lifetime fan of Erin Faith Hicks' art.

She's amazing. Her art resembles roughly what you'd find in a volume of *Scott Pilgrim*—only with a touch

more detail and (probably) a touch more heart. Hicks' characters are built of expressions and she sells these effortlessly, taking a character through a range of visible, discernible emotions across the space of a single page. She doesn't restrict herself to a particular grid-size and while not as free from the chains of the panel as, say, your average manga, she still uses up her paneling space in creative ways that further work to buy the reader in to her narrative tricks and treats.

I mentioned above the few things I'd remembered about the book and really, there's hardly anything more that one needs in order to understand *The War at Ellsmere*. It leverages common tropes enjoyably and employs some rad art. Still, in the interest of padding better informing the potential consumer, I glanced through the book again to jog the memory of it.

Jun (Juniper to strangers) is a new arrival at hallowed old Ellsmere, a girls' school with a certain longevity built on the instruction of alumnists' daughters—and the occasional charity case. Jun is one of those scholarship students, the one poor girl in a menagerie of the wealthy. She (of course) catches the evil eye of a girl who is never really stated to be the most popular, though at least as concerns Jun's story, the girl is far-away the most powerful. Jun enjoys their antagonistic relationship until the moment, as one might predict, she doesn't. And it goes from there.

In some ways it's all very obvious and predictable and really exactly what we expect. But in the end, that doesn't matter so much. *The War at Ellsmere*'s pretty much what it has to be, so we read and are aware of where it must go and what it must do to get there. But all the same, there's something special in the heart of the book. Hicks' art breathes life into characters who might otherwise remain hollow YA archetypes. Through her steady hand, we come to like and appreciate these characters and it's in their quiet, reflective moments that Hicks allows them to at least begin to transcend their form. They never do quite escape their destiny—a fate commanded by demographic—but it's an admirable attempt and I was happy to be there for it.

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

Kailey (BooksforMKs) says

I adore this graphic novel! Juniper is a scholarship student who attends a fancy girls boarding school. She makes friends (and enemies) on her very first day, and has to hold her own in the new more competitive learning climate. But there is also a mysterious legend about the old forest and whatever monster or myth might be lurking in its dark shadows.

I'm growing to love Faith Erin Hicks work! Her stories are interesting and surprising, and the artwork is just so beautiful!

I really liked the character development in this book. Each character has their own background story, their own motivations and flaws. I felt really connected to the characters within just a few pages. It's just brilliant story-telling!

The action in this story is told so powerfully through the artwork, that I was pumping my fist in the air and hollering, "Yes!" when someone (who shall remain nameless) got punched in the face! How amazing is it that a picture can call forth that kind of triumphant emotion in a scene?!

Can't wait to read more graphic novels from this artist!

Phoebe says

I could NOT stop smiling while reading this. Ms. Hicks sense of perspective and visual storytelling are the charm to end all charms. And to top it off, the character dev, pacing, and art are nearly flawless -and the story has its feet on the ground (no leaps of logic, no 2-dimensionality). Plus there's a tad of magical realism -but I'm not gonna give anything away about that.

Also, cute, cute hair. Not a character in this book suffers from hair-that-bores.

Skye Kilaen says

This is my personal favorite of Hicks's projects so far. Juniper is a 13 year old smart girl whose family has no money. A scholarship to an elite boarding school seems like just the ticket. Until she gets there and earns the enmity of the ruling Mean Girl. You know what else is more interesting than she had anticipated? Whatever's lurking in the forest nearby.

One thing I love about Hicks's work is that no character is ever a stereotype. Even the Mean Girl. Everything doesn't wrap up at the end in a pretty bow either. But you feel pretty good about Jun's future.

Sarah Sammis says

The War at Ellsmere by Faith Erin Hicks is set at a remote all girls boarding school. Juniper is the newest student — and a scholarship one at that. The popular girl has decided to do whatever it takes to get her expelled. Meanwhile, she's been roomed with Cassie, aka "the orphan" who probably could buy the entire school if she wanted to.

<http://pussreboots.com/blog/2018/comm...>

Lisa says

Elite boarding school, with mean girls pestering the new scholarship student and her roommate. Ink brush illustrations focus on big eyes and gestural hair, but the characters are more substantial than they look. The storyline is fleshed out by an old school legend which no one understands until it repeats itself.

Jesse says

One of the consistencies of Faith Erin Hicks's stories that I'm loving is the inclusion of something supernatural in what would otherwise be an interesting story on its own. That little something unexpected, though, makes all the difference! Those interesting stories become much more. In *The War at Ellsmere* a seemingly unimportant story of the history of the school becomes the crux of the plot. I loved the characters in this one; even the "mean girls", but especially Cassie. I liked that while Jun was the main character of the story, Cassie was the one who stole the show. Another great graphic novel by Faith Erin Hicks!

Crowinator says

Juniper is a scholarship student at the posh, academically rigorous boarding school, Ellsmere Academy. She already knows she isn't going to fit in when she sees her incredibly fancy dorm room and thinks, "Apparently I'm going to school in a Disneyland postcard." She has a smart mouth and a whole lotta attitude, which helps her when she incurs the wrath of Emily, a rich, snobbish but equally snide and witty student. Of course, her smart mouth is also what gets her into trouble with Emily in the first place. Luckily, she makes friends with her roommate Cassie, who is sweet-natured and a little kooky; she often mentions things like alien abductions, and she's the one who tells Jun all the crazy stories about the school's mysterious history and the creature said to roam the nearby woods punishing evil. (This story turns out to be somewhat true.)

This graphic novel melds a lot of great elements: there's the "misfit at boarding school" story, the developing friendship between Cassie and Jun, the rivalry between Emily and Jun, and the weird hints of magic on the school grounds. The dialog is snappy and realistic and the characters are real -- even Emily, who could develop "stock-evil-rich-girl" syndrome but somehow doesn't. (Maybe because she's so cunning in her evil plans.) Juniper makes for a great heroine -- she's smart, determined, and sarcastic, always a great combo. Finally, the black and white art is fantastic. It's quirky and offbeat, like the characters and the story, but not so much that it gets really cartoony. It's perfectly pitched to middle schoolers or junior high kids.
