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Paying For It

"*Paying For It* ... is truly groundbreaking. ... I found myself utterly captivated by [Brown's] story."
—Annie Sprinkle, *The New York Times Book Review*



Synopsis

The critically lauded memoir about being a john, available in paperback for the first time! *Paying for It* was easily the most talked-about and controversial graphic novel of 2011, a critical success so innovative and complex that it received two rave reviews in *The New York Times* and sold out of its first print run in just six months. Chester Brown's eloquent, spare artwork stands out in this paperback edition. *Paying for It* combines the personal and sexual aspects of Brown's autobiographical work (*I Never Liked You*, *The Playboy*) with the polemical drive of *Louis Riel*. He calmly lays out the facts of how he became not only a willing participant in but also a vocal proponent of one of the world's most hot-button topics—prostitution. While this may appear overly sensational and just plain implausible to some, Brown's story stands for itself. *Paying for It* offers an entirely contemporary exploration of sex work—from the timid john who rides his bike to his escorts, wonders how to tip so as not to offend, and reads Dan Savage for advice, to the modern-day transactions complete with online reviews, seemingly willing participants, and clean apartments devoid of clichéd street corners, drugs, or pimps. Complete with a surprise ending, *Paying for It* continues to provide endless debate and conversation about sex work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First, the good news: Chester Brown's "*Paying for It, A Comic-Strip Memoir about Being a John*," is a funny, honest, thought-provoking book. Through his minimalist illustrations (almost sketches, really), Brown tells the entertaining story of how and why he began frequenting prostitutes after his live-in girlfriend, Sook-Yin, decided that she was "falling in love with someone else" and wanted to

share her bed with the other guy instead of him. Most men might find this sort of domestic arrangement unacceptable, but Brown seems to casually accept it with no hard feelings. As underground comics legend Robert Crumb notes in his Introduction, and Brown's friend Seth observes in Appendix 23, the author is a rather cold fish with "a very limited emotional range compared to most people." So, after enduring two years of celibacy following his break-up with Sook-Yin, Brown decides that "paying for it" is the best way to reconcile his desire to have sex with his determination to NOT have a girlfriend. It's an odd choice, but one he believes is the most appropriate for him, given his disillusionment with even the concept of romantic love. Unfortunately for Brown, prostitution is just as illegal in his native Canada as it is in the United States. This makes him more than a bit paranoid when it comes to trying to arrange his first appointments with the female escorts he sees advertising in some of Toronto's weekly newspapers. Brown's fumbling initial experiences are amusing, and even somewhat touching in an awkward way. But he eventually figures out how it all works. From there it's onward to a revolving menu of carnal comfort food, at least as he describes it. Brown circulates among roughly two dozen different partners, before finally settling into monogamy with one.

After eight years of waiting, we are finally graced with a new comic by Chester Brown. Brown's oeuvre is rich and varied, covering such diverse topics as outrageous, scatological farce, introspective childhood memoirs, Bible adaptations, surreal fiction (complete with its own language) and historical biography. Throughout the course of his career, Brown has challenged Bible scholars and the psychological community, to name a few. In this new book, Brown uses autobiography to challenge prostitution laws and their morality in general. Never one to back down from controversy, Brown takes a hands-on look at the profession by not only reading up on said subject, but perusing several prostitutes over the course of a decade. These encounters are depicted in a rather cold and stoic style, neither romanticizing nor sensationalizing them. Brown uses clear, concise facts to show his experiences and he succeeds rather admirably. Brown has obviously had it with the notion of "romantic love", yet still wants to have sex. He decides to peruse the services of a prostitute, yet has no idea how to go about this task. After cruising streets he believes prostitutes would hang out, he goes online to find one. He has quite a few encounters with different ladies... some with regularity, some only once. He encounters many problems... fear he might get assaulted, concern for their working conditions, age, etc... wrestling with certain moral dilemma, even feelings of attachment that comes up for one of the ladies. Brown pulls no punches and doesn't hesitate to portray himself badly. He's particularly hung up about age, as a woman in her late 20s is deemed "too old".

I liked reading this book well enough but something seemed off. I couldn't exactly put my finger on why I wasn't enjoying the book as much as I thought I should be enjoying it. It wasn't the repetitive nature of the stories or the author's obsession with telling every story about every prostitute no matter how uninteresting. Then I read the appendix and Seth's response clarified my distaste. Seth called Chester a robot with a limited emotional range. However, the part that hit home was when Seth talked about an argument depicted in the book where Chester comes off better in his book than he did in real life and if Seth wasn't as good of a debater as he could have been it's because he isn't thinking about libertarian politics 24/7 and it's exhausting talking the Chester because Chester thoroughly researches libertarian politics. This is what kills the book for me. It's a modestly interesting story about a man who decides that he is sick of romantic love but still wants sex. Then it dovetails into these encounters but also the reaction of his friends when he tells them about it. The problem with the book is that Chester won't keep attempting to argue for the completely unfettered free market in terms of prostitution. Even reasonable arguments like legalization with taxation or legalization with regulation are too much for him. By the appendix, he's arguing against everything that is not the complete free prostitution and his arguments began to start stretching things. He believes that prostitution is not wrong because even if sex is sacred, churches make money from sacred objects.

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