Meanwhile, in 1971, the events of Atica, Cambodia, Kent State graphic histories reveal the reality of the Autumn of our discontent.

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The Autumn of Our Discontent
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PLUS...CRUEL SUMMER

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Reading is Just the Beginning
We live in a time of increasing civic dysfunction, racial unrest and political violence. But then, as Americans, we usually have. Sometimes the discord simmers and sometimes it boils over. Our decade is one of the latter, the late 20-teens the most volatile period since the 1960s. Now three graphic non-fiction works take us back to those days of rage. Big Black: Stand at Attica (Archaia) is the first person account of Frank “Big Black” Smith, a young and dumb Smith was sent to Attica, New York’s notoriously harsh state prison. Large and in charge, he was known as “Big Black.” Smith became an ambassador between the various prison factions. That’s why he was chosen as a spokesman for the prisoners of Attica when they took over the prison to protest inhumane conditions. Despite Big Black’s best efforts, it all ended in carnage as the uncompromising Governor Nelson Rockefeller unleashed the state police on the prison. Dramatist Jared Reinmuth follows Smith’s recollections with a sympathetic but honest script, while the photorealistic art of French cartoonist Ameziane puts the reader right in the middle of the action, where you can smell the sweat, the smoke, the blood. Attica (365.97479 Sm55b) also details the words and actions of the authorities, especially the cold-blooded Rockefeller, who describes the massacre as “a beautiful operation” to Richard M. Nixon. The famously paranoid President saw the prison strike as not a homegrown reaction to oppression but further evidence of “an international conspiracy.” That was the viewpoint of many politicians of the day, such as Ohio governor Jim Rhodes. As college campuses across the nation were overwhelmed by protests against the Viet Nam War, baseless conspiracy theories and outlandish rumors ran rampant among both citizens and leadership.

That’s one reason Rhodes sent in the National Guard to quell student unrest on the campus of Kent State University. The explosive mixture of mysterious provocateurs, police infiltrators, exhausted and angry Guardsmen and increasingly militant students led to “four dead in Ohio”, as the song said. In Kent State (Harry N. Abrams), Ohio’s most volatile decade is explained by Derf (My Friend Dahmer) Backderf. The book is Derf’s account from his perspective, but the story is told from the viewpoint of his friend Jeff Miller. Both Krause and Miller were among the protestors that summer of 1969. Krause, Jeff Miller, Sandy Scheuer and Bill Rhodes were part of that generation that believed in themselves to justify their actions. But the main point of this fine graphic history from Drawn & Quarterly is that the divide, so much a part of our current crisis, reached its bloody nadir when the Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia with an iron fist. Vengeful rustics determined to create a glorious future out of the agrarian past, the Communist victors of their Civil War cleared out the cities. The family of Tian Veasna were among those thousands relocated to the countryside. In fact, the author of Year of the Rabbit (959.6042 T4351) was born during the diapora. Veasna’s father Khim struggled to keep his family alive while enduring separation, forced labor, and constant surveillance by finks and zealots. As a doctor, Khim was in danger of falling victim to the never-ending purge of professionals and intellectuals. Firing squads, pistols and pickaxes, even crocodiles: these were the means by which Angkor, the State, eliminated every man, woman and child it considered a threat to its filthy Utopia. But beyond hell lies hope, as the Veasna family persevered and prospered, as described in this fine graphic history from Drawn & Quarterly.

The summer of 1968 is cruel indeed to young Ricky Lawless, his hooligan father Teeg, Dad’s new squeeze Jane, and Dan, the private dick obsessed with Jane. Ricky is a bad apple fallen far too close to the tree. The book opens with him pissing off an old pro wrestler, then follows the kid’s slow but steady journey toward disaster. Teeg can’t be bothered to help his kid. He’s too busy planning a major heist with his crew, which now includes Jane. Teeg loves Jane, madly, deeply. Ricky hates Jane, and plots with Dan Farraday, the detective who considers himself her knight in shining armor. Each character gets their time in the limelight as the reader is pulled from present to past and back again. Like all the best hardboiled fiction, Cruel Summer portrays without judgment the sad stories of bad people doing sordid things. Ed Brubaker’s tough but humane script yet again finds its best expression in the shadowy art of Sean Phillips and the subtle but strong colors of son Jacob. Cruel Summer is available at Central, Tates Creek and Beaumont.
MEANWHILE
go to work in the morning. BFFs Rory and Angela have them post-collegiate blues: Rory, because her plans go bad; Angela, because everything goes according to plan. Rory was set to go study dragons in Australia when she’s dumped at the boarding gate. Angela has snagged a choice internship with the leader in the field of crypto-pharmacology, none other than Rory’s formidable mother. In their first novel, webcomics collaborators Sophie Goldstein and Jenn Jordan answer the question What happened to Harry and the kids after they graduated from Hogwarts? It’s always tough, the first time you leave home and meet the world. Especially when that world turns out to be the exact opposite from what you were raised to believe. Martial artist Shang-chi learns this the hard way when he kills a man he believes to be a menace, only to learn the true threat is the man who taught him to kill. For Shang-chi’s father is one of the world’s greatest villains, the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu! Shang-chi starred in one of the best comics of its decade, Marvel’s Master of Kung Fu. Originally published to exploit the Kung Fu Craze of the 1970s, writer Doug Moench and artist Paul Gulacy moved beyond the Yellow Peril clichés of the early issues to develop MOKF into the finest spy series in American comics. Reserve this monumental Omnibus from Eastside while we wait for more new comics to come in. Meanwhile, Sean Murphy has written and drawn the best Batman novel I’ve read in ages. Batman: White Knight was released under the DC Black Label imprint for mature readers. After years of escalating warfare with the Dark Knight, the Joker surrenders, in a way, using experimental medication to become citizen Jack Napier. He uses the legal system and social media to expose the corruption nurtured by Batman’s caped crusade. Napier becomes a folk hero as both Gotham and his allies turn against Batman. But where’s there’s Batman, there will always be a Joker... Go to lexpublib.org to reserve this and all these other items!

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