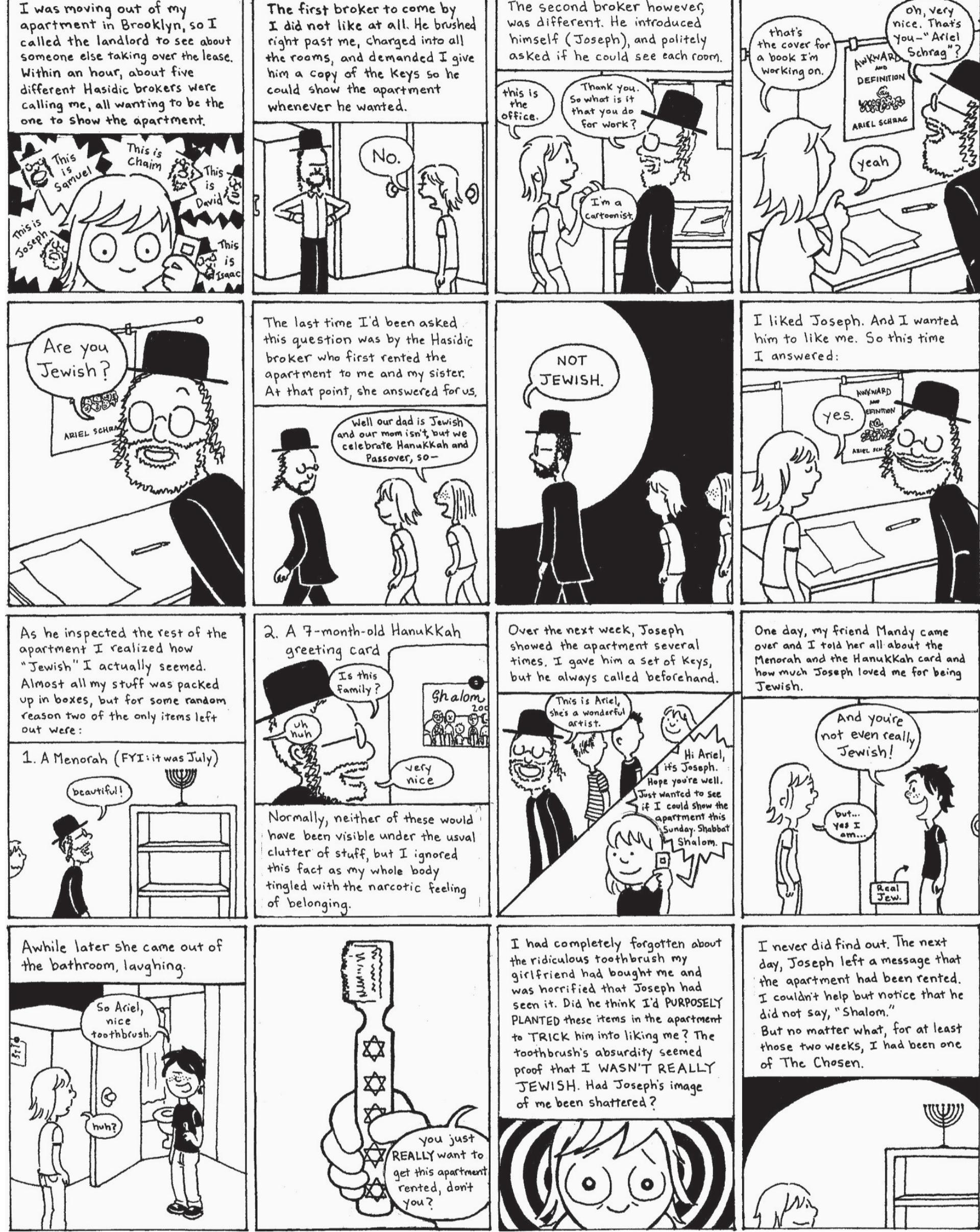


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The Chosen

Ariel Schrag 07



comic kvetch

Graphic novelist Ariel Schrag brings her multi-media schtick to Toronto *By Stephen Baldwin*

Ariel Schrag was an imaginative California kid who was into art and comics before most of her schoolmates learned how to multiply. Only it isn't her wild imagination that's helped garner her success — it's her raw, unchecked portrayal of adolescence.

In her first four autobiographical graphic novels (*Awkward, Definition, Potential* and *Likewise*), Schrag covers the obsessions, sex, struggles and loves of a confused Jewish lesbian through high school in Berkeley, Calif.

"I've never been a particularly

extroverted person," Schrag says in a telephone interview from New York. "This was just something I had always wanted to do."

Since high school, comics have had a major impact on her work. "I've always loved the graphic novelist's ability to exaggerate details — that emphasis is definitely an important part of my work," says Schrag, who had a particular fondness for *Calvin and Hobbes* and *Uncle Scrooge* growing up.

Along with her own novels, the 31-year-old edited and contributed to *Stuck in the Middle — 17 Comics from an Unpleasant*

Age

co-writes an online comic called *Ariel and Kevin Invade Everything* with comedian/writer Kevin Seccia; writes a column for *AfterEllen.com*; and has a writing gig with HBO's *How to Make It in America*. (She also wrote for the third and fourth seasons of Showtime's *The L Word*.)

The high-profile TV work came off the strength of her screenplay for the upcoming adaptation of *Potential*. "I like the group dynamic of working on TV," Schrag says. "I mean, it can be challenging, too, but it's fun to be able to write and come up with story ideas with other

people." Schrag also engages in live, multi-media performances of her work, featuring projection slides of her comics along with voice-overs and music. The shows were put together because she didn't feel that her novels alone were a sufficient enough expression of her art.

"It annoyed me that authors could do book readings, but I had no live component to my work," says Schrag, who will present such a reading in Toronto on March 27.

But while she is an accomplished cartoonist and performance artist (she toured with the San Francisco-based performance art collective

Sister Spit in 2009), Schrag still considers herself a writer first.

"When you're a kid you're usually labelled as a talented artist first because nobody really cares about what you write at that age. I sort of figured out that I could write on my own, and then joined the two."

■ *Animated with Ariel Schrag*, presented in association with the exhibition *Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women*, comes to Toronto's Gladstone Hotel on March 27 at 2 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, visit kofflerarts.org.

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