

## **Jackie Brown Books**

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# **MANUSCRIPT REVIEW**

The Story of Gordin, The Adorable Little Part  
by Scott Dawson

# About This Report

This manuscript review is a detailed review of a many aspects of the project including:

- An analysis of the project itself.
- Market viability.
- Comparison to similar books in the marketplace.
- Next steps towards completing the full project.

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Story of Gordin, the Adorable Little Part* is a charming book with a unique premise -- that there is a community of beings at the level of the components of machinery. The story is told in a style reminiscent of the Japanese "light novel" which mixes pages of text interspersed with illustration but not in panelled illustration as found in a graphic novel and far more mature than a picture book. *The Story of Gordin* manages to describe the familiar experiences of boxes being moved from one shelf to another and the experience of a factory and conveyor belt through the consciousness of metal and plastic pieces. We follow main character, Gordin, on a surprising adventure where the world is not all what we are used to. Author, Scott Dawson, makes us question everything we know and experience the world anew through the eyes of Gordin and his friend Lisa.

The book humanizes parts and we begin to care for them, imagining their lives hidden in boxes with no contact or knowledge of anything beyond the comforts of their box. The parts wonder if there is actually an "Assembler" or being that created them. Gordin has a fuzzy recollection of his beginning that he keeps to himself during this debate as it is not an experience other parts recall.

But other myths emerge -- such as a place called "Rework" where all kinds of horrors have been heard to have happened. Only one part claims to have been there and parts of his story are accepted only because other parts remember the box being opened and then closed again before he joined them. Most of the day is taken up by intense games of "forklifts and and factories" and in meditation and self-study.

One day, their world is physically shaken when a forklift moves the box from the supplies shelf to assembly. Without much time to recover, a bright light enters the box as it is pried open. The parts react differently to the shock of the unknown and the fast-changing experiences coming at them: the removal of their plastic coatings (as depicted in your artwork), the clicks and clacks of being latched into place, the blurs of colours, smells, and the sensation of having electricity flow through them. Our overwhelmed hero processes many diverse emotions ranging from fear to ecstasy. But there is no time to get used to anything as life outside of the box does not slow down for anyone.

Gordin and the reader are taken on a fast-paced adventure where everything is up in the air! What will he experience next and where will he be taken? Will he end up in the dreadful hell of "Rework?" Will Gordin find a new community or has he lost his friends forever? These questions and many more flow through Gordin like electricity as he struggles to understand his new fate in this brave new world.

The concept of this book is unique and compelling and I do think many people will be interested in buying this book for their children. I can see it becoming part of library collections. I also see opportunities for merchandising Gordin-related products. As Gordin ends up as a headlight, toys could require that children fit Gordin and other parts together and connect them so that electricity flows and the kids get light. The product could be a light such as a lantern, flashlight, or a car kid with headlights.

## COMMERCIAL VIABILITY

This book fits right into the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) projects that have been very important in education. There are quite a few books for kids on robotics, some with talking trucks and bulldozers, and others on invention and coding. This book fits in here as it offers ideas about how things fit together, the types of tests used to create new machines, the assembly line, and even the distribution and warehousing system. There is lots to grasp from this simply and fun tale of conscious components.

In addition, telling the tale with illustrations elevates the commercial viability which could be further elevated if it were to be a graphic novel. Schools look for diverse ways of getting kids to read more. This book combines a highly desirable story-telling medium with the STEAM content.

Because it is charming, you can keep up the interest level without increasing the complexity of the vocabulary. This will enable the book to fit in the hi-interest low-vocabulary books which will make it a hit with the school market. You would have several audiences for the book. In some cases, tweaking or changing the cover for the different audiences gives the book life in both audiences as too grown-up and you lose the middle-graders, too young and you lose the YA (young adult).

Graphic novels are one of the highest growth categories in publishing, growing from \$800,000 to over a billion in five years. The books *Guts* is coming out in 2019 to great hype and has a million book

first print run! Here it is on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Guts-Raina-Telgemeier/dp/0545852501/>. You will see that the illustration is very simple and generic, whereas yours are much nicer and unique.

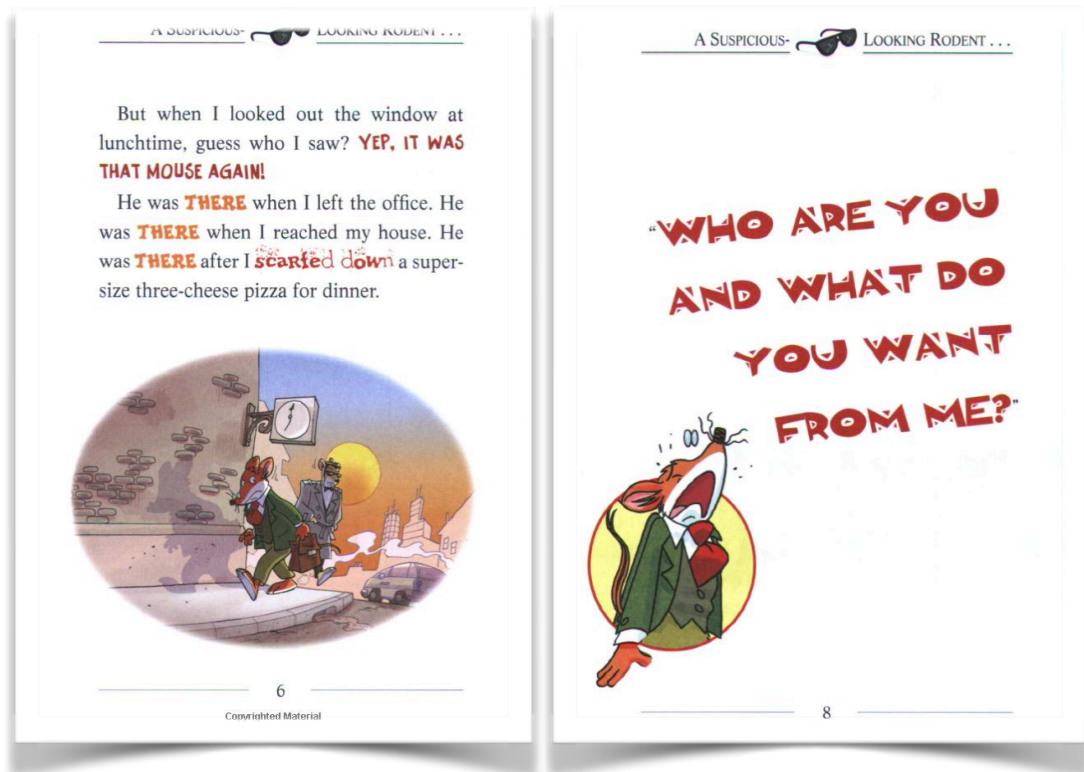
Whether you decide to go with fewer panels or more, we would need to ensure that the number of illustrations are compatible with the light novel/graphic novel genre to place the book in the best spot for success.

I do prefer the variety in layout in this graphic novel, part of a series called The Baby-Sitters Club. These images are from, *Boy-Crazy Stacey*, is number seven in the series, written by Ann M Martin and illustrated by Gale Galligan: [https://www.amazon.com/dp/1338304518/ref=rdr\\_ext\\_sb\\_ti\\_sims\\_1](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1338304518/ref=rdr_ext_sb_ti_sims_1)



The other style that may appeal to you is the Geronimo the Mouse series: <https://www.amazon.ca/Geronimo-Stilton-34-Secret-Agent/dp/0545021340> (the link takes you to book 34)

In this series, there is one illustration per scene, but it is fairly isolated from the words. Using water colours, you may want to have the background flow into text, however the text is designed for the book. They have used text features to amplify the visual aspect of the book without going further into graphic novel mode and this series of books is very successful.



And here is a watercolour version that is highly acclaimed. *Moonshadow* was recently rereleased and people seem to be loving it.

It is a collection of several books in one volume, so it runs to over 500 pages!



And this one, *The Best We Could Do*, which is considered an illustrated novel, perhaps because it doesn't have traditional panels throughout as graphic novels do. Perhaps this is a style for you to consider. Text is presented in boxes and it is not entirely in dialogue as in most graphic novels.





Yes, graphic novels are definitely experiencing a lot of commercial success in the general market and in schools. It may be possible to attract a publisher for your book, so you do have more options than many writers. Traditional publishing versus self-publishing is something we should discuss when we meet again.

"Light novels" are a Japanese form of illustrated novel that is popular with kids. A light novel may later be made into a manga or anime. It is possible we could attach the book to that category, but still, the better selling category is graphic novels with an average page count of at least 200 pages.

You mentioned you got to 40 pages of comics before and gave up because there was no story. This time we'd develop the story first in order to ensure this did not happen again. Planning is a big part of successfully completing a book. If 200 pages seems impossible, then we can talk about creating several smaller versions of the story and releasing them individually, perhaps online only. When you get enough buzz and have several stories that then total 200 pages plus, we repackage them and release them as a book.

## WHERE WOULD IT SIT IN A BOOKSTORE?

The book is most likely to be placed with middle-grade readers. Although, as you say, it is a bit sophisticated, it may be a better idea to create it so that it would be classified as Young Adult (YA). As a genre, it is one of the highest selling ones after romance (I'll check, as I believe it is the second highest selling genre). You would need to amp up the big concepts within the book. Like the God-like "Assembler" and what it means to be "assembled", increase the emotion and the complexity of what is happening all around.

It would be possible to aim for a young YA, that would be readers in middle school (ages 12 - 14) and for kids who are younger than this who are strong readers. There would be interest there.

Kids these days read a lot of complex material. For example, although the Harry Potter series is for YA (that is, books designed for kids 13-18 and whose main characters are in that age range) kids are reading that in Grade 5, which is from ages 10 and up. Lots of kids desire a more sophisticated read and there would be no need to "dumb down" the story (your concern, mentioned in an email) for it to be enjoyed by readers as young as 10 or even 8 and 9, although you would gear it to the middle-school crowd, which is kids 12 to 14. This, of course, does not eliminate readers older than 14. It is just a way of categorizing it as you write and also as it is marketed.

## **DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS**

A graphic book that is not an illustrated kids picture book nor is it an enlarged comic book with clichéd superhero storylines -- this is what is distinctive of your book. The splashes of water colour add movement in a way that typical middle-grade reader graphic novels do not.

I foresee a book with a mixture of panel sizes which would also make it quite unique, designed similarly to *The Best We Could Do*. That allows for text and for the illustrations in a style that may mean less illustrations, but still could be classified as graphic novel.

Some concepts parallel human experiences, whereas a whole new world view is required for a lot of what happens with Gordin and his friends. I saw some of your planning in the notes that are part of your drawings.

Point of view is from a conscious component of things humans build and discard. There is mystery for the reader in understanding the world of parts and for kids (and I bet adults and Disney might be interested in this) marvelling at your imagination. Imagine how kids would then look at all the parts around them after they read about Gordin, Lisa, and friends. The variety of ways they can be combined, yet most must be pre-ordained -- Gordin can only be part of one thing, perhaps, but he would have no idea of what he'd end up as at the beginning of his journey in the box. Just as happens to a teenager, Gordon is discovering what he will be and his power as part of a team which must do its job or face Rework.

Imagining a story from an unusual perspective has been marketable for many, including for the Toronto writer, Emma Donoghue's *Room*, a story told from the perspective of a five-year old born in captivity and the epic, *Watershed Down*, Richard Adams book of 1972 which was told from the viewpoint of rabbits.

The vague and sinister humans who are faceless is a neat change, making them unidentified and less important, compared to the sharply drawn parts. Yes, humanizing the parts, giving them a softer edge, at least in the main characters, is a good idea while keeping the humans faceless and unimportant is a great way of making things topsy-turvy.

## CHARACTERIZATION

We know Gordin and I see from the email you've sent that you are working on drawings for different characters. Lisa we see, but they need more of a relationship for us to care that they are together. What makes her call out his name? Is she calling out names of other parts or is there a way she recognizes him? Maybe she is despondent at being alone and is so relieved to get a response from Gordin when she calls his name.

We'd like to know more about the guy who has heard about Rework before and a few other characters of course so we get the fullness of the world and Gordin's place there in the enlarged world outside of the box.

Life in the box reminds me of kids and Santa Claus. There is always some point when an older kid tells them that Santa doesn't exist and which is one of the first ways kids learn that life is gonna suck when they grow up. That is like the piece who had experienced the world outside of the box telling the other parts about Rework and even the discussions about The Assembler. Kids aren't always willing to believe there is no Santa and you show that Gordin is different because he is more attuned to possibilities like The Assembler.

You asked if Lisa and Gordin need to be fleshed out -- Gordin is nicely developing and we feel for him and get him to some extent. Lisa isn't mentioned until she is calling out for him after they are assembled. We need to know more about her before they are transported away. Plus knowing about other parts would heighten our sense of bewilderment when he is removed from the community he is comfortable with. We get how devastating this must be as everything around him changes and he struggles to make sense of it all.

It is almost like this book is leading to a form of Artificial Intelligence. After all, headlights now go on when the light level changes, as if they are making a decision. Perhaps using that as part of the story, to show that they are developing consciousness would be cool, or even that their lack of movement is what keeps their secret safe

It is interesting that in your notes you were imagining how the part felt after you dropped it and I see you drew a mouse on the floor that shows Gordin that there are creatures as small as him that can move. Interesting learning we see in that character, and as you develop the story more, it will be so interesting to see how Gordin ends up. As we work on making the story more complex, the piece could be picked up by a child or as it is YA, by a 15 year-old perhaps, who ends up being part of the larger story. They could have been on a tour of the facility . . .

So many possibilities!

So when he was in the box he was at one stage, does he gain or lose when he is added to other parts to create different things? Part of the world building would be to show if he gain more of himself or lose his individuality as he is incorporated into more and more complex parts, leading to him eventually becoming part of a car.

Spending some time on world building will help you to develop the personalities and stages of development, even angst, which is important to increase the complexity of the book. For instance in a YA book, YA heroes discover how they "fit" in the world beyond their friends and family. They spend more time reflecting on what happens and analyzing the meaning of things. So it is like Gordin starts as an eight year old in human terms and ages to say 16 through his experiences, becoming more aware and sure of his abilities.

## CHALLENGE

The book needs to be *at least* 150 pages to fit its genre. I will do a comparison of other books like it to confirm this with a bit more stats than are in the earlier section. However, one of the suggestions could be to release shorter stories and then compile them. But you don't want to create something great but not gain readers because you don't meet their expectations of value. And perceived value in graphic novels is one of the reasons they are large. Most printed books are around 200 pages plus but people don't care as much about page length in eBooks. I'll check on the market for graphic eBooks as that is something I did not investigate.

More complexity in the story will keep people guessing and wanting more and will make a series a possibility. Through talking and brainstorming, we can create some directions to explore as having a bit of a subplot makes the whole thing more exciting.

Maybe there is a type of item they do not want to be part of, like a gun or something, and parts shun parts that are destined to that -- or personality matches destiny. Gordin is unassuming, but maybe he should be brilliant so we are happy for him when he becomes a lightbulb.

Design and writing go hand in hand with a graphic novel, but the story does come first. I see that you are working in InDesign. You may want to try Final Draft as they have a graphic novel design and writing tool template. It would export to InDesign. It costs \$250, however. There may be other softwares that work for this, but I have not investigated further than the softwares I know and trust.



Maybe another part, a mean-spirited one, "grabs" something from Gordin and that was what caused him to go to Rework? Knows how to use a magnet or something that is on them?? Gordin is too overwhelmed during the first time out of the box that he hardly notices and when they fail the test he realizes he is the cause and that it was due to the other part's sabotage of him. Eventually he has to change something so that he can be the part he was before the antagonist did something to him. Then when he is loaded he sees a difficult part struggling to do its bit and he makes that part do better -- whether out of kindness or self-preservation, that will depend on how you grow Gordin's character. Maybe he communicates such that a human notices and for this reason they save the day together? The teen who picks him up off the floor?

There is a lot of potential in this story and the illustrations. You need to add complexity and a few villains to increase the interest in the book.

Maybe a human is a protagonist or after the build the car crashes because there is an evil part in it, something that might have been a recall issue in real life? At that point, Gordin is left abandoned in a field with other junk until a new assembler takes him and uses him for something else, maybe something he realizes could cause devastation so he purposely prevents electricity from flowing.

We are talking about a book that is likely to take six months, I should think, to make it great and to increase your chances of being picked up by a traditional publisher or to self-publish well.

## STRUCTURE

We'll talk about the hero's journey when we start working on developing complexity in the story. You probably have read about it as you have been working on developing stories. We would need to create more elements of that for this story to work and then to improve the meaningfulness of the ending. I know this is a draft version and perhaps you are working on an updated version. Still, my advice here will improve the book's marketability and potential for a series.

The other element of structure would be how you will fit in the drawings. As stated before, I would suggest a hybrid approach perhaps like *The Best We Could Do* book or going full-on graphic novel and following that format.

## COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

A brief comparative analysis. Consensus: you'll need around 200 pages to produce a book that fits the category.

### 1. *The Wild Robot* by Peter Brown



Page Count: 288 pages

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (April 2016)

## THE OTTERS

*The island's northern shore* had become something of a robot gravesite. Scattered across the rocks were the broken bodies of four dead robots. They sparkled in the early-morning light. And their sparkles caught the attention of some very curious creatures.



A gang of sea otters was romping through the shallows when one of them noticed the sparkling objects. The otters all froze. They raised their noses to the wind. But they smelled only the sea. So they cautiously crept over the rocks to take a closer look.

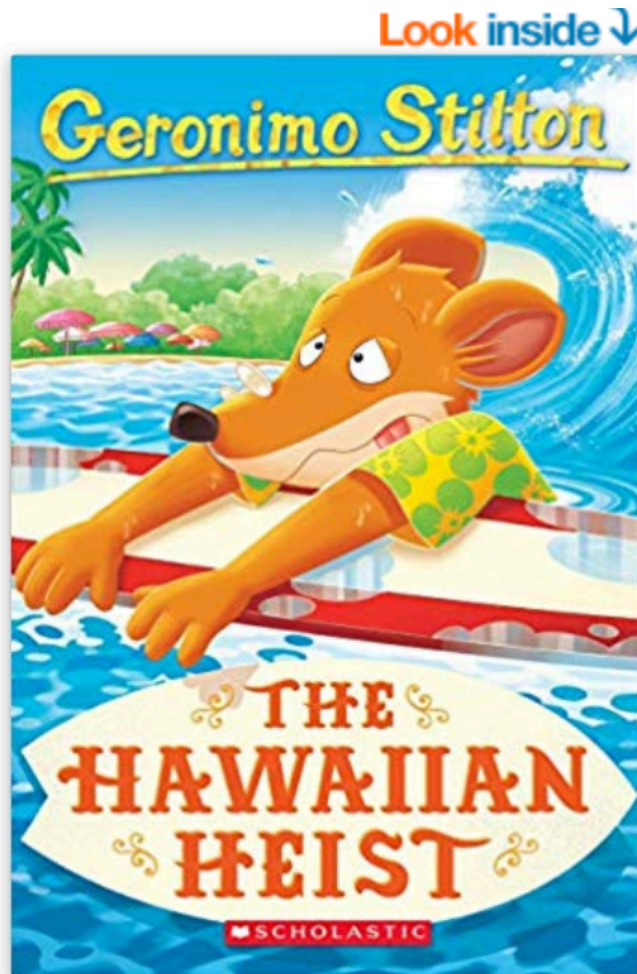
The gang slowly approached a robot torso. The biggest otter stuck out his paw, swatted the heavy thing, and quickly jumped back. But nothing happened. So they wriggled over to a robot hand. Another brave otter stuck out her paw and flipped the hand over. It made a lovely clinking sound on the rocks, and the otters squeaked with delight.

They spread out and played with robot arms and legs and feet. More hands were flipped. One of the otters discovered a robot head in a tide pool, and they all dove in and took turns rolling it along the bottom.

And then they spotted something else. Overlooking the gravesite was the one surviving crate. Its sides were scraped and dented, and a wide gash ran across its top. The otters scampered up the rocks and climbed onto the big box. Ten furry faces poked through the gash, eager to see what was inside. What they saw was another brand-new robot. But this robot was different from the others. It was still in one piece. And it was surrounded by spongy packing foam.

The otters reached through the gash and tore at the foam. It was so soft and squishy! They squeaked as they snatched at the fluffy stuff. Shreds of it floated away on the sea breeze. And in all the excitement, one of their paws accidentally slapped an important little button on the back of the robot's head.

## 2. The latest in Geronimo Stilton's Series. Book 72!

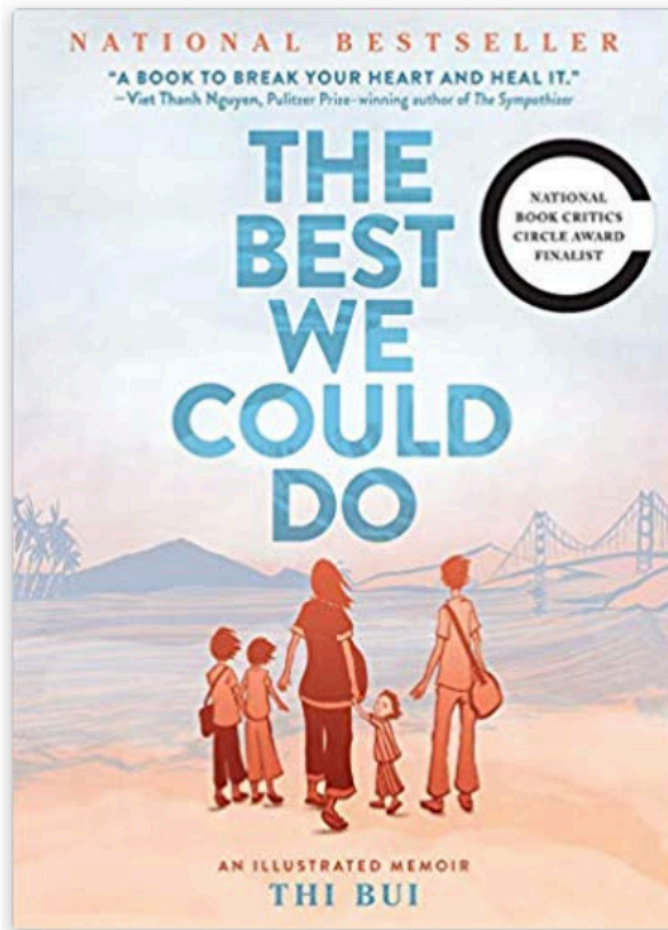


Page Count: 128 pages

Publisher: Scholastic Paperbacks (April 2019)

(interior pages from this series was included above)

## Book 3 - The Best We Could Do by Thi But



Page Count: 336 pages

Publisher: Harry N. Abrams (March 2017)

(interior pages posted in previous section)

## NEXT STEPS

The next steps would be to meet to consider what elements of this report you agree with and what you would like for your story. After deciding this, we would work to create an outline so you can complete the story before starting on the artwork. You would write it more in the form of a script than a novel.

We can continue our work together for \$3500 for a full-length book (I've taken the \$250 you paid for the report off the price of \$4000 and given you an additional \$250 discount). This includes support with the development of the work as well as editing and support with the structure of the art production for the book. If you chose to seek a traditional publisher, this work still needs to be done before they will consider it. We can probably test the interest after we have three chapters illustrated and the story developed. At that point, I can send it to a few agents I know.

If you choose to self-publish, then we still complete the book and position it for the self-publishing market. For an additional \$1000 we will partner with you to market, promote, and sell the book and even look into merchandising options.

A payment schedule can be arranged.

I'll be in touch to set a meeting to discuss this report with you. Yes, it is quite an investment, but your book is quite brilliant and it is worth bringing your creativity out into the world. I know how passionate you are about this story and people will love how you came up with the ideas, especially that little bit about dropping the part and wondering about it from the perspective of the part itself.