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It's A Good Life, If You Don't Weaken: A Picture Novella



Synopsis

An Acknowledged Classic returns gorgeously re-designed. In his first graphic novel, *It's a Good Life, if You Don't Weaken*--a best-selling D & Q titles ever--Seth pays homage to the wit and sophistication of the old-fashioned magazine cartoon. While trying to understand his dissatisfaction with the present, Seth discovers the life and work of Kalo, a forgotten New Yorker cartoonist from the 1940s. But his obsession blinds him to the needs of his lover and the quiet desperation of his family. Wry self-reflection and moody colours characterize Seth's style in this tale about learning lessons from nostalgia. His playful and sophisticated experiment with memoir provoked a furious debate among cartoon historians and archivists about the existence of Kalo, and prompted a *Details* feature about Seth's "hoax".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What's most likable about this graphic novel's protagonist and narrator is that he's something of a self-lacerating, depressed, oversensitive, melancholy soul, a true negative-thinker -- the sort of constantly gloomy, soliloquizing character who might ultimately prove exasperating to hang around with but whom I found refreshing and sort of appealing, at least in a world of comic-book superheroes. He gives the narrative its thoughtful, intelligent, somewhat troubled voice. But the narrative itself is awfully negligible -- mainly just the narrator's inexplicable and not-terribly-consuming obsession, over the years, with a deservedly obscure Canadian cartoonist of the past -- and there's no particular suspense involved, no colorful characters, no vivid scenes, no surprises, and no payoff. I read the book (as of course one does) at a single sitting and came away

feeling pretty unsatisfied. I didn't even care much for Seth's graphic style. I grew up on those same New Yorker albums that he dotes on, and compared to that pantheon of cartoonists, Seth's artwork seems exceedingly grey and bland, especially because all the pages in this book are printed in black and white highlighted with the same tepid textbook-blue wash, which gets a little tiresome. (However, none of that blue mars the front cover. It's handsome and atmospheric, as you can see.) What had first led me to the book, oddly enough, was an online search for the origin of the saying "It's a great life if you don't weaken" -- something my father used to say, and which I gather was popular in his World War II generation. (The Net traces that line to Scottish novelist John Buchan, of "Thirty-Nine Steps" fame, who at one time served as governor general of Canada.

One thing that all readers should know about me is that though I love graphic novels, I am extremely picky. However, this graphic novel was perfection! It tells the story of Seth who is depressed and feels lost in the world until he discovers an obscure cartoonist named Kalo. Though there is little information on this man, Seth decides to devote years of his life to discovering the man's true identity. He even goes as far as to find Kalo's house in a small town and visits the man's family. As he does so, he also returns home to his mother and brother and find himself traveling to his childhood house. Though this is far from being a "coming of age tale" (I hate that phrase), Seth certainly does develop throughout the story. His search does not change his identity, but it does help him understand himself better. Though the book is set in Canada, I felt that the scenes were familiar and could be found in any country. The pictures are drawn in shade of blue and black that help illustrate the dark and depressed mood of Seth. There are also numerous drawings of houses, landscapes, and cityscapes. I found these to be incredibly interesting. In many graphic novels, I feel as if the artist uses landscapes as filler pictures for when the action is stopped. However, in this book, I felt as if drawings of these scenes were photographs of the setting. Many were bleak or lonely which, of course, reiterated Seth's view of the world. In many graphic novels, the art will override the text. However, this book was superb in the exquisite blending of the two. Seth's observations were philosophical and I felt that they pertained to all people at any point in life. His conversations with his friend Chet, were also enlightening to his character as well to how people interact in a friendship.

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