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Summer Blonde



Synopsis

Adrian Tomine's cult comic series *Optic Nerve* is finally collected into one sharp-looking hardcover volume. Described as the Raymond Carver of comic, Tomine constructs tales of emotional disconnection with an ear for painfully real dialogue. Combined with his deft black and white depictions of urbane lifestyles, Tomine's fans have often accused him of eavesdropping in on their most intimate moments and, with forensic skill, laying their lives bare. The conflicts between emotional gratification, narcissistic neediness and moral discernment mark the title story in which a socially crippled man nurses an obsessive crush on a young woman. He watches close up, paralyzed by his guilt, as her beauty catches the eye of his neighbor: a hip, selfish young man with a short attention span. One of *Optic Nerve's* most popular stories, "Hawaiian Getaway," features Hilary, telephone service rep who is having the worst week of her life. She lost her job, her apartment, and her grandmother. Close to the edge, she is losing her grip. Reaching out to random strangers on the phone, Hilary is looking for someone to help her. In "Alter Ego" a successful young author has writer's block. He can't, or won't, decide between another ghostwriting gig and finishing his second "real" novel. He stalls on committing to his novel and his girlfriend when a chance postcard leads him to flirt with fantasies of changing the past. Finally, "Bomb Scare" documents the early unease of his generation by setting this coming-of-age story during the tense months of the Gulf War, the event that ushered in the 1990s.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just like his other two books of collections, this one is another SLAP in your FACE, when it comes

to your emotions. As I read the stories I get drawn into the characters' simple events, yet complex emotions surrounding those events and feel hit when the end comes. I love how all of Tomine's stories are dreary, having and/or not having closure at the same time, depending on how you look at it. I also enjoy the fact that his stories get progressively longer (from the first book on) and so this book is full of 4 long stories. The graphics are good and do an amazing job at expressing emotions and reactions of the characters. Also, I love how all his comics are based on a miserable real world and are told truthfully.

An struggling novelist tries to connect with his High-School dream girl, and instead finds himself drawn into a relationship with her teenage sister. A lonely man, obsessed with a girl he doesn't know, unwittingly goes from admirer to stalker. A socially awkward young woman, unable to deal with people face-to-face, starts making cruel crank phone calls, looking for human contact of any kind. Fate draws a high-school misfit closer to the girl of his dreams, much to the dismay of his only friend. These are the stories and characters presented in *Summer Blonde*, written and drawn by Adrian Tomine. The people in this book, and the situations they find themselves in, are quite often unpleasant, and Tomine never flinches away from showing us the darker side of human nature. There are no easy answers to be had for the problems these characters encounter, and like real life, the end isn't always what we expect, or want. There were many times when I recognized familiar traits in these characters, and that's Tomine's real genius: He holds a mirror up to us, and shows us ourselves, and the world, warts and all. This amazing book was my first exposure to Adrian Tomine, but definitely not my last. I can't recommend *Summer Blonde* enough.

Four stories about 20-something people with dysfunctional social lives. The *Summer Blonde* story is about a sexy girl who cheats on her lame boyfriend, and the obsessive loner who fantasizes about her. *Hawaiian Getaway* is about an overweight 27 year old, out of a job, and has trouble with men. These stories were written in the late 90's, a time when bulky computers were the norm, Starbucks wasn't full of laptops, and nobody surfed the web from an iPhone. It was a time when we talked on the phone, made plans to meet and showed up, and wrote with pens and paper. I wonder if today's 20-somethings will be able to relate to any of this?

I really liked Tomine's first collection (*32 Stories*), and loved his last one (*Sleepwalk and Other Stories*), so I shelled out for the hardcover edition of his latest. The four stories are beautifully drawn in Tomine's instantly recognizable precise style, but the storytelling is rather disappointing. His stuff

has always been somewhat similar, focusing on loss and loneliness, but here here four protagonists (three male, one female) are little more than subtle variations of each other. Each is a kind of lonerish social outcast type who has deep problems relating to others and whose imagination is fertile territory for spawning sad obsessions. So you get a hipsterish writer who never got over high school and thus neglects his beautiful girlfriend due to his fascination with the younger sister of "the hot chick" from high school. Then you have the pimply-faced production designer at the alternative paper who seethes at his neighbor's casual sexual prowess and turns quasi-stalker in a surge of misguided imagination. There's the stoic Asian woman who simply cannot manage even a normal conversation. The last story is a totally banal high-school loser story which veers into a loser version of a John Hughes movie with a totally ridiculous ending. I still dig how Tomine just jumps into his character's lives, and manages to convey their whole life with a minimum of exposition, and then stops the story right when they're at a kind of emotional fork. The problem here is that the four stories are simply far too similar, almost as if he's stuck and has nothing else to say but further riffs on the same material he's been doing for ten years. I sure hope this isn't the case and that his next book will show a new maturation of his storytelling, 'cause he is a talented artist.

WOWTomine always makes me think when I read his work. I had to look at myself and think if I was as negative as the Summer Blonde lead character. Not only does this have stunning drawings but, Adrian really knows how to capture a person and dissect them. If you enjoy any of Adrian's work I suggest you write him an old fashioned hand letter and thank him. He doesn't believe in FB or other social Media, nor should he.....his work will be passed down like old mythology on onion skin paper through the sounds of harps--or just paper and old prints not destroyed by revolutions of the future. ENJOY

I'm a huge fan of Tomine's work (Shortcomings is one of my favorite graphic novels of all time) and I really enjoyed this work. Tomine specializes in characters who feel both utterly normal and like the worst bits of ourselves dragged up to the light -- he has a genius for portraying an awkward self-loathing that feels completely real. These four stories are about very different protagonists, but they all share a certain loneliness and an anger/resentment that bubbles up in different ways. A really fabulous read, if sometimes painful.

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