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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

œ[Seth] invites the reader to linger cozily in his ruminative, patient stories, each of which grows from Seth's obsession with the past.â • â •The Village Voiceâ œRich, evocative...characterized by small moments revealing the author's sharp eye for detailâ • â •The Globe and Mail

Seth was born in 1962 in a rural Ontario town. Seth lives in Guelph, Ontario with five cats, a gigantic collection of vintage records, comic books, and 20th century Canadiana, and his very patient wife. He regularly contributes illustrations to *The New Yorker* and the *National Post* and recently provided the entire album artwork for Sony records singer-songwriter, Aimee Mann.

I'm glad I got to read this graphic novella by Seth as the third work and not the first which I believe many have done. This graphic work does much to explain the later oeuvre of Seth's body of work. I realize that every fiction novelist writes into their novels their own life experiences. Seth goes beyond these normal limitations; he actually creates a fictionalized autobiography with himself as the main character of the story. The complete story is set on Seth's obsession with the recent past that being in the time frame from the 1930's to the 1960's. He grudgingly puts himself in the present time set. I must believe that Seth is fixated with this historical time frame and insists on frequently visiting it. Also we find out about Seth's fanaticism of all cartoonists and his absolute adoration of the New Yorker magazine. In reality this novella would serve as a manual for a psychiatrist to search the mind of one's desires, ambitions and the meaning of life. Well the meaning of life according to Seth. Just remember Seth intersperses real people such as Peter Arno and Charles Schulz along the likes of his fictional character of constant search in this story named Kalo. Seth bares all in this book which explains his later writings of "Clyde's Fans" and "George Sprott". This is indeed a new way of utilizing the graphic novel format. Although I enjoyed his later works more than this work, it does serve as a basis of just who Seth really is. Five Stars!! No Problem!!!

Seth is one of the best graphic novelists out there. His stories are interesting and his art is superb. If you like this one check out his book, "George Sprott."

i would have preferred each page a bit larger as on the copy delivered to me it is difficult to read the words

This is a deceptive book; Seth is a prodigious cartoonist of weak ability, who rode the coattails of talented cartoonists like Crumb and Clowes when there was a pent up demand for indie comic fare. At the point he was around, publishers were desperate and he produced. But is it good? A short coming of Seth is a lack of imagination and talent. His story is one big con job; he pretends to have discovered a cartoonist of the past who fell into obscurity and goes about researching his life. At the end he admits he made it all up and justifies his deception as a noble cause. His drawings are feeble but his dishonesty as a storyteller is what is in my opinion unforgivable. Pass on this and if you come across it, do the world a favor and toss his work in the garbage.

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. The cartoonist who calls himself Seth is, coincidentally, Canadian.) When I closed the book, I realized that I wasn't even sure why he'd chosen that slightly altered line for his title. It doesn't even seem particularly appropriate, at least for Seth himself; he doesn't appear to be having an especially great, or good, life, and he doesn't come across as someone who refuses to weaken!

I've rarely experienced such a dislike of the main protagonist in any book that I can remember, "graphic novella" or else. This is mostly due to how the main character (a self-insert) is presented in the beginning. Seth is shown to be an obnoxious, arrogant, self-pitying, shallow person who doesn't realise how worse he is for indulging himself this much without realising the impression he makes on others. He shows all the signs of undiagnosed Giftedness and I certainly hope, by now, that he has come come across a book or other that explained to him why he felt this way. It gets better when the plot kicks in, but not all that much, unfortunately. There isn't much of a plot, but I can work with almost nothing, if done well. It is done well in some parts but left me wanting all the same. Just because it's autobiographic doesn't mean you can get away with just about anything. Far too navel-gazing to reach any sort of true communion. A cartoonist's obsession with another cartoonist, which is mostly a deviated obsession with himself. I can't say I recommend it. I'd suggest Blankets a million times over this one. The author also doesn't know how to spell "religious" and "whose".

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