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This sophomore graphic novel from Noah Van Sciver may seem like a left turn from his critically acclaimed debut graphic novel biography of Abraham Lincoln (*The Hypo*), yet upon closer reflection, it showcases Van Sciver's preoccupation with pathos and the human condition. *Saint Cole* depicts four days in the life of a twenty-eight-year-old suburbanite named Joe, who works at a pizzeria to support his girlfriend Nicole and their infant child and then Nicole invites her troubled mother to move into their two-bedroom apartment until she lands on her feet again. Joe reacts by retreating into alcohol: he wants out, and he's angry. He's in a position to act rashly and he does.

Saint Cole Details

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From Reader Review Saint Cole for online ebook

John says

No thanks.

Robert says

Another gritty, darkly funny tale of a downwardly spiraling twenty-nothing from the master, Noah Van Sciver. Van Sciver's art is just getting better and better, and his dialogue and characterizations all carry the ring of truth. The ending came as a complete surprise (though clues are scattered throughout); it is one I will not soon forget.

Derek Royal says

One of the joys of Noah Van Sciver's writing is its realistic quality, its authenticity and true-to-lifeness without coming across as simple, outright autobiography. Many of Van Sciver's shorter comics -- for which he is better known -- have this quality. One way of reading Saint Cole is as a longer-form exercise in what he does with shorter fiction. Call it a "graphic novel," if you prefer, or perhaps even closer to something like a novella. The "lived" feeling of this story, right down to its unpredictable and ambiguous ending, is what makes it resonate.

Jason says

It was getting worse and worse and worse--I get stressed out reading books about people who are more or less decent who make progressively bad decisions in succession. And then the ending happened, and I thought, okay, maybe this dude has a chance to get himself out of this mess. Maybe he can make it.

Jan Philipzig says

Existential, gritty, authentic, miserable, awkward, fresh, darkly funny, heartfelt, unpredictable, ambiguous - I love Noah Van Sciver's storytelling style! Thank you, Dan, for bringing "the master" to my attention! :)

Sam Quixote says

Joe is Noah Van Sciver's typical working class loser protagonist (literally an "Average Joe"). Working as a waiter at a local pizza joint, Joe struggles to make rent money while dealing with being a husband and father, neither of which he's mentally prepared to be at 28 years old - he's clearly still a manchild looking to party,

screw around, etc. The pressure builds, his drinking spirals out of hand and things come to a head when his meth-ed out mother-in-law comes to stay in their crappy apartment.

Unlike most of Van Sciver's comics, I didn't love Saint Cole but it wasn't bad either. It's always morbidly interesting to see someone's life implode and the story has dramatic tension as Joe's drinking increases and his already-shaky frame of mind begins to unravel faster and faster. But, aside from the final page, it's a fairly predictable and mundane tale of a desperate fuckup that Van Sciver's done better and more memorably before, most notably in 1999 which has a similar protagonist/story.

The ending is definitely surprising and unexpected but also far too abrupt, underwhelming and unsatisfying. Van Sciver's art is fine as always but he's not doing anything especially different from his other comics and it remains a firmly secondary aspect to his writing.

There was enough to Saint Cole to keep me more-or-less entertained though it's definitely not one of Van Sciver's more compelling books. It doesn't have a gripping story or a unique character portrait, it generally feels like a retread of older material, and I wasn't sure what he was aiming for. Still, it's not a bad comic either and Noah Van Sciver fans will probably get something out of it.

Andrew says

Joe, the protagonist, just has the shittiest life ever. It's terrifying to read about because of how mundane it is. I could very easily imagine a similar outcome for myself if I'd taken a few wrong turns. Turned to alcohol instead of school, had a falling out with my parents (my financial support), and then had an accidental baby with one of the many awful girlfriends I had in my early 20s. I could be in a similar situation! It's terrifying to think about for me even if it is fairly unrealistic for me. I think my biggest fear in life (right now) is addiction (and other mental health issues) and unwanted babies... young male problems.

Joe's descent into depravity seemed very realistic to me.

The overtone of economic issues struck a chord with me. Joe needs to balance having a low paying fatiguing job with supporting his unemployed wife, child, house, and increasing reliance on alcohol. It's a dangerous spiral. I feel like once you get stuck into a system like that it must be incredibly hard to escape. At one point Joe sees a commercial advertising a 3-week college program. It's too good to be true, and is. It's not that easy to escape - and Joe doesn't seem to make an effort to do that. He's still a young kid ready to party in the body of a 28-year old father. But it is wild how fast your 20s go by. It'd be easy to forget about going to school or finding gainful employment and realize you're too old to start.

Joe's life has hints of improvement (a promotion at work, being more friendly with his wife, his wife wanting to get a job) but then Sciver digs in at Joe's life just completely unravels in the most disgustingly satisfying way.

I really didn't enjoy reading this book until things got so crazy that I was able to separate myself from the action. It made me uneasy.

Joseph Young says

Guy feels trapped in the life of his making, starts drinking too much, and develops a problem. We see the inevitable downfall, how burdens of his life just keep getting bigger, even with little nuggets of delusional sanity thrown in. Despite him being kind of an ass, it's hard not to feel for him. This feels true to life. He knows he's going to mess up and then he does. It's painful to watch, and painful to share along side. There's not a happy ending, but an open one.

If you can't relate to the downwards spiral, you probably won't like this book. You'll find it sad and depressing, and kind of pointless.

Some of the art really set the mood, while some of it was just hard to see. You could feel the spiral pattern, downwards.

Daniel says

Well, folks, it's time to head home. On the title page of this book, Noah Van Sciver declares this comic to be a novel. Not a graphic novel, but a novel. And I absolutely and completely agree. Van Sciver has single-handedly cartooned the first real comics-novel. Heart-wrenching, depressing, disturbing, it feels as if Bukowski had written it himself. But of course, Bukowski didn't. Noah Van Sciver did.

This book is extremely refreshing, coming from alternative scene. A lot of comics I read from Gen-Y are, to me, complete shit. Van Sciver's work being an exception, and he really out did himself this time. Eat your heart out, Alan Moore...Van Sciver's the new literary genius of comix.

Anthony Vacca says

A very engrossing and grungy existential yarn starring that deadbeat you used to buy weed from. You remember that guy? Scruffy. Crappy gages in his ear. Well, he still has the gages. And he managed to knock some girl up. Nowadays he busts ass trying to make ends meet as a waiter for a pizza joint while his wife and nine-fingered mother-in-law sit on their asses all day at the apartment whose rent he can barely afford to pay. He also kind of has a pretty bad drinking problem. And he's totally considering making a move on the 17 year old waitress who just started working with him. He's about one day away from some kind of volcanic breakdown or another. He's just living the American dream, and it's awful.

David Schaafsma says

I just read Van Sciver's *Youth is Wasted*, a collection of short stories, and I said in my review for it that I preferred the longer ones. So I get my wish in this novella about a loser in his twenties who is spinning out of control. This is a dark tale and he is basically an anti-hero, a jerk, and the tale seems bitter, but maybe more importantly, honest, real. I really think this feels like a huge leap in his storytelling and artistic skills.

It also feels like a lot of slacker/loser comics by and about guys in their twenties, deeply angsty, geez I got a kid and a girlfriend and no money, but I still seem to like these stories. Joe is a drunk who works at a

pizzeria, though still is broke, of course, with a girlfriend home with a baby, and the girlfriend's (out of control, drunk, stoner) mother moves in for some time and things get rapidly worse. Lots of drunken craziness.

I think one powerful aspect of it is the economic issues. I think Joe would maybe be a jerk anyway, one way or the other. Maybe. But there's also strong evidence that the crazy stupid drunken crazy mistakes he makes come from all the stress from working long hours and not being able to make it. In that sense, it very much is a commentary on the times.

I'll add a comment after now having read *The Hypo*, which is a study of Lincoln as bipolar, primarily depressed, so Joe fits in this category. And now I have heard Van Sciver has suffered from depression, so maybe much of this work explores mental illness, finally, including in some autobiographical sense, his own struggles.

Molly says

Saint Cole is . . . not a saint. Cole is fed up with his dead-end job, frustrated by the tiny apartment he shares with his girlfriend, and is none too happy when said girlfriend invites her mom to stay with them for a few days. His girlfriend and son take off for a few days, leaving Cole alone with her pot-smoking, meth-using mom - and that's when everything *really* falls apart.

Vittorio Rainone says

La storia di una caduta nell'abisso che dall'abisso stesso è salvata. Disegni scabri, che ricordano tanto il nostrano Tota, che si stendono come incoerenti ragnatele su oggetti e volti, rendendoli alla perfezione nelle loro imperfezioni. Una vita distrutta che non vuole tornare a galla, anzi adora affondare. Un protagonista umanissimo, con i suoi lati positivi e i suoi pesi negativi, così come tutto quello che ha intorno. Un finale che ricorda tanto un fumetto diversissimo: *Asteryos Polyp*, ma risulta meno "improvviso" di quell'altro finale. In ogni caso: un libro piccolo ma davvero interessante.

J.T. says

Just noticed I never wrote a review for this one. It's been a long time since I read it, but hell, it's by Noah Van Sciver so you know it's fantastic.

Andy says

This Ignatz Award-nominated book shows Noah Van Sciver at the top of his form with a realism that's both grim and at the same time humorous. You won't see the ending coming, but you'll think about it for a long time.

