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S.J. Harris , Steven Harris

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Poor Eustace is not very well. Convalescing in bed, his world is confined to the four walls of his grand and gloomy room. His days are spent in wild imaginings, punctuated by the occasional visit from his mother and a legion of Aunties, who fuss and smother Eustace.

But then his wicked uncle arrives in a cloud of pipe smoke, accompanied by a swelling cast of prostitutes, hoodlums, drunkards and assorted hangers-on. Suddenly Eustace finds himself transformed from invalid to the star of a glittering and decadent social scene, serving drinks and holding court from his enormous bed. That is, until his Uncle's past begins to catch up with him...

Eustace is blackly comic, surreal and exquisitely rendered. It marks the debut of a brilliant new graphic novelist.

Eustace Details

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Author : S.J. Harris , Steven Harris

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From Reader Review Eustace for online ebook

Ali Lafferty says

This was such a beautiful graphic novel! The first half is pretty stationary, plot-wise, but the second half takes on things like prostitution and drugs and I can't believe the author threw an 8-year-old boy into his as our narrator. His family dynamic is depressing: his parents pay no attention, his aunties come and visit bringing bullies in the form of cousins, and his uncle is a con artist/pimp who basically wants to open a brothel out of Eustace's bedroom. Of course, because Eustace is eight, he doesn't exactly realize what's going on. He just knows the housekeeper is in on the secret and his cough medicine is delicious. His cough medicine might actually be brandy at one point. The artwork was all pencil and the writing was in pencil as well so sometimes it's difficult to read, but it's delightfully depressing and I loved every last word.

?Skye? says

This was absolutely insane. I think I liked it, but I'm a little overwhelmed and bit unsure.

First off, I absolutely loved the art style. I'm not a big fan of the typical 'comic' style so this was something different, though I will say (and it may just be me) I found it hard to identify some of the characters in the drawings and got a little confused, but it was easy to piece together from the text.

It was also really messed up. Luckily, I love messed up stories so I enjoyed how weird and eccentric it was, and actually how disturbing it was. There's a whole host of prostitutes and a mad woman and mistreatment and some really creepy old men, but it was so different I couldn't help but find it interesting.

This book is highly engrossing, disturbing and definitely not for everyone, but I personally liked it.

Vivek Tejuja says

I love graphic novels. I have loved them from the time I was introduced to them by a friend. Since then, I have not gone back on them. From Neil Gaiman's Sandman series to Bill Willingham's Fable Series, each graphic novel has been an experience in its own self and a unique one at that. I also believe that it is not easy to write a graphic novel. It is not that simple to say what you want to through pictures and characters that have to be spot on, since this is not a novel in its true form. So yes, I love the genre and appreciate the writers and illustrators who are able to deliver every single time.

Having said that, debut graphic novelists are a scary ground to experiment with. As a reader you do not know what to expect. At the same time you take chances whenever you are convinced about the graphic novel in question and this is exactly what I did with "Eustace" by S.J. Harris. More so when the graphic novelist is from Britain, from where I haven't read too much graphic fiction. Anyway, I was pleasantly taken in by this dark and sometimes radically funny graphic book titled after the protagonist, "Eustace".

"Eustace" is a boy, who is coming of age and is terribly ill. He is in bed all day with nothing to do but mull over life and dread visits from his uncles and a legion of Aunties. He has to eat horrid soup and nothing else. He gets tired easy and has nothing to do but sleep all day and hallucinate and use his wild imagination to his advantage. That is more or less how his time is spent. And one fine day a wicked uncle arrives and changes everything in his life. Eustace is exposed to decadence galore and life changes drastically for him, till he

realizes more about his uncle and his past. That in short is the plot of the book.

Now to the illustrations: I loved them. There are strokes of brilliance in almost every page and the reader can see the effort put by the author in terms of expression, so to create the dark mood and at the same time keep it readable. To be able to create a sense of balance in a graphic novel is not very easy and Steven manages that effortlessly at times. I finished the book in one sitting and will also reread it at some time, just for the laughs and also for the satire that is hidden somewhere. I will most certainly look out for more stuff written by him and not miss that for sure. A must read if you like graphic novels.

Tate Ryan says

I have read a lot of Graphic Novels. 'Eustace' was something, I had not experienced before. After the first couple of slow chapters I thought 'this is not too bad, but it will be an atypical story where we are suppose to feel for the child and be devastated and sad as he passes away.' However the books second half takes off into this absurd but entertaining tale of debauchery and vice which Eustace finds himself trapped in. It really is surreal and entertaining and to find out that in some aspects it is based on a true story makes it even more worthwhile. The final icing on the cake is the Illustrations/ Art. Maybe the highest quality and most simplistic beautiful sketches I have seen in a novel. Truly impressive. I am surprised that Eustace has had so few reviews on goodreads, it deserves to be one that everyone is talking about. I had started this review thinking I would give it 4 stars but I believe I have talked myself into giving it the 5 stars it deserves. Note, it is probably better if the story comes to you as much as a surprise as possible it will add to the experience, So avoid those long winded explanatory goodread reviews if you can.

Olga Lempert says

Beautiful artwork and a good writing style, but I don't get the story.

Alex Hern says

Eight-year-old Eustace is a very sickly boy. Confined to bed through some unknown malady, he whiles his life away dreading the thin reedy soup (the only thing he can keep down); avoiding the affections of his innumerable aunts; and chatting to us, his imaginary strangers. He used to have imaginary friends, but then they were mean to him in the park, so he stopped speaking to them.

Were the struggle to just survive not such an occupation, the oddities of his life would give him much to tell us about. One day, Eustace's brother, Frank, joined the army to meet men — which, in 1936, is a relatively ballsy thing to do — causing his mother to go into a near-terminal decline. She gave the servants the day off, and went to bed, leaving no-one to bring him any food. Quenching his hunger with narcotic cough syrup is one way to deal with that problem, but perhaps not the smartest.

Then Eustace's uncle crawls out from under his bed, on the lam from the law. His secretary follows soon after. And then the booze and prostitutes arrive...

If it's not clear, *Eustace* is a strange book. The plot continues getting weirder from thereon in, and ends rather abruptly in a manner which is both the logical end-point and deeply fucked-up. A short epilogue in the form of a newspaper clipping provides the only real resolution any of the characters get, and emphasises how a book which begins as a potentially realistic story told through the heightened experience of a child goes well off in a different direction.

There is a clue from the start that odd things were going to happen though, and that's Steven Harris' artwork. One of the particular joys reading comics offers is the chance of synchronicity between artistic style and thematic elements, and Harris offers that in abundance. Rendered, as best I can tell, entirely in pencil and with copious amounts of white space marking Eustace's fitful drifts into and out of sleep, the most immediately noticeable aspect of Harris' style is his figure work.

Eustace looks thin, wan and sickly; his eyes are sunken deep into his head; his straw-like blond hair is combed-over in a way which suggests premature baldness. But the thing is, those are traits he shares with all Harris' figures. Even the big, boisterous Uncle Lucian, who crawls out from under Eustace's bed and turns his life upside down, has the same cutting cheekbones and thin lips.

While the similarity starts off as a distraction, it soon becomes clear that Harris' intentions are more subtle. The similarity between Eustace and "Oubliette", the first of many prostitutes who ends up in his room, becomes a minor plot point, while Frank and Eustace's mother's appearances aren't exactly supposed to make them look hale and hearty either.

Similarly, a minor confusion at the start concerning Eustace's asides to the reader is inverted quite wonderfully as it becomes clear that they are less aside than we think — and raise further questions about the poor boy's health.

But it does all come back to that weird narrative. Weirdness is good, but when it extends to the pacing, which it does here, it's less commendable. The whole structure of the book is someone with their foot on the accelerator of a clapped-out car pointed straight at a wall. It very slowly builds steam, eventually reaches a pleasant speed, but then never quite slows down, and, eventually, stops, causing pain for all concerned.

It's not the first time that's happened to *Eustace*, either. The story has its roots in a comic Harris did on the BBC's h2g2 website (a sort of proto-wikipedia based on the *Hitchhiker's Guid to the Galaxy* which ended up being more of a weirdly-laid-out forum where a lot of the first wave of Britain's online creatives congregated) which was itself suspended abruptly after six months. Harris' other cartoon series, *Paper Cuts*, lasted over two years, and he returned to the site to pencil a further three last spring.

The book has, in a way, been a decade in the making. Given the level of craft evident from a first-time graphic novelist, that's not something which will surprise you by the time you finish it.

Jenna says

That was weird.

E says

Eustace is a very strange graphic novel. The drawings are amazing, macabre, crude, and captivating. The novel itself is interesting, confusing, and dark. Once finished, you ask the question, "What in the world did I just read?" I still have no idea.

Jasmiina F says

Quite weird reading experience. I didn't think I would like the art, but it's really beautiful and something really fascinating so it was impossible for me not to like it. The story was a bit fucked up and at the end I just had to pause and think what the hell just happened.

Wilde Sky says

A sick child gets a number of odd visitors.

I found this graphic novel a bit weird and the story didn't seem to go anywhere.

Liz Yerby says

That's not what I expected!

Mark Hibbett says

This was monumentally All Right and OK. The illustrations were good, in a vaguely Edwardian Steven Appleby sort of way, but the story was confused and meandering. It's one of those "graphic novels" which leans so heavily on the "graphic" that it forgets the "novel", with very little time for story, character, or point. It's something you can get away with in short form, but when it's presented as a whole book it feels rather lightweight.

Angela says

Eustace is an odd book; a very odd book. The ugly drawings intrigued me, as did the scrawled words in pencil. However, after a while it became clear that this story was going one way...DOWNHILL. It was quite insipid, I found. Not impressed by the plot and the drawings got to be a bit annoying after a while - as did the handwriting.

Dan Smith says

A beautifully ugly novel. Eustace is a sickly 8 year old, plagued by elderly relatives cooing and mooning over his convalescence as he laments his poor digestion with alternately cheery and gloomy asides to the reader.

The tone is handled masterfully. The breezy monologues, dialogues, pin-sharp speech patterns, and free-wheeling scenes gradually take the strain of a growing sense of dread as some relatives prove relatively...morally flexible. But throughout, the pencilled artistry and subtle lettering (coupled with the generally high vantage point of the eye) give the story a dreamlike sense of flotation which sees you through the nastiness beneath as it gradually rises to the surface. What's remarkable in all this is that the story stays almost entirely within Eustace's room.

Good use of panelling also, although it's sometimes a little too constrained by the regular beats of a basic 3x3 frame, and breaks out into free-form movements across and down the page.

I'd also have preferred to see bit more of the plots of individual characters worked through: the central focus is on Eustace, and a few others, but this makes the huge supporting cast rather poorly treated. It's as if Eustace doesn't really know or care what is going on outside his room, but then again perhaps that's the point.

More of this, please!

Zoe Davey says

The artwork was truly great - you step into the strange and monochrome world of sickly little Eustace.

Shawn says

The best way I can describe this book is as an odd mash-up of Roald Dahl, Shirley Jackson, Neil Gaiman, and Tim Burton. It's dark and macabre, yet whimsical and humorous all at once. The first words spoken by the main character, Eustace--"I'm listening to the cats devouring the birds outside."--set the tone perfectly.

Eustace is a very sickly little boy whose entire world, virtually, exists within the walls of his bedroom, yet he dreads having to see the majority of the people who come to visit him. Then one day, he finds his Uncle Lucien under his bed, hiding out because he is a wanted man. As time passes, Uncle Lucien brings more and more seedy characters into Eustace's world until it is completely unrecognizable.

I really enjoyed the metafictional element of this book. Eustace narrates what is happening directly to the reader, who he refers to as an "imaginary stranger." He's a pretty fascinating character and I could envision a series of books that follows him as he grows up. I also enjoyed the art style. The pencil-sketch aesthetic works really well for the story. That said, I do think the first half of the book is stronger than the latter half. I'm not opposed to stories taking turns and going off the rails a bit, but I so enjoyed then kind of intimacy developed between Eustace and reader, and then that disappears when more and more characters start entering the scene.

I look forward to seeing what else this author has up his sleeves in future books.

Fred says

What a strange graphic novel. I really liked the first half but then everything went downhill very fast and I found the story very difficult to follow. The art is quite beautiful and unique but I didn't really like the writing style, it made everything more confusing. I was going to give it at least 3 stars but then after reading the end I can't really give it more than 2.

Lorcan Redvers says

The art work in this graphic novel was very beautiful and i loved the style of the characters faces especially. But outside this i found the actual story very lacking and mostly pointless. It didn't have much plot and the second half of the book definitely went down hill for me.

Aine says

I really liked the character of Eustace in this dark, heavy graphic novel. As a bed-ridden eight year old, he was a compelling and funny narrator. Although the book was upsetting from the start - Eustace is a lonely and isolated young man - it becomes increasingly more odd and jarring as his great uncle Lucy arrives on the scene and brings his own chaotic life with him. I get why the story unravelled as it did, but this wasn't explained until the end and that felt too late.

I'd have settled for more of Eustace's life and insights. I think the author would have done much better to tell the story of his engaging and lovely protagonist.

Anita Cassidy says

Excellentlly written and fascinatingly drawn - one to check out. The talents of someone who can not only write a great tale but DRAW it too are enough to fill one with awe. Well done S J Harris.
