ForeWord Reviews

LITERARY

A Very Minor Prophet
James Bernard Frost
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Before the Internet, there were zines: xeroxed pages combining comics with collage and held together by staples and passion. Strictly appealing to long tail market segments, zines were never about money. They were about expression. They were individual free speech forums in which their creators could talk about the horrors of suburbia, sexuality, and the difficulties of getting laid. Zines were lowbrow, transcendent, shallow *and* deep. They were controversial and contradictory. But most importantly, they were cool.

James Bernard Frost's latest book *A Very Minor Prophet* is the coolest paean to the bygone era of the zine and to the land at the end of the Earth. Told from the perspective of Barth Flynn, a cyclist, barista, and atheist, *A Very Minor Prophet* records the months leading up to the 2004 election and the days that immediately followed. As the result of a flat tire, Flynn witnesses the first sermon of Joseph Patrick Booker, a midget bent on changing how the world sees Jesus, and creates a zine around the experience. For the first time in Flynn's life, he's done something with passion. His world changes forever: As a man, he messes up; as an artist, he sells out with the realization that, "the saddest thing about selling out is just how cheaply most of us do it for." And in the end he finds redemption.

Like a zine that changes with the whims of its creator, *A Very Minor Prophet* is everything at once. Only a hip audience will appreciate the scenes of catharsis and sexuality. But the book's surgical use of irony and humor to talk about the war in Iraq will impress everybody.

At times it's extremely sophisticated, a comedic novel switching between a clear typeface and a more primitive mode of representation. At other times it's a crude zine filled with grainy images of Tattoo (of *Fantasy Island* fame) with a massive clock swinging between his legs. It's a collection of sermons that never gets preachy. It reviles Christianity while championing a Jesus Freak revival. And it talks about global issues but sings about Portland, Oregon.

Even at its most absurd, Frost's writing contains a rare power. He creates truth. Every word he sets on the page becomes part of the next word's foundation. By the time the last one

has been read, readers find themselves wanting his reality, not theirs, to be the true one.

Known more for his food reviews and reportage on technology and gaming, Frost's articles have appeared in *The San Francisco Examiner*, *Wired*, and *The Official Magazine of World of Warcraft*. In 2001, his vegetarian-focused travel guide, *The Artichoke Trail*, won the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism competition's bronze award.

Joseph Thompson