



Alternative Energy

Marc Bauer

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Brandon Baker is a frustrated, binge-drinking, hard-partying, strong-cussing, live-at-home, stuck-in-a-dead-end-job welder in Medicine Hat, a town in southeastern Alberta, Canada, that's "not exactly a Mecca of cosmopolitan activity." Little wonder that when the protagonist of *Alternative Energy* is presented with the dangerous yet potentially lucrative opportunity to work on the oil rigs of the Great White North, he leaps at it, as if "pulled toward a giant unseen star in the distance."

Marc Bauer's *Alternative Energy* is not really about working on the oil rigs, although there are a few short passages on the subject, one of them quite dramatic and exciting. It is about a young man barely into adulthood getting on with his life. Brandon heads north in search of adventure, riches, and women, and does so naively believing that "my life was really going to be like a beer commercial." Things go well at first. Brandon finds plenty of beer, bikini babes, and a nubile physical trainer named Katy whose sexual talents make Bauer's principal character a very happy young man, at least for a time.

The novel reaches a climax in more ways than one with an intensely graphic, sexy shower scene that seems drawn straight from a porn video. The ten-page episode, while exciting, reads as if it were written by someone else, as neither the voice nor the tone match that in which the rest of the book is written. Brandon's relationship with Katy begins with sex and drugs (magic mushrooms and "devil weed"), but, much like his harrowing if brief time on the oil rigs, it quickly changes from a life of fun and adventure into "a crash course in manhood."

Bauer's novel is sprinkled with a fair share of sex. Whether Brandon is simply "lying naked in a bed with a goddess," or making love with a woman until "our animal instincts were satisfied," the young man gets to sow his wild oats. To his credit, he is also looking for more than just a "naked frolic" in the hay.

Alternative Energy is not a groundbreaking work, but it is a solid, very readable, quite credible, and easily relatable story. While perhaps intended for a male audience, many women are likely to see someone they know in Brandon Baker. Unlike some of the more stereotypical young males in the book, Brandon wants to grow up, wants to love and be loved, and wants to be happy. His journey toward each of his goals is believably written by Bauer. Whether or not the novel is autobiographical, it rings true enough to make the reader believe that, if Marc Bauer is not Brandon Baker, he at least knows someone like his main character, and he knows him very well.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (November 16, 2012)

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