Foreword Review JUVENILE FICTION

Big Nate: Aloha!

Lincoln Peirce
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Nate returns with new middle school hijinks, puppy love, baseball, and Cheez Doodles in *Big Nate: Aloha!* Here, the sixth grade know-it-all attempts to woo a fellow classmate, Daisy, with his charm and infinite wisdom, only to strike out big time. To Daisy, Nate “seems kind of fun. And he’s kind of cute. But he also acts like kind of an idiot sometimes.”

When Nate’s father gives him money for a haircut, Nate opts to spend the cash at the arcade. He relies on a trusty sidekick, Teddy, to create the “buzz” of a lifetime. And while interning at the local comic shop, Nate summons up his inner detective to bust a shoplifting ring. Later, he busts out his trusty band, Enslave the Mollusk, for a streetside busking battle for supremacy.

Peirce is a master of middle school mischief. He captures naughtiness in all its delicious guises while imbuing his bumbling hero with adorable goofiness and illusions of grandeur. Nate is snarky and rebellious; he concocts scheme after scheme, and he enlists his hapless friends in all of them. When his schemes succeed, it is by sheer luck. In fact, there is no doubt that parents of middle schoolers will recognize the pranks that Nate unleashes on his teachers and family, which Peirce expresses through clean, direct sketches to hilarious effect. The four- and eight-panel vignettes span multiple pages.

When summer vacation arrives, Nate’s school year ends much as it begins, with a self-improvement scheme too crazy to believe. “Aloha” in Hawaiian can mean comings or goings, and one never knows, with Nate’s constant state of motion—and the ambiguity just makes this installment of Nate’s adventures that much more enjoyable and unpredictable.

NANCY POWELL (September / October 2021)

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