

Broken Lines

Tom Pappalardo

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Broken Lines is a rollicking, careening adventure unlike any other.

With a bizarre plot, metafiction that breaks the fourth wall, and lots of visual candy, Tom Pappalardo's *Broken Lines* is entertainingly unique.

Pappalardo has written stories, essays, and comic strips and worked in graphic design, all skills that come to bear in *Broken Lines*. The plot revolves around a waitress, Maggie, and several strange characters whom she meets: a cowboy, a spaceman, and a frail, aged vampire. The four band together with a loose goal of getting the vampire to a distant town, while avoiding the firemen—agents of evil who start fires, not put them out.

The plot could be considered secondary, however, to its delivery. Pappalardo breaks up passages of prose with illustrations, including photo-realistic drawings, photographs, fake ads, footnotes, quotations, and a massive number of different fonts in various sizes. It might sound like a bit much, but somehow it all works.

At one point, the somewhat ignorant Spaceman acquires a dog named Banjo, and their first interaction gives a sense of the character's innocence, as well as Pappalardo's ability to sharply convey humor:

"Who's the dog?" Spaceman asks the only dog in the room. "You!" he confirms. "You're the dog!"

Perhaps the most delightful section of the book stems from Pappalardo's struggles to finish the project. When the author imposes himself on the characters in a food court, he recounts the creation of the story thus far: "I scribble notes for this scene on my porch in March, 2003 ... Now it's half past 2017. Fourteen years compressed into two heavily-revised paragraphs." A few pages later, after informing his characters that they are, in fact, fictional, Pappalardo describes Cowboy's reaction as "a dark and serious look, the dead-eyed stare of a Richard Scarry cat piloting a tugboat." Such references are fresh, if esoterically resonant.

Broken Lines is most likely to appeal to Pappalardo's own demographic—men in their forties who are familiar with pop culture and ready to poke some fun at it—but all will appreciate that Pappalardo has created a world, and a book, unlike any other.

PETER DABBENE (January/February 2018)

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