



DeadEndia: The Watcher's Test

Hamish Steele

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In *DeadEndia*, author and animator Hamish Steele introduces the bizarre, fun, and dangerous world of the PollyWood Theme Park—specifically, the scare ride–slash–supernatural portal called Dead End.

Steele has been publishing *DeadEndia*, based on a cartoon short produced for the animation company Cartoon Hangover, as a webcomic since 2014. *DeadEndia: The Watcher's Test* adapts the webcomic's first story arc with redrawn pages and other changes to better suit the graphic novel format and court the young adult reading audience.

The story centers around Barney, a young man who's just gotten a job keeping things tidy at the Dead End ride inside PollyWood Theme Park. He soon learns from his coworker, Norma, that the ride is actually a portal to multiple angelic and demonic realms; a series of escalating supernatural adventures ensue.

Norma, Barney, Barney's talking dog Pugsley, a demon named Courtney, and others make for a colorful cast, while side plots involving Barney and Norma's love lives give representation to LGBTQ people. Steele tells a satisfying story within each chapter while also contributing to the larger narrative arc.

The art is excellent—a cartoony style, as one might expect of an animation artist, well suited to both the dramatic tension and the sense of humor that inhabits the book. Steele's placement of word balloons and their "tails" can occasionally prove confusing, requiring the reader to backtrack a bit or use context to determine who's speaking. But *DeadEndia* is an engaging, entertaining saga with memorable characters, and it works wonderfully as comedy, drama, and romance.

PETER DABBENE (September/October 2018)

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