

For What It's Worth

Nathan Pettijohn

Cordurouy

(298pp)

979-898874241-8

A fun mashup of youthful rebellion with heartland quirkiness, For What It's Worth is a nostalgic comic novel in which absurdities abound.

In Nathan Pettijohn's dark comedy novel *For What it's Worth*, an Oklahoma man reminisces about the final week of his senior year—which included brushes with the criminal world.

Jon is a millennial who, in 2006, felt senioritis in its full force at his Tulsa high school. He and his friends Fonz, Weasel, and Hernandez decided to raise the ante on memorable class pranks. They planned to each take turns executing one prank while abiding by a list of their own rules. But little went to plan in the boys' escalating misadventures, which included a break-in and a kidnapping that took a macabre turn. The boys also met oddballs in the course of their pranks, including a history teacher who moonlighted as a safecracker but who was inept about evading capture and a prominent town scion who has a pet llama—and ties to money laundering.

Throughout Jon's narration, there's nostalgia for that "one last hurrah" before life turned serious: in their senior year, Jon and his friends smoked weed, used mushrooms, ribbed each other, and contended with their principal, who was determined to uncover their wrongdoing. There are discursive scenes that focus on early 2000s pop culture too; and elsewhere, details specific to the boys' hometown are centered. But the friends' end-of-the-year boredom dominates many scenes; in class, they watched movies and played games.

In the present, evincing both the tomfoolery of idle boys and a grown man's nostalgic hindsight about his youth, Jon reflects on their experiences across the span of one week. He is a lighthearted narrator but also worldly and self-aware. Further, there are sections that backtrack in time to show events as they happened outside of Jon's perspective, with details that he couldn't have known about, fleshing the novel and its setting out further. Still, there are instances of easy coarseness, and Jon proves nonchalant in sharing grisly details.

In addition to the book's screwball antics, though, there are poignant storylines, including the loss of a sibling to suicide. These stories, while mentioned in passing, nonetheless bind the friends together in unspoken empathy. When the boys obtain the loot of a heist gone awry, the story becomes more tense. Their decisions, however, remain impromptu and often ill thought through. As such, the book ends in a memorable (and consistent) fashion.

In the entertaining novel *For What It's Worth*, the machinations of mischievous high school seniors lead to trouble in a place where money and offbeat influences intertwine.

KAREN RIGBY (September 4, 2023)

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