

Hell World Heaven

Nancy Xia

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"In order to like your exercise, it will be good to listen to your favorite music, partner up with your neighbors and coworkers, or watch TV while biking and doing sit-ups," author Nancy Xia writes in her first book, *Hell World Heaven*, a collection of seemingly random thoughts.

Xia, whose credentials are unknown, covers all manner of subjects, including psychology, religion, culture, health, politics, and even "show reviews." A rather lackadaisical table of contents is meant to guide readers through the plethora of information, but only serves to confuse her audience; there are no chapter headings, and the subject matter seems to have no organization whatsoever. For example, in chapter sixty-four, Xia talks at length about the history of crystal meth. In the following chapter, she writes about a skeleton discovered in an ancient grave with strange abrasions on it. From here, readers are met with Xia's thoughts on the current state of psychiatry in China, the blossoming of the canned meat industry during recessions, and the actions of Somali pirates.

Xia's thoughts and ideas have little substance or merit, and are often common knowledge. In chapter eighty-seven she provides a short history lesson on Leonard da Vinci and the Mona Lisa. This chapter, like countless others, offers no new insights to readers. In chapter twenty-three, Xia tells readers that homosexuals should be treated equally because God said, "Love thy neighbor." Only a few sections of the book will be valuable to readers. Xia's insight into Chinese culture and history (are there really treasures hidden inside the Buddha's belly?) is one of the highlights of the book.

The theory behind *Hell World Heaven* is that there are two powers at work in our everyday world: good and evil. Some people see the world as a heavenly place where good things happen; others see it is a bad place where bad things happen. Here, Xia attempts to provide readers with examples of both. Sadly, the lack of any real rhyme or reason to this book makes for reading tedious reading that will surely frustrate even the most dedicated literary fans. If there are lessons to be learned within this book, only determined digging will uncover them.

LIAM BRENNAN (May 18, 2010)

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