



Jeff Steinberg: Champion of Earth

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A video-store clerk is the only one who can save the Earth in the slacker-comedy graphic novel *Jeff Steinberg: Champion of Earth*.

By fluke, Jeff Steinberg—a thoroughly mediocre person—is chosen by aliens to compete in a contest to determine Earth’s fate. Steinberg reluctantly fills the role while the world jokes about his inadequacies and looks for another way to save the planet. But Jeff finally defeats his foe, only to find that there are even more waiting.

Although there are plenty of funny moments throughout the book, the story sometimes feels as though it’s been retrieved from a musty file cabinet. The opening banner sets the story at “next Thursday, 9:30 AM,” which, combined with President Obama talking about “going out on top” and a reference to the 2011 *Green Lantern* film, marks it as somewhat current.

Yet the title character is a twentysomething who works at a video store and refers to ’80s and ’90s movies like *The Karate Kid*, *Dave*, *The American President*, and *Back to School*. The story, and many of the jokes, revolve around VCRs and VHS copies of movies, the TV series *The Cosby Show*, Windows ME, and mixtape CDs.

While the retro-humor might not appeal to some audiences, others will love it. Equally polarizing are the story’s characters, few of whom are classically “likable”—even Jeff seems equally motivated to fight by thoughts of impressing an unfaithful girlfriend, and the prospect of winning free dinners for a month.

Jeff Steinberg: Champion of Earth isn’t a grand heroic epic, but it succeeds as a vehicle for frequent punch lines and entertaining wackiness.

PETER DABBENE (September/October 2017)

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