ForeWord Reviews

LITERARY

Johnny Future: A Novel
Steve Abee
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In an article about writer-director Kevin Smith for *The New Yorker*, Tad Friend found himself resorting to code. Each time Smith referenced an intimate body part during his Carnegie Hall performance, Friend replaced it with "Wayne Gretzky," one of Smith's heroes. And each time a procreative verb based upon the Wayne Gretzkys came up, Friend substituted "Walter Gretzky."

It's tempting to do the same thing with Steve Abee's *Johnny Future*. Like Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* without the moral exploration, and as aimless as Don Delillo's *White Noise*, Johnny Future, book and character, is the seedy soul and story of sub-culture L.A. The book turns the ugly beautiful and desecrates everything suburban America holds sacred.

Unlike Kevin Smith, whose humanity is revealed in Friend's article as if he were a character, Abee's Future lives a parasitic life. Aside from himself, Future loves nobody but his grandmother, Dolly. And even though Future is a fictional character, it would be too cruel to take the one person he cares about and drag her name like a tarp over the complete and utter Walter Gretzky-ing waste of his existence.

A cast of characters written for shock value, including Baby Juice, the paraplegic transvestite, Maurice, a soldier in the love army and porn shop proprietor, and the rescuing angel, America, help Johnny as he decides what to do about Dolly. Moved into a retirement home six months before, Future hasn't yet visited her (it's like three buses to get there), but he knows he needs to save her.

Johnny Future is at its best between plot points. When Future's mind interprets real and imaginary interactions with strangers, Abee reveals himself to be a poet of humanity, a sincere clown, and a brilliant writer. Sitting at a bus stop, for example, Future watches a young man come and rescue his senile grandfather. It's a tragic scene, after which Abee delivers one of Future's best mental riffs:

"I look down at something else, you know, saying, no problems, man. Sorry. I'm not seeing you in your time of pain. The pimpish Armenian car of sadness drives away. I look around. I see a star shimmering through the orange sky nighttime. It looks like it's coughing.

Fuck this, I'm not sitting at this bus bench. It's depressing. I want to kill myself. I'm walking. Oh, fuck that, the bus is coming."

As the moment happens, Future feels it, but then it's over. The bus comes, and his life continues. The world once again revolves around him, and he's unable to relate the experience to his own life.

Johnny Future is Abee's fourth book after *King Planet, The Bus: Cosmic Ejaculations of the Daily Mind in Transit*, and *Great Balls of Flowers*.

Joseph Thompson