



Oksi

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Inspired by Finnish mythology and folklore, *Oksi* is a grand, memorable graphic novel about family, jealousy, and love.

Umi is a mother bear with several cubs. One, Poorling, is different from the others. Scaup, a primordial god in the form of a waterfowl, notices those differences and begins to tutor Poorling on how to use her special abilities. Meanwhile, Umi hides her cubs from Emuu, the “fierce grandma in the sky,” and Mana, whose Shadow Children inhabit the forest.

The book’s events unfold in a slow, dramatic fashion. The hidden agendas of Emuu and Mana are revealed, along with Poorling’s true origins. Umi is killed, but Poorling is offered a bargain by the primordials: she can be restored in exchange for Poorling’s service as guardian of the forest. Though this entails a risk (there’s no guarantee that Umi will accept her), Poorling agrees, and she takes a new name to go with her new role: Oksi.

The book’s art is a haunting but playful feast for the eyes; its procession of stunning images are complemented by the selective use of color. Poorling is drawn in a cartoonish form, while other characters are dark and ominous. But the roles are sometimes reversed, yielding surprises: there are glimpses of Poorling’s inner rage, and the bipedal Shadow Children are shown in primitive, animalistic poses. Gray scale images of the forest landscape at the beginning and end of the book establish its setting and mood, while the book’s length allows for natural, rising intensity.

Oksi interprets an age-old story with inimitable vision and grace.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2021)

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