

## ★ **Palaces**

### **Simon Jacobs**

Two Dollar Radio (Jan 16, 2018)

Softcover \$15.99 (248pp)

978-1-937512-67-5

*In this wonderful novel that takes no prisoners, the characters' disorientation creates a satisfying sense of psychological horror.*

As tightly packed as a mosh pit on a Saturday night, *Palaces* is a vivid, explosive novel. Joey and John, two young counterculture kids, are drawn into a postcapitalist nightmare. How did it happen? Isn't this what they wanted all along?

As a couple, Joey and John are the perfect narrators for *Palaces*. They're educated but not worldly, aggressive but not empowered, idealistic but uninspired. After graduating, they cut ties with the people, places, and experiences that formed them, and venture into another world—a strange abandoned neighborhood at the end of the commuter line.

Nihilism is their new code, and they happily adopt it. They wear punk like a uniform, but it doesn't ease their sense of being impostors, constantly seeking a sense of authenticity in a strange world. When they confront a homeless man who's taken over their squat, John wonders, "How much less genuine was our poverty than his, because we rejected what we'd been given, because, if we'd wanted to, we could have taken it?"

Joey and John have a volatile relationship. The suburb of sprawling mansions that they find themselves in seems to represent the fulfillment of their ideals and the destruction of the known world, though John is unable to stop seeing the connections between it and the world they've left behind. The characters' disorientation creates a satisfying sense of psychological horror.

The narrative weaves in elements of pop culture and critical theory for a self-aware, smart story that is part horror and part mystery. In his third book, Jacobs shows that he is clearly a short fiction writer: his sense of scene, tension, and dialogue give *Palaces* that feeling. His clean, incisive style is a standout. There's no bloat here. No words are wasted.

*Palaces* is robust, both current and clairvoyant, and answers the question of what happens when our deepest fantasies become reality. With a pitch-perfect portrayal of the punk scene and idiosyncratic, meaty characters, this is a wonderful novel that takes no prisoners.

CLAIRE FOSTER (January/February 2018)

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