



Softies: Stuff That Happens After the World Blows Up

Kyle Smeallie

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In Kyle Smeallie's *Softies*, a young girl survives the explosion of Earth and explores the galaxy via spaceship.

In the aftermath of Earth's destruction, Kay is rescued from space by Arizona, an alien waste collector, and Euclid, his part-cyborg pet. With nowhere else to go, Kay hitches a ride, making stops at planets and meeting a wide variety of alien creatures. Wacky adventures ensue along the way, featuring—among other things—a space library full of inaccurate information, an unfunny stand-up comic, and crop circles.

The book is arranged as a continuing series of individual, chapter-length short stories; most pages end with a joke, some of which are surprising because of their unusual vocabularies—an egg joke plays on the word “albumen”—and high references, as to the Edward Hopper painting *Nighthawks*.

Softies has its idiosyncrasies. Kay's sentences often end without periods, exclamation points, or question marks; overlapping word balloons indicate a person being talked over, which gives lines the sense of real conversations and results in some humor.

Smeallie's art is bright, colorful, and fun; it delivers laugh out loud moments, as when a Picasso-esque bird with both eyes on one side of her head slams her skull to the ground in an effort to free some food that's stuck to her beak.

The book invests in the characters' futures when, in its final section, Kay deals with the loss of Earth on an emotional level previously unseen. With laughs aplenty and a universe full of crazy situations, *Softies* is breezy, satisfying science fiction.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2020)

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