

Spellbound: A Graphic Memoir

Bishakh Som

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A fictional alter ego channels a true-life account in Bishakh Som's *Spellbound: A Graphic Memoir*.

Anjali, a former New York architect, serves as a visual substitute for Bishakh Som. Her history and personality also mirror Som's—for storytelling purposes, Anjali *is* Som. A series of chronological chapters, most one or two pages long, detail Anjali's attempts to pay bills and care for her aging parents while creating and publishing a graphic novel. A few chapters extend longer to suit their subjects, including the twenty-three page "Vampiric Caterpillars," in which Anjali deals with the deaths of her parents in India. Events flow, one to the next, with ease.

The book has an unpredictable, lively, and enjoyable rhythm. Gender, orientation, and identity are prominent themes: Anjali explores the possibility of romance with a longtime woman friend before beginning a promising relationship with a transgender person. Her questioning is an additional source of internal conflict throughout the book.

Anjali is a smart lead: she balances occasional bouts of self-pity with genuine, self-effacing humor. She's both admirable and relatable as a mature person who finds herself drawn in different directions, trying to find her place in the world and following her dreams without ignoring her responsibilities.

The art is appealing in its clean, clear style, and is rendered in beautiful colors, aided by an architect's eye for layout, design, and details. *Spellbound: A Graphic Memoir* is an absorbing graphic novel that takes common struggles and examines them through an uncommon lens.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2020)

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