

The Hockey Saint

Howard Shapiro

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An unlikely friendship between likable, emotionally rendered hockey-playing characters illuminates the conflicts of loyalty in this graphic novel.

Lessons about loyalty, friendship, and the price of fame are draped upon a background of professional hockey in this excellent graphic novel by Howard Shapiro.

The Hockey Saint discusses college ennui, with student Tom Leonard, the book's main character, only a year removed from losing his parents in a car accident. Tom plays on a hockey team and idolizes Jeremiah "Jake" Jacobson, a national hockey star. When one of Tom's friends secures Jake's home address, Tom soon meets his idol in person.

The two find common ground, despite the radical differences in their lifestyles, and Jake opens up to Tom about his genuine love of hockey, and the high price of fame. Tom sees a good person caught in a web of deceit and alcohol and eventually helps Jake to be open and honest with the media. Jake, meanwhile, helps Tom put his own troubles in perspective as well.

The art is outstanding, with consistent and expressive faces that provide for clear storytelling throughout. It is Shapiro's characterizations that set *The Hockey Saint* apart, however, by focusing on the simple things that bind Tom and Jake to each other: similar ages, the loss of their fathers, video games, hockey, and a general need for a friend who doesn't harbor preconceptions. Readers will find themselves rooting for these characters—Jake is likable and down to earth, even volunteering at a local food bank, and Tom, while carrying his own set of early-adult uncertainties, is never whiny.

Shapiro adds another interesting dimension for music lovers, in that each chapter is preceded by a "recommended listening" list—two or three songs whose music or lyrics resonate with the chapter's events. For example, the Rush song "Limelight" accompanies the chapter in which Jake reveals the quiet desperation of his own "gilded cage."

The Hockey Saint succeeds because it touches on so many elements of modern life: the responsibilities of fame, the delicate line between helping a reluctant friend and betraying trust, and the general sense of aimlessness that often comes with early adulthood.

PETER DABBENE (Winter 2015)

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