



The Life and Times of Halycon Sage or The Last Book Ever Published

Karima Vargas Bushnell

Lulu (May 28, 2015)

Softcover \$11.99 (146pp)

978-1-312-96191-3

This is a deliciously funny and witty satire of the literary world.

Karima Vargas Bushnell satirizes the literary world and many other targets in her deliciously funny fiction *The Life and Times of Halycon Sage or The Last Book Ever Published*.

Halycon Sage (pronounced “HAL-i-con”, not “Hal-sea-on”) is a writer who has made an unlikely success of himself by writing very, very short novels. As he embarks on a journey of soul searching (with the concurrent goal of saving the world), his story becomes intertwined with many other equally eccentric and entertaining characters. Among them, there’s an Iraqi immigrant who, unfortunately, harbors a love for aviation and gardening (including the use of fertilizer), which makes him a prime target of federal authorities; an Eastern European named Alexander Preiscech, who is baffled by the way supermarkets seem to call his last name over the loudspeaker; and No-Name Stupid, Halycon Sage’s horse, who has a mind of his own, and uses it quite effectively.

A nanobot device designed to eliminate explosions of any kind is the MacGuffin that the characters eventually end up pursuing, but this book is more about the journey than the destination. The tale is a clever, wild mixture of lowbrow and pop-cultural humor—when searching for a woman named Jenny, Preiscech is told, “Sure, man, just call 867-5309,” a reference to the ‘80s pop song. But there’s also a spiritual element woven throughout the story that, even with the humor, comes through as sincere. Every character is on a quest for fulfillment of one kind or another, and it’s easy to root for them on their journeys. There are some nice “extras” in the book as well, from informational and amusing footnotes, to an appendix that includes a fake high-school term paper analyzing Halycon Sage’s novel *One Hundred and One Cows*—complete with the teacher’s comments written in.

There are some simple homonym errors: “site” instead of “sight,” and others. But notwithstanding those occasional mistakes, the prose is clean and, more importantly, delivers the jokes with a droll sensibility, as when Preiscech, futilely searching for Halycon Sage, wakes suddenly:

“Halycon Sage, where are you?” he cried from the depths of his soul.

“Shaddap, ya moron,” came the response from down the hall. It was true, what his parents had told him. To every question, there was always an answer.

Bushnell herself boasts a variety of experiences, serving as director of the Light Upon Light Sufi Center in Minneapolis, and having worked as a college professor, refugee/immigrant job counselor, and more. In *The Life and Times of Halycon Sage*, she’s successfully channeled those experiences, weaving a variety of outlandish personalities and points of view into an entertaining, fast-moving novel that is nearly guaranteed to provoke laughter.

PETER DABBENE (September 30, 2015)

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