

The Spectacular Shenanigans of Mr. P'choka and Earl

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The Spectacular Shenanigans of Mr. P'choka and Earl is a funny and energetic graphic novel.

A former logistical consultant and his companion race to defeat an alien corporation that puts profit before preservation in the quirky, entertaining graphic novel *The Spectacular Shenanigans of Mr. P'choka and Earl*.

The story begins *in medias res*, as Earl, once an employee of SMRZ Industries, crashes through the window of a SMRZ Orbital Facility and falls to the surface of the planet below. Earl and his companion, Mr. P'choka, whose head is a giant eyeball that shoots laser beams, have a plan to stop SMRZ's environmental destruction.

With help from a resistance movement and a formidable squirrel, the duo races to find a critical package and meet a deadline. In the meantime, they endure constant threats from SMRZ agents. A final confrontation with Mr. SMRZ reveals a secret about Earl's identity.

This is a swift and tongue-in-cheek tale: after an explosion results in a large cloud of dust and debris, Earl says, "I hope there weren't any asthmatics in that crowd." When Earl and Mr. P'choka meet the head of SMRZ Industries, it's just that—a giant head.

Some background is provided, but there's not much emphasis on the particulars: SMRZ agents are described as aliens, but the details of how and when they arrived are absent, and much about Mr. P'choka remains a mystery throughout. He speaks in a strange language represented via hieroglyphic symbols inside word balloons; the content of his speeches must be discerned through the reactions and responses of Earl and others. These storytelling choices are disorienting, but they also create a heightened sense of excitement: unknowns remain, and exposition is minimal. A deadline countdown is noted in captions, resulting in urgency.

The character designs, including Earl's rag-doll appearance and the SMRZ agents' square heads, are unique and appealing. With clean illustration lines and a bold, simple style, a font that uses unusual combinations of upper and lower case lettering, and a limited color palette of black, white, gray, and red, the book's art is striking. Occasional misspellings, and awkward panels in which word-balloon tails cross, or extend from the opposite side of a frame, distract from this strong work, though.

Still, this is an adrenaline-fueled story with a message of environmental consciousness that's delivered in a fun, original way. SMRZ agents are frightened of heading into the overgrown, tree-heavy areas around the city, and Earl and his allies stand in stark contrast to the company's destructive, profit-driven ways. The conclusion is action-packed and suggests further adventures. *The Spectacular Shenanigans of Mr. P'choka and Earl* is a funny and energetic graphic novel.

PETER DABBENE (February 22, 2022)

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