Weeaboo

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Weeaboo is an exuberant coming-of-age story about three friends and the immense changes they experience during their senior year of high school.

James is a biracial Japanese teenager who's under a lot of family pressure to get into a good college. Maya is a Black anime fan whose cheerful attitude and outgoing personality mask the fact that she's lonely and struggling with self-confidence. Dan is a white teenager who pours herself into auditioning for the boy's lead in the school play, only to be cast as the heroine instead. Nobody around her recognizes that there might be more to Dan's gender than what they assume.

The three friends spend the year preparing to cosplay together at an anime convention, while each dealing with their own individual problems. The novel tackles a number of big issues, including cultural appropriation, racism, homophobia, gender identity, sexuality, and the complexities of fandom and anime culture. As James, Dan, and Maya struggle to figure out who they want to be after high school, they all make mistakes, sometimes hurting each other in the process. Not every issue addressed is explored in depth, and the story isn't wrapped up neatly. This, however, feels true to the messiness of being a teenager.

The art, a blend of soft watercolor illustrations and panels drawn in a classic anime style, fits the book's tone perfectly, though the structure is a bit chaotic. Time jumps aren't always executed smoothly, and the panels depicting the classic anime show that the characters watch are sometimes jarring. But the emotional lives of the characters are handled in a consistent, thoughtful, and engaging manner.

Weeaboo is a graphic novel snapshot of growing up, by turns playful and serious, and a celebration of friendship and fandom, imperfections and all.

LAURA SACKTON (November / December 2021)

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