

What the Luck?

Brian Cramer

Brian J. Cramer (Jun 20, 2014)

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Details of Japanese culture from an American visitor's perspective accentuate the humor in this insightful tale of self-discovery.

What the Luck? works to combine comedy, mystery, and a quest to find one's true place in a modern, messy world. Brian Cramer has woven together an easy-to-read story line with a self-searching subplot about a man looking for a sense of identity and purpose in Japan and unsure if he will ever find it. It's a quest that so many people face in their lives, and Cramer has indeed worked to write a soulful tale of today's disaffected.

Bill Brabham is a divorced and unemployed financial analyst. Spotting an article about the need for cleanup crews in the nuclear hazardous zone of Fukushima Daiichi, Japan, he heads there to try to find some purpose to his life. Little does he know just how much of a fish out of water he will be and what experiences lie ahead of him.

The details Cramer puts into the text about Japan, Bill's work at the Fukushima site, and the people he meets along the way are very engaging. Bill's the outsider—he's surprised by getting tentacles in his food, being called "Beer-san" instead of "Bill," and being affectionately dubbed "The Cool Mexican" by his colleagues. His daily trials and tribulations put the reader in Bill's shoes, experiencing everything he does with all of its difficulty and excitement.

While the details of place and experience are well written, other aspects of the narrative are problematic. There are constant references to Bill having "*Lost in Translation*" moments, and there are footnotes to explain parts of the text, which use unintelligible notes like "blah blah blah." These bits do not work with the rest of the text as a whole.

Sometimes the humor in the book works well, such as Bill saying to a native Japanese girl that he's from the United States, and she replies, "You can't be; you're not fat!" Sometimes the humor falls flat—"Bill's [ramen noodle] soup failed to appear in the hatchway. He thumped it. There was still no noodley goodness forthcoming." The latter style sometimes makes *What the Luck?* seem more juvenile than it is.

Bill has a lot to deal with in *What the Luck?*, from discovering explosives and a possible crime syndicate vendetta to his feelings toward local beauty Natsuko. At its best, the book gives the reader insight into being on the outside in today's world. *What the Luck?* succeeds in conveying the experience of emotionally driven soul searching.

JAMES BURT (August 4, 2014)

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