

Wire Mother Monkey Baby

Rob Reynolds

Outpost19 (Nov 7, 2017)

Softcover \$16.00 (262pp)

978-1-944853-37-2

The novel's descriptions of trying to find human connection in a world driven by materialism are both thought provoking and darkly funny.

Rob Reynolds's *Wire Mother Monkey Baby* is a comic, voice-driven novel of ideas. Consisting of protagonist Clayton Draper's meandering, intimate journal entries, the novel explores loneliness, capitalism, work, and what makes life worth living.

Draper has recently moved into a new apartment complex in Austin, Texas, in hopes of finding a better life. He is isolated, depressed, and merely going through motions at his job writing educational materials for a publishing company.

His new apartment is beautiful. The complex contains pools, trails, restaurants, and bars with live music available nightly. Frequent parties offer him a chance to meet new people. But all this comes with a catch: it's sponsored by Kool Kola, and Draper is expected to drink the soda and support the brand. As it turns out, the complex has a few more sinister surprises lying in wait, and Draper's new life is not what he hoped it would be. He quits his job in a further effort to force a change, but this only leads him deeper into solitude and self-loathing.

Draper's chatty, rambling journal entries capture an uneasy, dissatisfied mind. With an archly satirical voice, he moves from literature and philosophy to cutting descriptions of fellow apartment-dwellers to unhappy reflections on the state of his own mind. The journal's style is conversational and witty, with short entries that make for easy, absorbing reading.

The variety of subject matter is appealing and maintains interest in a book that is without a complex plot. The novel's events include confrontations with threatening coworkers, awkward attempts to meet people at bars and parties, and a trip to Paris, but its heart lies almost entirely in its characterization and ideas.

The novel's exploration of the emptiness of capitalism is sharp. Draper needs human connection, but the best he can find is a tenuous relationship with a feral cat, so he tries to fill the void in his soul by buying things. His shopping sprees are both funny and sad, and tension rises as Draper's failures lead him deeper into well-medicated isolation.

Draper's in-your-face honesty in his journal is both a strength and weakness. While his insights are often refreshing, he is at times a difficult, unlikable narrator whose detached, judgmental attitude can be wearying. His harsh assessments, particularly of women, make him an occasionally unpleasant companion, and his descriptions of people veer into stereotypes.

The novel is on its firmest ground in its engagement with philosophy and literature. Sprinkled throughout are quotations and discussions of books and writers that deepen Draper's troubled quest for connection and meaning.

Rob Reynolds's *Wire Mother Monkey Baby* is an insightful, if unsettling, look at the inner workings of one man's mind.

His descriptions of trying to find human connection in a world driven by materialism are both thought provoking and darkly funny.

REBECCA HUSSEY (March 1, 2018)

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