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Observing the isolated existence of an adolescent cat, his younger brother and their overactive imaginations in the American Heartland, *Skyscrapers of the Midwest* serves as an intimate chronicle of their stories of childhood hope, panic, and loss. Filled with belligerent cowboys, lumbering automaton deities, and wide-open spaces, this comic gives voice to a highly respected new creator in the field of sequential literature.

Skyscrapers of the Midwest Details

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Author : Joshua W. Cotter

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From Reader Review Skyscrapers of the Midwest for online ebook

Barry says

This book started off harmlessly enough, but I was captivated by the time I finished it. Cotter does a phenomenal job of evoking the relationship between two brothers. The specter of death haunts much of the book: a grandmother's death that seems to infuse everything with sadness. The ending here is breathtaking. Great stuff.

Deb says

This collection of comics was verrrry odd. Giant flies who land and suck your soul away, no explanation given, and robot hobos. Being uncool in school and the beatings that follow. Losing a favorite stuffed animal and the random paths it takes en route back to the original owner.

I only ended up finishing this book because I was stuck on the bus, 30 minutes from home, and had run out of reading material. Comics based on everyday life don't grab my interest very much, but I recognized that the material was actually quite thought-provoking. I just didn't want to think on a hot, sweaty bus ride.

Most teenagers won't get into this collection of comics, but adult graphic novel readers will find probably find notes that resonate with their own past experiences.

Heep says

This may be first graphic novel that I put down without finishing, although I did thumb through the last three-fourths. The art is fine. The story and tone are tired. This has been done before - the youth angst etc. It aspires to be honest and give an unvarnished picture, but one wonders how much time must one expend on the dreary and the down, especially when the author really isn't offering anything that is really new or particularly innovative. I dealt this kind of stuff when I was that age, or saw others do so. I have relived it through a number of graphic novels and now it just feels like a downer.

Batmark says

<http://morethansuperhumans.blogspot.com>

Although everyone in the book is portrayed by an anthropomorphic cat, Skyscrapers of the Midwest is clearly an autobiographical story. Standing in for the author is an unpopular, nameless fifth-grader who loves robots and comic books. The first sequence sets the tone for the rest of the book: Waiting to be picked for a kickball team in the schoolyard, he ends up not being picked at all because the teams are already even and none of the other boys want him on their team anyway. So he plays by himself with his toy robot, and

daydreams that another robot the size of a building attacks the playground. When the most popular kid in school (who also happens to be one of the kickball team captains) tries to defeat the robot and is subsequently crushed underfoot, our unnamed hero transforms into Nova Stealth and saves the school, much to the delight of all the cute girls. But his reverie is broken by the kickball landing at his feet and the kids taunting him. In defiance, he kicks the ball away from the players, who continue calling him names.

The book is filled with other, equally painful instances of adolescent trauma, such as being laughed at for having diarrhea on a Boy Scout camping trip, losing a grandmother, getting kicked in the groin by the girl he has a crush on, and so forth. One of the more affecting sequences takes place on the main character's birthday, and it can be read here (for the time being, anyway).

Skyscrapers of the Midwest also features the boy's younger brother, Jeffrey (the name of the author's actual brother), who is significantly more carefree and not yet troubled by his affection for his stuffed dinosaur, Rex. It is through Jeffrey's eyes that many of the book's more fanciful events take place, including a flying cow that he takes on a gleeful aerial bombing run, which results in the utter destruction of his elementary school, his family's church, and the house of some kid named Levi, whom he hates.

Joshua Cotter's work is very similar to the works of Joe Matt, Chester Brown, and particularly Chris Ware in that self-loathing, painfully autobiographical sort of way. Skyscrapers of the Midwest is a morose book, and more like Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan* than Matt's *Fair Weather* in its use of fantasy sequences and metacomic elements (such as fabricated letters columns) to punctuate the sadness that inhabits practically every panel of the work. One significant difference, however, is that Ware's metacomic elements are an exercise in style, whereas much of the metacomic material in *Skyscrapers* seems to have been generated from Cotter's sincere love of the art form, and of a desire to recreate the experience he had when first reading the comics of his youth (specifically, the Marvel comics of the mid- to late '80s).

Skyscrapers may not be as strong a work as, say, *Jimmy Corrigan*, but as Cotter's first published work it's incredibly good. I recommend it highly, and I look forward to reading his next book.

Chezzie says

I didn't like this book. But then again I don't really get the point of it. There were loose themes to things but I didn't pick up on a storyline, and I didn't like the themes. Violence, abuse, bullying, anti-Christianity, imaginary friends, middle school, brotherhood... Women characters slobbering with admiration towards male characters that beat them with no point to why this is being shown... What the fuck? Oh and the writing is often just... Swearing... What's the point? I wouldn't want to meet the guy who drew this. It's negative, everyone's gettin beat down, their grandma eaten and there's no fuckin resolution.

The drawing also isn't my cup of tea. It was often hard to make out, due to a scribbley shading style.

I just get bad vibes from this book.

Bill says

There's a lot going on here, most of which defies conventional description... sometimes it's dark comedy,

sometimes it's intensely uncomfortable tales of adolescence, and sometimes it's just really, really odd. It wasn't unusual to laugh out loud one page, nearly cry the next, and be intensely creeped out on the third. Definitely a reading experience that'll stick with me a while, even if I don't think I got it all. I need to read this again sometime. I look forward to reading this again sometime. I dread reading this again sometime.

Scott says

There are cats, foul mouthed cowboys, robot gods, robot cats, and more. It's a coming of age story, but it allows its downtrodden characters to escape into fantasy. They aren't infinitely sad, or ready to commit suicide, they don't even contemplate it. Instead, if something bad happens to the characters, they try to find a silver lining, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes this book is far more bizarre than real life, but not completely.

MariNaomi says

Haunting, sweet and creepy. Parts of it made me laugh out loud, and much of it kept me thinking. Also, I could get lost in the art...

Andrew says

Cotter's *Skyscrapers* is not without its charms; it's a nice stew of cute, sad, and surreal, with robot hobos, robot kitten angels, and all protagonists rendered in a stylized, *Fritz*like cat-people manner. Cotter's style is scratchy and moody in a way that casts a funky, nostalgic melancholy over his stories of the epic tragedy that is childhood. Unfortunately, however, this often tips over into unchecked miserablism ultimately feels showy and unearned; in spite of its chunky girth, the entire book feels like one sadistic "remember when adolescence made you want to die?" setpiece after another. Like Chris Ware, Cotter often incorporates fake advertisements, other comics, and letters pages, but as Cotter isn't even a tiny fraction of the draftsman and designer that Ware is, leading these elements to play most often like cheap and hollow gags. On the other hand, one of my favorite things about *Skyscrapers* is that there's not a redundant inch in the entire book, and even single lines in the "letters page" or fine print of advertisements will be referenced and recalled later on.

David Schwan says

OK, A bit too weird for me. Some fleeting hints of those skyscrapers (I have spent plenty of time out on the plains of the Midwest to know what they are).

We get a fair amount of robots running amuck with a hint that said robots are alien in origin.

There is a rubber T-rex that weaves in and out of the plot.

In between sections we have a whiny conservative writing an advice column.

On the plus side graphics are nice.

Jeff says

The first 1/3 of the book left me with the impression that this was just a series of weird and wacky tales, with only a few having to do with each other. But actually Joshua Cotter in fact has no random stories or wasted space at all in here. Its quite thought provoking, and builds on itself with determined purpose.

I had said in a previous version of this review that Joshua Cotter and this book was similar in style to Tony Millionaire (the author of *Billy Hazelnuts*, *Uncle Gabby*, *Sock Monkey*, et cetera), and at this point this only applies loosely to the art work itself. Their story telling styles and purpose are vastly different.

This is a serious and heavy hitting piece, and is not for young kids. Don't let the cartoonish look fool you into thinking this is kids stuff. There are at times themes of child abuse and general violence, which would probably be too much for younger children.

Printable Tire says

At first I wasn't sure I'd like the combination of cute drawings coupled with horrible situations, but Cotter depicts so accurately the humiliation and injustices of childhood that in a weird way his style works awesomely. And I appreciate that it ends on sort of a positive note (although, as Orson Welles notes in a quote found in the appendix of the book, "if you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story").

David Schaafsma says

This work is in the vein of R Crumb and Chris Ware, told by a younger artist, not done as well but who can match those two comics greats! It's almost an homage to them. The work has nothing to do with skyscrapers but plenty to do with the midwestern Bible belt white-bread coming of age life of a high school nerd/loser. Miserable growing up stories of bullying, church, sci fi robot escapist fantasy, interspersed with very funny ads for things like Fun cigarettes for kids, as Crumb and Ware would also have done. Fritz the cat characters. Maybe some miserable Adrian Tomine tone, but the feel is closer to Jeffery Brown Incredibile Change Bots though with more precise, less sketchy drawing.

If you think his life is all misery, read his loving and devoted acknowledgments page, where he clearly adores his family and friends, nerd though he may still be, which points to his wanting primarily to be darkly adolescent-humor funny more than anything else as a way of reaching out to teens or to adults who had a rough childhood. He's really good, I think, though I want to see later stuff.

Brenna says

The most important aspect of *Skyscrapers of the Midwest* is the eminent re-readability of the books, as well

as the myriad interpretations which the content both invites and entices. Too, there is not a single wasted panel or image to be found amongst these pages. Seeing the inter-connectedness of these books makes them unique in their own sense – they are readily accessible to new readers at either issue, though best understood by those who have followed the previous book.

Veritably filled with desolation, interspersed with fragments of hope, author Josh Cotter has adequately captured the spirit of youth adulterated by the cynical, searing view of adulthood, popularly known as “growing up” in our society. And yet, Cotter goes beyond these obvious targets to encapsulate the entirety of the world through his microcosmic, singular universe. The systematically unseen interrelation amongst all things is brought to light, invoking the reader to reconsider his or her own surroundings: *Does symbolism actually exist? Can one predict one's own personal tragedies through relatively imperceptible objects and occurrences?*

Skyscrapers of the Midwest is amongst the most important (and unduly under-recognized as such) contributions to the American comic book/graphic novel medium.

Erik Erickson says

Unfortunately the subject matter deals almost entirely with bleak and cruel acts and characters. I don't want to marginalize whatever elements of the story are autobiographical, but Cotter's personas and relationships aren't particularly complex or interesting: overly religious people are bad; this guy beats his girlfriend and she still loves him; kids can be cruel. There's just not much of the nuance of real life reflected - everyone is an extreme version of some stereotype.

The art is not bad, although it can be incomprehensible at times. There's a good organic feeling given to everything, partly due to how most shapes are rounded.

The flying kitten army was cool though, so there's that.

Never says

The art is nice enough, but heavy-handed satire, especially anti-christian satire, gets really old for me really fast. We get it, you're not a christian. It seems an especially juvenile approach after reading Kevin Huizenga's really fascinating piece involving christian/non-christian interaction in *Curses*.

Sean says

Overall I thought this book was a little scatterbrained. I didn't know necessarily what Cotter was trying to say with this story, and some of the symbolism was totally lost on me. I can sympathize with him because I was a fat kid myself, but all I felt leaving this book was sorry and unsure about Cotter. Some of the satire in the book is brilliant, but it's mostly below the surface and you have to read some of the fine print (literally) to find it. The sarcasm and satire present in the panels themselves, though, came across as shallow and childish. I realize this is told from the perspective of a 5th grader, but it's him looking back on it as an adult.

Rating is 2.5 out of 5, right down the middle. This was really nothing special to me. Perhaps the best description is the quote from Warren Ellis on the back, "This is one odd f***ing book." However the good humor hiding in the shadows was enough to save it from a rating too low.

Jason says

i'm re-reading this very closely as i'm right in the middle of the section in my thesis that deals with this book...

and what an amazing piece of work it is...

truly high modernist brilliance...every minute aspect of this text is rich with meaning and significance...it's so hard for me to believe someone as young as Cotter could be capable of such a mature and unbelievably well-crafted narrative...

the universality of his themes cannot fail to touch practically everyone who reads this book...what person hasn't felt keenly the myriad pressures which are relentlessly exerted on the youth in our culture?...Cotter so poignantly illustrates these pressures and their consequences with almost an effortless grace and facility in working with dense symbolic visual motifs.

at times he can almost come off as cocky while showing the reader just what he's capable of as an artist and writer, but his sensitivity to the subject matter, his clearly sympathetic and tender representations of the characters belies any prideful assertions one might attempt to make...

the plain truth of it is he's at the top of his game, and it apparently hasn't ever gone to his head...

i look forward to teaching this book at the first opportunity i have...i'm confident students and scholars will continue to derive new insights from its pages for quite some time...

John Wiswell says

Perhaps well-meaning but too cynical a book to fly with me. This reads like an amateurish reaction to Perry Bible Fellowship - but while it's just as defeatist and mean-spirited, it's nowhere as clever. Instead the point of the joke, over and over again, is that the result is sad or underwhelming. Instead of riffs on internet fights or theology, it's just how crappy being a kid is. The opening story about a kid getting superpowers to repel a robot is so obviously going to be that kid's fantasy, and when it is, there's no twist beyond that. It's just supposed to be depressing. A statement that didn't need to be made.

But maybe it needs to be made for you. I can't think of a time in my life where this would have stirred anything inside me. It lacks the teeth of Horror, the insight of robust Satire, or the actual laughter-production of a Comedy. Fifty pages in, it felt like I was only reading to fill my time. There's too much in the world to read to settle for that.

Michael says

Pretty interesting. Essentially, it's an autobiography about Cotter's childhood, with forays into his imagination Muppet

Babies-style. As autobio, it's solid, not exceptional, but good. Fortunately, Cotter makes it fun with his flights of fancy. Pretty well illustrated too.
