



The Lovely Horrible Stuff

Eddie Campbell

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Money makes the world go round, as they say... but HOW, exactly? Award-winning graphic novelist Eddie Campbell (*From Hell*, *Alec*) presents a fascinating journey into the wilderness of personal finance. With his trademark blend of research, anecdote, autobiography, and fantasy, Campbell explores how money underwrites human relationships, flowing all around us like the air we breathe -- or the water we drown in. The result is a whimsical graphic essay, deeply grounded in Eddie's personal experiences with "the lovely horrible stuff," ranging from the imaginary wealth of Ponzi schemes and television pilots to the all-too-tangible stone currency of the Micronesian island of Yap. In a world where drawing corporate superheroes requires literally transforming oneself into a corporation (which is kept in a shoebox under the bed), we are in strange territory, indeed. Fortunately, Campbell's wry eye and vivid full-color artwork imbue the proceedings with real humanity, making *The Lovely Horrible Stuff* an investment that's worth every penny.

The Lovely Horrible Stuff Details

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From Reader Review The Lovely Horrible Stuff for online ebook

Mark Victor Young says

Pity the poor autobiographical cartoonist to whom nothing interesting happens for, like the lawyer who represents herself, he has a fool for a client. Witness the talented cartoonist Eddie Campbell begin to illustrate his tax returns for us as he bellyaches about money. Spoiler alert: he doesn't like having to worry about it, and oh yeah, there's some tribe in the South Pacific that uses giant stone disks for money. Snooze.

Mel says

After listening to Eddie Campbell's talk last weekend I decided it would be nice to read more of his own work. He came across as amusing and intelligent and I definitely felt like that reading this. It was a very interesting book. It looked at the influence of money in his own life, as well as how it is viewed in a more global perspective.

The personal first half of the story told how money was responsible for all sorts of problems with relationships. The pressure and inconvenience of it. As well as telling amusing anecdotes about trying to get a television programme made during a time of global depression.

The second half looked at the island of Yap that had large stone discs for their currency. It was part history, folklore, travelogue, anthropology and ironic look at the way money can be viewed.

The art was a mixture of sketch with some real photos mixed in. I did enjoy it and definitely want to get more books by Eddie now.

Sam Quixote says

Eddie Campbell's new book is divided into two parts. The first is mostly autobiographical and deals with Campbell's relationship with money – "The Lovely Horrible Stuff" – and how it dictates a lot of his life from relationships with his kids, wife, and father-in-law (whose own wheelings and dealings are discussed at length), to his professional life in comics and TV work. Campbell makes the distinction that though he is careful with money, he is not interested in it nor its highly complex structures in finance and accounting, choosing instead art and dreaming over the filthy lucre every time.

This first section was interesting in part, I found out that in order to be hired to work for DC and Batman that you needed to be your own company or else you wouldn't be paid, and found out that Campbell is apparently something of a media figure in Australia. However, it felt a bit sour to read about Campbell talking about his father-in-law's financial problems and how they trickled over to his own, but Campbell is perceptive enough to see how the situation turns him from happy-go-lucky artist to bitter old man muttering about money just like his in-law.

The second section deals with the island of Yap in Micronesia and the Yapese system of money which involves enormous stone disks with a hole in the centre. This was their currency and Campbell goes to great

length in documenting their economic system, their culture and history. To be brutally honest, I didn't give a fig about the Yapese. They're a tiny island nation who bartered with large pieces of stone and that's it. I didn't care about which chief made which stone disk or which Western explorers showed up, it was just so tedious to read.

Their inclusion is of course to make the point that their stone disks are as silly a currency as shiny gold in the West or the belief that a piece of paper is worth whatever the number printed on it. I get it, the concept of money is stupid but we need something otherwise society wouldn't function. But money can be art as seen by the stone disks which Campbell says could be viewed as sculptures as the merging of art and money in one. But it's still really dull to read.

It's an uneven book with the first part being more interesting than the faux-anthropological second part, though I can't say the book as a whole was particularly fun or engrossing. Fans of Campbell's work will no doubt enjoy this but I don't see it appealing to a broader audience – it certainly didn't grab me.

David Allison says

PART 1: PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

For Christmas this year I was given the prospect of impending joblessness, a gift that has a fine Dickensian heritage, though unfortunately it's not Dickens but Shakespeare who has a cameo in the comic at hand:

You don't need a Shakespearean imagination to understand that redundancy is not the sort of gift I've always dreamed of receiving, or to appreciate that it's not the sort of unwanted gift that you can easily pass on to an unsuspecting relative...

Not that I'm so lacking in compassion for others that I'd *want* to inflict that on anyone else. Even in this post-Monneygeddon age, there's a limit to what I'm willing to admit in public!

A few weeks ago an alternative version of this present drifted into view, a hot air balloon that looked like it might be capable of taking me somewhere:

For fourteen hazy days it seemed like there might be the chance of me getting an "enhanced" redundancy package out of all of this, the sort of parting gift that could potentially see me right for the most part of a year, testing out Campbell's replacement for the old TIME=MONEY theory in the process:

This sort of thought is doubly appealing for an insubstantial character like me. After all, what better basis

could there be for a future in fiction than a speculative surplus of something that only has value because we agree that it does?

In the end it turned out that there was no "enhanced" package, and that my redundancy pay-off, if it comes, is unlikely to last me until the kettle boils on my first day of unemployment...

I'm only capable of laughing at this right now because it's all still a story that can be framed in the future tense. I can try to make a point out of "if it comes", but I'd be a lot less sure of my ability to do the same with "when it came". It might seem daft and exciting to think that the hot currents of finance can lift you up so far, but the thought of the fall back down is far less amusing. As a colleague of mine is fond of saying, *"Miss a few mortgage payments, then see who really owns your house"*.

And so what am I left with that I can be sure of in this scenario? A head full of stories about how this could be my moment, stories that go down smooth but which threaten to leave a bitter aftertaste...

In truth, my throat's already starting to burn right now. The atmosphere in my workplace is curdling, alliances are being formed, and all around me people are delivering monologues to an unseen audience like it's eviction night in the Big Brother house. I'm trying to position myself as an observer here, but I can feel the camera crew circling round, trying to spot the next corpse, and the words *"I'm not here to make friends"* are minutes away from my lips.

It's okay though! In my dreams, I have a plan - a grand artistic adventure in which I shed this story like a suit and sell it on eBay...

Life becomes **story** becomes **money** becomes **time**. It's a nice theory, but would you want to risk your livelihood on your ability to turn a panic about money into a fresh supply of the same?

Let's just hope it doesn't come down to that, eh?

PART 2: ADVENTURES IN THE UNCANNY VALLEY

If I start by saying that Eddie Campbell's *The Lovely Horrible Stuff* is a worthy follow up to *The Fate of the*

Artist, I hope you'll understand that it requires a long and thoughtful critique. Like Fate, this is the sort of comic that it's easy to get carried away by, until you're floating off like Campbell does from the cover image onwards.

Unfortunately for you, dear readers, the most likely destination for me to arrive at is - as always - right up my own backside. I'll try to keep this short and to the point - ALWAYS BE CLOSING - but please forgive me if I start to drift, and if you end up feeling like you're still in the dark remember that I warned you about this possible outcome at the beginning.

That's enough about my arse for now though! My objective here is to chart out a very different sort of landscape, the "uncanny valley" that some observers have evoked while describing the mix of painted art and photography that Campbell deploys in The Lovely Horrible Stuff. The combination of these elements - both present in the artist's work since his adaptation of The Birth Caul but never so frequently and thoroughly integrated as they are here - is disconcerting throughout the book, with Campbell's vivid, scribbly evocations of people and places...

...blurring into pictures of the same subjects ripped from real life, and vice versa:

My eyes find the artist's renditions of the people in this book to be pretty much perfect, in their own rough way. So perfect, in fact that the appearance of actual people and villages and living rooms somehow pushes the whole thing over the edge into unreality.

Please try to bear in mind that I'm not criticising Campbell's technique here - quite the opposite, in fact! If Campbell's use of photographic elements didn't feel so in keeping with the seemingly effortless arrangement of organic moments into lyrical form that characterised his Alec strips, then the results wouldn't be even half as unsettling.

Like Campbell's previous autobiographical works, The Lovely Horrible Stuff seems to suggest a certain porousness in the borders between life and fiction. You might find yourself describing Campbell's narrative style as conversational, as I have before, but there's a reason why Campbell is one of Alan Moore's finest collaborators - few comics creators are as mindful of the big literary picture as these two, and the fearsome symmetry of The Lovely Horrible Stuff is yet another example of Campbell's eye for a pattern.

Actually, The Lovely Horrible Stuff might be the place where Campbell finally tips his hand in this regard. The first half of the book is built around various financial anecdotes from Campbell's work and family life, and as such it has the reassuring familiarity of After the Snooter and The Fate of the Artist working in its favour, as well as a setting that will have points of intersection with the daily lives of most of those who are likely to find themselves reading it. The back half of the book, in which Campbell takes a trip to the Micronesian island of Yap in order to discuss the strange stone circles the islands inhabitants use as currency (or rather, as stores of *wealth*), is left feeling strangely exposed in comparison.

The Yapese provide Campbell with a convenient Other, a mirror in which to reflect the first half of his tale by way of a series of abstracted expressions of and contrasts with his (our?) concept of money. Which is to say, with our *values*:

And so both the grand folly of the business of art and Campbell's shipwrecked relationship with his father-in-law find themselves literalised in the grand adventures of the Yapese and their tongue-in-cheek mythology, and Campbell's dependence on unseeables is paralleled with the overpoweringly physical presence of the Yapese currency. As if this textual neatness wasn't enough, the territory won't stop breaking through the map. The woman in the panel above is hardly alone in being framed against a reassuring background of real leaves, which has the paradoxical effect of making Campbell's narrative cartography seem like an elaborate fabrication. After all, why else would the map-maker leave those tears in the fabric, if not to insist a little bit too thoroughly that the place they've described definitely exists?

That's when it occurred to me: there is no Island of Yap. The photographs in the book and on the internet? Mocked up. The various tentacles that reach out from the wikipedia article? No need to worry, we'll fix it when we get home.

Once the illusion of Yap fell away from eyes, I started to see everything else more clearly. You see, there's no "Eddie Campbell" either, that's just a pseudoname Alan Moore uses when he wants to get a way from ideaspaces for a while, a secondary life he pretends to have lived, inky li(n)es trailing off into nothing like the hair on his face. The people you see in the book, claiming to be Campbell's friends and family? Actors, all actors, and as such there's no reason to worry about their drama being traded in for the cold taste of coins.

Me? I don't exist either. All of my financial worries are fake - did you really think it possible that I could propose to live off my thoughts alone if I lose my job? Thankfully, Illogical Volume is just a work-in-progress, a computer programme designed to vent words and neurosis on an irregular basis. This blog is a dry run for deliberately useless AI; thank you for participating in the beta test.

And as for money, well, don't be ridiculous - of course *that* exists! It's one of the few "real" things in The Lovely Horrible Stuff, a terrifying fantasy in which family breakdowns and human sacrifice are shown to be just another type of currency, put to the service of a strangely unconvincing story that somehow manages to keep the world going round...

A_girl_from_earth says

En dehors de l'originalité du graphisme et de la forme que j'ai adorés, je n'ai pas trouvé cet album vraiment intéressant, ni même vaguement amusant. Ça m'a même franchement laissée de marbre, pour ne pas dire que je m'y suis même ennuyée et que j'ai même parfois trouvé le propos et le délire de l'auteur obscurs, on ne sait pas bien où il veut en venir, ça part un peu dans tous les sens, sans boussole pour s'orienter vraiment. Bref, pas la bonne pioche que j'avais espérée.

Otherwyrld says

This was a bit of an oddity. I think I was expecting a treatise on money rather similar to Scott McCloud's seminal work "Understanding Comics". Instead we get an autobiographical work that just happens to talk about money. The book is divided into two parts. The first relates to the author's travails with his father-in-law and what happens to the money Campbell lent to him. The second is the story of the stone money of Yap, in which Campbell travelled out to this remote island to explore. Of the two, the first story is much the more interesting.

Campbell's artwork often divides people - some love and some hate it. I tend to be in the former camp, and it was nice to see him work in colour here, though some of the pictures were too small to do the story justice. A bigger format book might have helped. The lettering and page design gave me rather more trouble, which meant that the story didn't flow as well as it could have.

So, minor work by Campbell. Good, but not great.

Victoria says

I found this book at the library and decided to read it on the spot rather than take it home. You see, I have a problem where my currently-reading and to-read stacks blend and I never finish anything anymore. I figured I'd prevent that (and strain my back less) by reading it at once. The narrative was mostly what I'd expected: a responsible man explaining his very well-meaning views on money. Most of me hoped it'd be completely unexpected, perhaps even an absurdist view about finances. Not so. He explained his history of not incurring debt, trouble with lending to family members, and the dangers of wanting to be right (suing) rather than just muddling through (paying down debt).

This is where the art became more interesting because the story bounced from his story of being a freelance artist who managed his own finances via various schemes to an artist who hired an accountant. We started to see the difference between his real life and his ideals, where he'd like to be. The art was great in that sense because it was so expressive. Blurry lines; hasty-looking background coloring; scratchy, not-quite-clear features. That said, I wasn't bowled over by his art style. Eddie Campbell is certainly a very skilled artist. His scrawling lettering and scribbled outlines just weren't for me. I must say I like cleaner lines.

The last section of the book took a real curve. He started to write about a Polynesian society that he's fascinated with. They made gorgeous, giant rock sculptures that white men turned into currency. At some point in the past there was a great hey-day of this rock art. So much so that it fueled competition among artisans within the tribe. Presently they are mostly just left around the island for historical and aesthetic reasons. Perhaps this was the absurd turn I'd hoped for in the beginning. I did like that this story of the sculptures posed more questions than it answered, like money itself. Can we ever get a full grasp on it? Are we ever going to have a definitive answer about how to properly have and maintain wealth, especially as money changes over the decades. It used to be on a gold standard until U.S. currency was digitized in the '70s. That's just as real a change as the stone sculptures falling into and out of favor. Are we more civilized in modern, digital times? Even Eddie ends the book by declaring that he has no idea and knows nothing about the right way to handle money.

Jeffrey says

I was prepared to do be disappointed by this book, as much as I always love Eddie Campbell's work - I saw a bit about how he was using computer and collage and photos... once I started reading though, I pretty much forgot about all that, the form ends up blending in nicely while Campbell's humor and storytelling pull you along before everything else. Campbell continues to push himself, and it's always his most personal work that really resonates.

Mark Schlatter says

A strange mixed bag. Half the book is about Eddie's financial growth and woes (including a horrifying and funny story about his father-in-law). It's similar to much of his recent autobiographical work. The other half is about the stone money of Yap, Eddie's trip to Yap, and some economist's theories and idea inspired by the giant stone disks. I like both halves, but I don't see them working together as a whole.

Rick says

Best known for his collaboration with Alan Moore on the extraordinary *From Hell* and his singular creations Alec and Deadface, Eddie Campbell chronicles his financial woes in the entertaining but flawed *The Lovely Horrible Stuff*. Like many creatives, the concepts of understanding, managing, and even earning money at times elude Campbell. Displaying his trademark wit and superior storytelling skills, Campbell explores a failed Alec sitcom, how producing a Batman comic forced him to incorporate, his struggles with his cantankerous father-in-law, and his journey to Yap, home of the world's largest currency. Sadly the narrative unlike most of Campbell's works often fails to engage, creating reader apathy. The terrible lettering further enhances the rift. Many of the poorly rendered captions must be re-read numerous times. Thankfully Campbell's unique talents salvage the tale. Relying on a combination of traditional cartooning, photo images, and intelligent use of color, he achieves an interesting but not great work.

Zac says

Mostly personal anecdotes about money, but the last half is focussed on the island of Yap and the use of Rai stones as currency, which was a lot more interesting than it sounds. Occasionally quite funny. Campbell is usually a great artist but I didn't love the art in this and the use of colour and of photographs. But the storytelling was very good and it has piqued my interest in reading 'Alec'.

Dave Riley says

Campbell is an idiosyncratic comic book maker. Despite his many important collaborations when given his head he prefers to muse via anecdotes taken from his life experience. So there's the *Alec* stories and *Little*

Italy and so forth....

This one is in that mode and I for one loved it. A self published work (not unusual for Campbell) maybe it lacks a few pixels in the reproduction of the panels, but for my money, it's the thought that counts.

I loved the way the stories were illustrated. I really appreciated the mixed media and the photomontage effects. Very discursive but personal in the sense that I have to ask, "Eddie -- how can you do that to your family?"

Ouch!

In that sense this is brutal stuff laid down bitterly with whatever he draws with. It's almost a protest comic: a man in his late fifties objecting to his lot in life and blaming money ('the lovely horrible stuff') for a good part of his suffering.

He does have a point of course.

It is, afterall, the root of all evil -- but Campbell here takes money as a medium and explores its over bearing capacity to enslave us.

But then, most of the book is taken up with an almost anthropological narrative about the role of stone currency of the Micronesian island of Yap. If you think that's a strange indulgence you would not be alone in your thoughts.

What on earth is Campbell doing out there in the Pacific?

And this is where you either accept the point of the story telling or you don't because I think this is a very thoughtful commentary on the personal experience of money and the function of it. Money, for Campbell, is an unfair medium of exchange. Addictive but unforgiving. Useful and tyrannical.

In his case its presence or absence serves only to complicate his life forcing his artistic penchants to be in hock to the stuff. It warps relationships, promotes obsessions, rules our lives -- and those of the good people of Yap.

Andrew says

This book runs like a diary, or at best a daily blog. The illustrations are nice, if a bit strange - some of it is just color over photographs.

I didn't read the whole thing, so maybe it gets better in the second half?

Robert Boyd says

A minor work in Campbell's oeuvre. The first half deals with his own interactions with money, including creating a corporation so that he can write and draw a Batman comic (and he sees this as every bit as absurd as it sounds) and loaning his father and law \$70,000. Neither of these things ends well, which reinforces Campbell's basic sense that one should keep things simple, not borrow (or lend) money, and otherwise be a good, miserly Scot. Frequent quotations from headlines about the financial meltdown and recession of 2007-09 reinforce these views.

The second part of the book involves an unintended trip to the island of Yap, where giant limestone discs were famously used as "money." Campbell explores the mythology and history surrounding this custom, and also discusses the economists who have used the example of Yap to discuss financial matters such as the concept of fiat money. But he finds himself more interested in the discs as artistic objects, carved by generations of anonymous Isamu Noguchis. At the end of the book, he suggests money problems have caused a serious rift between himself and his wife, suggesting that his frugal, conservative approach to money is no cure-all.

For this book, he floats text above each panel. There is a lot of text, and as a consequence, the panels are quite small. It feels like the art is almost an afterthought. The book is in color, and Campbell makes full use of the digital toolbox, but in ways that seem unique to him. The work often involves photographs combined with drawn images and "painted" with slabs of Photoshop color. Sometimes this doesn't work, but overall, it's quite interesting. Because of their detail, photos have an effect of stopping the eye and interrupting the visual flow of a comics narrative. But Campbell's technique of digitally painting the photographic elements simplifies them in much the same way a well-crafted drawn cartoon panel is simplified. This keeps the eye moving and the narrative pattering along.

Russell Grant says

A new Eddie Campbell book is always something to look forward to and this one is no exception. This one is a return to autobiography and as the title would suggest the topic is money. It's split into two parts, one dealing with Eddie's issues with money, the second part details his trip to the island of Yap to explore their strange currency. I enjoyed both parts pretty much equally. Eddie is a fantastic story teller and knows how to keep an audience interested. He succeeds completely here, but I didn't love this book, I found it had a fundamental flaw.

Eddie's new art style. Eddie has always had a very identifiable look, a scratchy pen that is decidedly complex in its sketchy-ness. It's at play here, but he's gone digital and has added photoshop backgrounds, colours and textures. Sometimes it looks like he's drawn over a photograph, other instances look like he's coloured his drawings, or fit a picture of his hair on top of his self portrait. It just never really works, and is constantly distracting. In his previous books I found myself lost in the stories. Whether biographical like the Alec books, historical like *From Hell* or fantastical like *Bacchus*, I always found myself lost in them and not wanting to leave. It never really happens here because of the art. "The Fate Of The Artist" was the beginning of this experimentation and I found it worked very well in that one since it had photos alongside the hand painted/drawn work. By mashing them together in this one it just draws too much attention to itself.

I hate to knock a favourite author for growing, changing and experimenting, it's still a fine job after all. It just

never quite works as a whole. Worth reading if you're a fan, maybe try one of his greatest hits if you're new to his work.
