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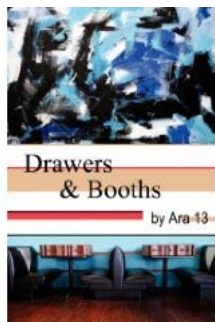
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Drawers & Booths

Ara 13

Reviewed by Araminta Matthews

Okay. To be perfectly honest, when I received this book as my next review assignment, I was completely prepared to absolutely loathe it. With its pretentious post-modern art cover mixing Jackson Pollack mess with Stars and Stripes Forever American diner motif coupled with the author's name (Ara 13? Is he an "Artist-formerly-known-as-Prince-and-now-once-again-known-as-Prince" fan to the core, or something? I know that Ara is the Goddess of Vengeance as it is part of the origins of my own name (albeit mine was birth given), but 13? Can we say "ostentatious"?), I fully expected this book to ruin me. And after I read the back, his conceited-sounding homage to wit with "Ara comes from a long line of primates. His ancestors are directly responsible for the fashioning of the wheel and the discover of fire", I truly believe that I would abhor every moment of this book.

Boy. Was I wrong.

Ever a fan of postmodern metafiction, I found myself almost immediately engulfed by this book. Please bear in mind that I am a rather, shall we say "opinionated", individual who rarely finds cause to change her judgments without a tremendous amount of evidence to the contrary of her first impressions. This book provided me with just that. I loved it. I not only loved it, I loved the author. His stark, post-modern, to-the-minute real time interpretation of what it would be like if a certain political powerhouse were to be tried for his political and military atrocities moved me from guffaw to contemplation, and from introspection to riotous laughter again. He is clever, fun, and possibly original (if there is such a thing). His narrative style (complete with the cell phone call that interrupts the story, rendering pages 42 and 42 blank) is infectious and worth your time.

The book, if you haven't guessed already, is almost like anything you have ever read, though it is reminiscent of such post-modern greats as Daniel Quinn, Kurt Vonnegut, Chuck Palahniuk, and even a smattering of Jeanette Winterson. The insightful, mind-evolving introspection of Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* is mirrored by Ara 13's exposition of the military and military courtroom drama. The bouncing, non-linear style of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* is echoed in the halls of his shifting focus – from the Marine Corporal courtroom drama to the random investigator whose presence is clearly off-kilter to the narrator whose presence is felt throughout. Indeed, this even had me conjuring up

memories of Goldman's *The Princess Bride* where the story within a story is prevalent. The post-modern, visceral and raw experience of a Palahniuk book is evidenced here by Ara 13's raw descriptions, while Winterson's out-of-the-box approach to thematic storytelling resonates in his often off-the-subject life lessons.

The story is fun. The writing is witty and fresh. The author is – well, he may still be pretentious, but at least it is not very distracting. And the plot is a mystery of intrigue. In spite of my better judgment, or at least, my initial judgment, I recommend this book to any reader willing to shake a stick at the rhetoric of classic literature.

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