



Waiting for the Man

Arjun Basu

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Joe, a 35-year-old advertising copywriter for a slick New York company, feels disillusioned with his life. Soon he starts dreaming of a mysterious man and, not long after, begins seeing him on the street and hearing his voice. The voice overwhelms Joe and he starts to listen to it, camping out on the front steps of his stoop, waiting for instructions. The media take note. And soon he has become a story, a media sensation, the centre of a storm. When the voice tells him to “go West,” he does, all the while searching for this Man, this mysterious voice that won’t leave him alone. Until it does.

Waiting for the Man is a compelling and viscerally emotional story about the struggle to find something more in life.

Waiting for the Man Details

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From Reader Review Waiting for the Man for online ebook

Rose says

Joe, a 35-year-old advertising copywriter for a New York company, appears to be happy and successful in a New-York-city way until he starts hearing voices in his head and sees "The Man" who encourages him to leave all behind in search of something that we the reader can interpret as we will, or perhaps never quite understand. Joe becomes a media-sensation with the help of small-time reporter Dan who needs to understand the end story in order to fulfill his needs. While Dan eventually finds what he considers to be Joe's end-story, I'm not sure I did. I kept waiting for something more to happen. This was an introspective story, laced with some cynicism about what we as a society value, and it will suit many, but I am going back to something more adventurous with a less-subtle and more entertaining story.

Joseph Travers says

This is not a good book. This made the Giller long list in 2014, and I have no idea why. Other than an interesting concept (about a guy who gives up everything to follow a voice he starts hearing), this book was annoying. The first third kind of intrigued me, as I wondered where the story would go, but as I read on the style of the writing irked me (kind of John Grisham-like... very pedestrian yet self-important), and ****SPOILER ALERT****, I started to get the sense there would be no real resolution to the story, which annoyed me even more, even though I actually like stories that don't have an ending.

This book is built on an interesting premise but it feels like the author didn't think about how to end it, and never figured it out by the end of the book. Plus, it's got one of the worst *and* painfully drawn out sex scenes I've ever read. There's an award for bad sex scenes in books, isn't there?

Two stars, and I'm being extremely generous.

Alexander Kosoris says

Long-time readers will probably know how often I like to go out on a limb and suggest some fairly outlandish things – making presumptions about deeper meanings or even an author's mentality when settling in on specific techniques used. While the discussions that result can sometimes feel not far off from taking a stab in the dark, they usually come from impressions of something tangible within the work. Not far along in *Waiting for the Man*, I took particular notice of the prose. The narration is extremely choppy, to me sounding like a real go-go businessman, as our protagonist was shown to be. Because the synopsis seemed to entail someone dissatisfied with his daily existence, I assumed the story would be about finding a simple happiness, and I thought that we would start to see a change in cadence, opening things up to longer, flowing, vibrant sentences, to denote this change taking place. (Think of it like a subtler version of the inner/outer dialogue Terry Fallis employed in *One Brother Shy*.) And I was beginning to suspect I was onto something when this started to happen with things he actually cared about – talking about someone he was romantically interested in or regarding scenery that took his breath away in a place he loved, for instance – but then reverted to the original prose when he got transported back to the real world. However, as the book progressed, no substantial, lasting change took place. This is a great example of a time where I thought I

found something significant, but the theory fell apart as I read on. To craft a review that actually brings something meaningful to the table in a sea of reviews, I believe that one not only needs to be open and observant enough to pick up on something unusual such as this, but honest enough with oneself to scrutinize the theory while reading, and be willing to drop it if things fall apart. I don't think you can properly hit on significance from a flimsy base – an important lesson for writers of all stripes.

Apparently, I still enjoy using reviews as a vehicle to discuss more general writing concepts, rather than just talking about the work at hand. But, honestly, a review for *Waiting for the Man* is a reasonable place for this, at least in that it will bear more similarity to the book I'm reviewing. Basu's story is about Joe, a successful man in his mid-thirties with a good job in a Manhattan advertising firm. Getting hit with a strong bout of melancholia stemming from a lack of fulfillment in his life – explained by his father as a mid-life crisis – he starts to dream about a mysterious thin, black man (dressed like a pimp, sometimes riding a white horse). He starts to feel happy when interacting with this Man, and he starts seeing and hearing Him in his waking life, though no one else can. When the Man tells him to *wait*, Joe does just that: sits himself on the front stoop of his apartment building, waiting for ... he doesn't know what. *Waiting for the Man* is made up of two narratives, alternating between the two from chapter to chapter, the first consisting of the attention his wait draws from the surrounding world, along with a growing media frenzy and fame. The second narrative looks at the aftermath, seeing where he winds up after setting off on a cross-country journey when the Man urges him to *go west*.

The first chapter of *Waiting for the Man* reads effectively like a summary of the background events to get us caught up to what brought Joe to the step, and it contained basically all that I figured would make up the plot when I picked the book up. I recalled something similar happening in André Alexis' *Fifteen Dogs*, a book I loved, so I became intrigued as to where we would be going from here. However, an issue arises because the author decided to run through the significant changes within his protagonist in such an abridged fashion: We don't get to witness the growth when he goes from mindlessly working a job he's supposed to like to understanding his underlying dissatisfaction to responding to the situation strangely. Skimming over a potentially strong character arc limits how compelling the plot can be. Of course, the extent that this matters has a lot to do with how much the author actually wanted to tell a story, and I don't think that was the point of *Waiting for the Man*, odd as that may sound. Basu starts us with a protagonist who is already hugely self-aware and he has him basically passively observe the unfolding situation around him. The overt exposition reflecting on the modern world reads almost like a series of small essays hidden within a work of fiction, and I think this is the main source of my disappointment with the book, that I came in expecting a story and was treated to more of a commentary.

In addition to misunderstanding the focus of *Waiting for the Man* going in, I found myself surprised by the main argument as it began to come into view. I seemed to take for granted that a story criticizing modern society wouldn't suggest that the trick to happiness is to escape it. According to Basu, this is a pipe dream. The world we find ourselves in is so interconnected and both the world of marketing and the cult of celebrity have become so pervasive that it's impossible to actually leave it. Rather, the true path to satisfaction is to carve out a little place within this world where you're free to do what makes you happy. This idea in and of itself could have potentially been interesting enough to either drive a collection of essays or even to keep some meat just below the surface of a decent story to make it something special, but because *Waiting for the Man* finds itself somewhere in the middle, because it reads like brief opinion pieces scattered through unrefined fiction, it comes off wanting.

Krista says

I started having these dreams. I don't know what else to call them. Visions maybe. Nightmares. This thin black man in a floppy straw hat, dressed right out of the seventies, looking for all the world like a TV pimp. Like Huggy Bear from Starsky & Hutch. I never watched that show, it was before my time, but I remembered the character and now he was haunting my dreams. And this man, sometimes, later, would ride in on a white horse, a gigantic white horse with a mane that looked combed and neat and clean. A good-smelling horse. Bathed. It smelled supernaturally clean. And the Man had a smile you couldn't outrun. It was the size of the world. I fell into it.

Joe Fields is a 35-year-old copywriter for a NYC ad agency, making good money, living alone in a slowly gentrifying neighbourhood, and despite having an outward appearance of success, likely suffering what his father diagnoses as a mid-life crisis. When *the Man* steps from Joe's dreams and begins to appear and talk to him in real life, telling him simply "to wait", Joe interprets that as a command to sit on his front steps and await further instructions. As days and nights pass, the curiosity of neighbours leads to increasing media interest until Joe is the center of a maelstrom of attention, complete with websites, blogs, groupies, TV satellite trucks, sponsors, and pilgrims. Eventually, the Man tells Joe to head west, and with a donated Honda (wait for it...) Odyssey, he begins to drive, media entourage in tow. We know that Joe eventually does make it out west because the chapters detailing his waiting and travelling alternate with chapters wherein Joe is a fruit and vegetable peeler in the kitchen of a luxury ranch and spa in Montana. So basically, due to the intervention of a Magical Negro trope, it's like Bagger Vance has told Forrest Gump to start that jogging trip he goes on, but instead of other regular folks joining in his quest, because it's 2014, Joe Fields is trailed by a live satellite feed; regular folk can stay home on their fat butts and watch from their TVs, monitors, and smartphone screens.

Author Arjun Basu has a twitter following where he is known for award winning short stories that he calls Twisters. He must think in short bursts because even long paragraphs in *Waiting for the Man* are made up of short and punchy sentences. At times, this is interesting and propulsive, but often, it comes off as self-conscious and aphoristic. Basu obviously has done a lot of thinking about our modern media-driven celebrity culture, but I felt assaulted by page after page of moralistic conclusions:

- People become famous for wanting to become famous. Wanting to become famous used to be an aspiration and now it's a career.
- The web tells everyone that everything you say, every opinion you have, every action you take, has value. It's the logical conclusion to the entitlement that everyone feels. It's brought fifteen minutes down to one.
- Too many of us are so removed from the natural world that it has lost its reality. Its meaning. The natural world risks becoming a figment of the imagination, a good idea, maybe, but scary, too, a repository of old stories. Nightmares.

I also didn't understand why Basu -- so far as I can tell, born in and living in Montreal -- felt the need to set his story in NYC. There must be ad executives having mid-life crises in Montreal or even Toronto -- and this

wouldn't necessarily have bothered me if Joe didn't repeatedly talk about being a New Yorker and how only other New Yorkers would understand. Was that the only way to make the book a commentary on *American* media/celebrity culture? It felt inauthentic and off-putting to me. And, here's my biggest complaint: (view spoiler)

I wanted to love *Waiting for the Man*, and while it wasn't terrible, I'm left wanting.

Kris B says

There's no other book like this one, there simply isn't. It's an important book for today's cultural obsession with self-fulfillment and success.

To be continued...

Doug Lester says

I found Arjun's flippant, irreverent tone in perfect pitch for our time of social media over-saturation and cultural angst. The novel allows the reader to sit and wait for something to develop in the story and this slow build provides a creative tension. In the midst of the ennui there are brilliant observations and insights in the age of constant marketing. I love the final irony that in spite of a few insights the main character Joe has really only made a geographical shift. He is still waiting to push send on his e-mail to his parents and still smoking as he considers the possibility of jogging.

Joey Tanny says

For anyone who's ever thought about leaving the ring road circus of the connected age, tweeting, facebook, 15 minutes of fame, climbing ladders, "working towards something that will come later hopefully before 65 and retire and go on a yacht trip around the Caribbean (if my back still works)", this book has a lot you will identify with.

Easy to read, quirky, fun...and might even push you over the edge to take the plunge, cut the cords, send you on an adventure that will help you discover yourself. A more simple self. A happier self.

Bala says

This is an interesting fiction that flows well with clever and witty statements. If you have read 'Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance' and liked it, you will like reading this one as well. Aside from the synopsis and story overview, this book analyzes impact of external expectations and media influence in our daily lives. This book takes an introspective view on the meaning of career and life through the main character.

The chapters alter between the beginning and the end. The story ends when they meet in the middle. The

sentences are short and to the point. The use of a distinct character to highlight the cultural differences and the vastness of the US landscape was a good choice. But it also distracts the story a bit. The dialogues were witty. The main character has a sarcastic sense of humor.

The last few chapters went flat as I could predict how the story was going to end. It feels as if the last few chapters were crafted to bring some sizzle to the book. The book was good to begin with. Why spoil something that was flowing well? There are places, the author got carried away with an interesting word that stands outside the story.

Despite these few shortcomings, Arjun Basu has written a good book which is worth reading.

Lynne says

"Every religion and ideology has claimed my action as their own. My actions were never, really, mine. I never owned them." (p. 98)

Joe is just your average guy who like several people feels overworked and burned out. One night he has a dream of a man who tells him that he is waiting for him, and it is that one thing that causes him to leave his job and home in search of this mysterious man. What follows is more than just a story of one man's journey; it becomes a sort of social commentary on things like the celebrity culture, social media and how the public combined with some creative advertising and marketing can turn something simple and ordinary into the next local sensation.

Read the rest of the review here: <http://wp.me/p36jwx-xa>

Elizabeth (Literary Hoarders) says

I thought the premise of this book was very creative, and I appreciated the messages that were peppered throughout. You can find many things in this book, from spirituality to a profound sadness as people desperately wait for direction in their lives. My only issue was that the journey lagged now and then, and the story would get mired in its own quest for meaning. Other than that, it was an interesting read.

Luanne Ollivier says

Waiting for the Man is Arjun Basu's debut novel.

Joe is a New York copywriter. He's good at his job, fairly happy and his success has brought him material wealth. Until he starts daydreaming in meetings, floating away from the boardroom and watching himself from above. And then he starts dreaming at night as well. Dreaming of the Man. The Man who tells him to wait. To wait for him. "He had created a need I didn't know I had."

And Joe does just that. He sits on the stoop of his building day and night - waiting for further instructions. Others of course worry and wonder about him. Who is the Man? What has he said to Joe? And without

trying or wanting, Joe becomes news. Small at first, then growing exponentially.

Basu easily conveys Joe's sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment. When I started *Waiting For The Man*, I could only read a few chapters at a time. Basu provides much food for thought through Joe's ruminations on society, life, familial relationships, the media, religion and much more. It's impossible to read some passages without stopping and looking at them in relation to your own life and circumstances.

But as I continued to read, I became caught up in Joe's waiting. I felt like one of the public, hooked on Joe's story, just waiting for the latest reports from the media crew following his every move.

I was initially confused when the book's narrative abruptly switched time and place in the first few chapters. And then I realized that we learn Joe's story from the beginning and the end in alternating chapters until all is revealed. Or is it? Do we ever find the answers or do we create them ourselves?

Interestingly, I found myself more caught up in the ideas that Joe presented, rather than Joe himself. I ended up feeling quite middle of the road about Joe, neither here nor there. For me, he was simply a vehicle for Basu's exploration of the search for meaning in our lives.

Basu has crafted an unsettling, thought provoking first novel, one sure to leave you taking a second look at many aspects of our society and our own lives

Laura says

Unfortunately, this book was pretty disappointing. I read an ARC ebook that I got from the publisher. I posted a review on my blog when I was halfway through (<http://hnstbkrvws.com/2014/03/18/wait...>), and all the criticisms I had then still stand.

Basically, the characters are unbelievable, the plot is boring, and the plot is also unbelievable. On top of all that, much of the novel is filled with truistic philosophising about life, meaning, the nature of the internet age, etc.

Sorry guys. I really don't recommend this one.

Ann Douglas says

By sheer coincidence, I read this book right after reading Joshua Ferris' novel *The Unnamed* (which is about a man who ends up walking away from his life for reasons beyond his control).

Waiting for the Man tackles a similar theme. In this case, an advertising copywriter named Joe, who has become a minor celebrity, chooses to drive/walk away from his life after heeding the voice of a mysterious man. The novel tells two stories in parallel: how Joe became a minor celebrity (and what that experience was like); and what happened to Joe after that life-changing experience.

If you've ever read any of Arjun Basu's fiction tweets, you'll know what kind of narrative voice to expect here: smart, satirical, and culturally savvy.

An intriguing read.

Vicki says

Thirty-something advertising copywriter Joe doesn't even realize something is wrong until he unwittingly turns his own professional expertise to perverse advantage on his own personal meltdown. Inexplicably disillusioned and disaffected with a career, lifestyle and life that many might find enviable, at least on the surface, Joe simply stops living that life one day and parks himself on his Manhattan stoop to wait for the Man to signal what he should do next. Who is the Man? Each reader who follows Joe's journey in *Waiting For the Man* by Arjun Basu is likely to have a different answer.

Read my complete review at: <http://bookgagabooks.ca/2014/05/08/wa...>

Arlene says

Dig into this novel to mine for rich insights into our human condition. Almost every page includes a thought, a turn of phrase, or a dreamy musing that will make you stop and say, 'Huh.'

"The ultimate act of love is cleaning up after the object of your affection."

"To me everything in the world that was possible and laudable and not laudable and not smart culminated in a T-shirt."

This book is not plot-driven. To summarize: An advertising copywriter, Joe, sees a Man (that others can't see) and follows his instructions. After sitting on his front stoop for a while, Joe goes for a drive until he ends up in another place. His main occupation in the second place is peeling fruit.

Not exactly a page-turner. But it is a brain cell-turner.

Joe assumes his place on his front stoop in much the same way that Eckhart Tolle plunked himself down on a park bench for two years. Men who suddenly and visibly opt out of society can't help but search for deeper meaning in life—and attract attention while they're at it. Joe becomes a media sensation and sets people around him into the inevitable human clamoring for attention, for money, for their piece of the action. He becomes "both the story and the least important part of the story."

". . . success is like a pile of shit to a bunch of insects. Everyone wants to eat it, to play in it, to live a little."

Even though Joe left his advertising job behind, his journey leads him full-circle back to advertising. He begins to see it as the engine of society, the ". . . way of telling the world you exist."

"We crave narrative. We believe we are uninteresting without a compelling story. . . . A narrative validates us. It makes us tangible."

Basu's subtle humour and discerning assessments make this an enjoyable read—unless you're looking for a page-turner.

