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Aisha Franz, Helge Dascher (Translation)

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A finely wrought account of aliens and alienation in the suburbs The German cartoonist Aisha Franz's debut graphic novel details a few short days in the life of two sisters and their single mother. Set in a soulless suburb populated by block after block of identical row houses bordered by empty fields and an industrial no-man's-land, Earthling explores the loneliness of everyday life through these women's struggle to come to terms with what the world expects of them.

Earthling unveils a narrative rich with surrealist twists and turns, where the peas on the dinner plate and the ads on television can both literally and figuratively speak to the most private strife and deepest hopes in a person's life. As the sisters begin to come to terms with their sexuality, they are confronted by harsh realities and a world that has few escape routes for young women.

Drawn in deep gray pencil, the claustrophobia of Franz's crosshatching and smudging matches the tone of the book perfectly. Earthling is an atmospheric and haunting account of the inevitability of losing the dream worlds of childhood.

Earthling Details

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From Reader Review Earthling for online ebook

Katie says

I had a very good feeling I was going to enjoy this, and I certainly wasn't let down. Incredibly unique, realistic (aside from one obvious aspect if you read it ahah) and a tad depressing.

Vivek Tejuja says

Off late, say in the last decade or so, there has been a spurt of graphic novelists and artists from all over the world. "Earthling" by Aisha Franz is not just another graphic novel. There is something about it, which speaks to you and which hits the nail right on the head of the problem of our society today: Alienation and Loneliness.

The graphic novel is also a coming-of-age story of two sisters. It is about their estranged mother. A father that is supposed to take them on a trip which none of the girls wants to go to. The mother dreams of what could have been had she not got pregnant early in her life. The older daughter wants to be accepted. The younger one is confused about life. All the three of them want is some semblance to a regular life and happiness. The setting is the suburbs – unknown places, a big industrial wasteland and vast fields with nothing to talk about. In all of this, each of these three characters has built a fantastical element to their stories. They find their solace and comfort there.

Franz's setting itself is another character. The black and white illustrations also add that bleak element to the story. I think "Earthling" to me is more than just a story about coping with life. It is also to a very large extent about finding yourself amidst all the noise and silences.

The book, in its graphic elements relays a lot – on the human condition, how we are and yet there is a glimmer of hope somewhere for these people to perhaps want something more and get it after all. I loved "Earthling" because it was for sure a different graphic novel and to some extent also reminded me of Daniel Clowe's characters, all wandering and trying to find their way in the world.

David Schaafsma says

Two women, their mother, all sad, living quietly isolated lives, all bruised by encounters with men, who escape into fantasies of aliens, alternate selves. The art is pencil drawing, sometimes deliberately smudged, just to give it the feel of realism and accessibility, to match the simplicity and isolation of the workmen's lives. I read it in English, as Earthling. I like it.

Chelsea Martinez says

It took me many pages to get into this because the drawings are a bit crude and smudgy. I read this this same

weekend as "Skyscrapers of the Midwest" and there is a similar structure with shifting perspective from young sibling to older sibling to mom; both moms are in pretty dire straits. The younger sibling's storyline is more comedic: they encounter an alien but don't have an amazing time---they mostly just stare at each other unable to communicate, so it's like a realist alien story. In the course of a single day, the older sibling goes through a melancholy transformation involving a haircut, regret, running away, and not, so the comic relief of the alien-staring is nicely balanced. Unlike *Skyscrapers of the Midwest*, this work doesn't have the strongest sense of place, but it has a similarly dark view of gender roles (even for aliens).

Sian Lile-Pastore says

This was so lovely! Two girls and their mom trying to find a bit of connection - plus aliens. Wonderful pencil drawings too.

jess says

the drawing style did not immediately capture my attention but I stuck it out because I'd heard good things. ultimately I enjoyed the perspectives & some of the weird moments that make us human, which are captured perfectly here.

Meghan says

Slow and matter-of-fact and surreal and cool. Nice pencil artwork except I didn't like the scribbled cheeks all the characters had - looked like everyone was always blushing. Tells of a few days in the life of two sisters and their mom, mundane events, coming-of-age experiences, deep feelings, and weirdness.

Poly says

Es muy onírico y tiene momentos muy reflexivos. El final me dejó preguntándome si habría una segunda parte por ahí D:

Ariel says

The art was great but very strange story.

Vittorio Rainone says

Una bambina trova in un campo un alieno, lo porta a casa e cerca di comunicare con lui. Sembra che non riesca a farlo, sembra che l'alieno sia poco più di un pupazzo capace a malapena di dire ciao. La mamma

della bambina è una donna sola, lasciata dal padre delle sue due figlie, convinta di aver preso una china sbagliata. Il giorno del ritrovamento dell'alieno, la sua coscienza o chissà cos'altro avvia un dialogo con lei, le fa capire che qualcosa è andato per il verso sbagliato e che è stato un caso se non è diventata ciò che voleva. La sorella della bambina è un'adolescente decisa a buttarsi nel mondo della sessualità e contrastata fra ricordi di un passato spensierato e un presente di ribellione per un padre che non è stato presente in famiglia. Alien racchiude diversi percorsi che si compiono in una giornata: la madre, che fugge, la sorella, che realizza la relatività dei sentimenti, la bambina, che alla fine trova, non per caso, un compagno di giochi ed esperienze. E' una storia piccola di crescita, raccontata con una giustapposizione di microvignette quadrate, colori pastello, fisionomie abbozzate e tondeggianti, fumi che escono dalle vignette, splash pages a fondo bianchissimo che inchiodano alcuni momenti. Interessante, anche se sembra soffrire della patina di fissità di espressioni che tanto irrigidisce certo indie a fumetti.

Lori says

I'm still learning my way around graphic novels - I think this one might be good for older teens who like a bit of sci-if mixed with realistic fiction

Ma'Belle says

German illustrator Aisha Franz might not have the most precise or distinctive drawing style, but her smudgy pencils really work well for this book. *Earthling* depicts two sisters and their mother each exploring their insecurities through possibly hallucinatory coping mechanisms in preparation for their absent father/husband's visit. The girls are comparing their limited knowledge and experience with sex and romance with one another and their peers and media representations, while their mother is confronted with a ghostly alternate reality of herself that comes out of her TV to show her how successful and sexy she could have been if she hadn't met her asshole husband.

Every mundane movement and environmental happening carries significant symbolic weight, and the entire book could be described as magical realism. The cries and stares of insects, neighborhood cats, peas on a dinner plate, and even a welcome mat all instill strong emotions and a sense of confusion about what is real and whether imaginative coping delusions might be preferable.

Earthling is yet another reason why publishers should be investing more in translating graphic novels from non-English-speaking creators.

Lauren says

So simple, yet so surprising. I wasn't familiar with the book or author, but picked it up on a whim and loved it.

Bert says

I really loved this, it was weird and sad and the pencil drawings were beautiful, simple, childlike and funny. Suburban angst, adolescence and grown-up regrets. And aliens.

Katie says

Really touching and true. I loved the drawings--although they're deliberately childish (mechanical pencil doodles), they evoke exactly the actions and feelings involved.
