

Reviews

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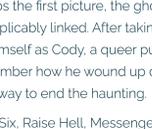
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“Light Carries On”

By Ryan Fitzmartin | May 16th, 2023

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What if death wasn't the end? What if we got another shot at living, a second chance to find happiness and meaning? Ray Nadine's supernatural drama "Light Carries On" explores queer romance and the meaning of life and legacy with tenderness and warmth. The Chicago set story is a moving dive into the emotional roils of a life unfulfilled, and a death unresolved. It's a slow-moving but engaging walk through the life of one person and the afterlife of another. "Light Carries On" is a poignant and highly sentimental graphic novel.



Cover by Ray Nadine

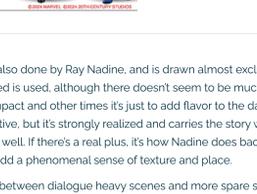
Written and Illustrated by Ray Nadine

When Leon's camera unexpectedly breaks, he is forced to borrow a used one from his mom's antique store. As he snaps the first picture, the ghost of the camera's former owner is released and the two are inexplicably linked. After taking Leon's body for an accidental joy ride, the ghost introduces himself as Cody, a queer punk rocker who died decades ago. Of course, he doesn't remember how he wound up dead but the two decide investigating might be the only way to end the haunting.

Cartoonist Ray Nadine (Station Six, Raise Hell, Messenger) has created an unmissable graphic novel that balances out themes of trauma, grief, and toxic relationships with radical empathy, queer joy, and healing.

Leon is an aspiring photographer and Chicagoan, a veteran of America's foreign wars, and someone just trying to make ends meet. A haunted camera brings him Cody, a ghostly rocker whose life was cut mysteriously short. Alternating chapters tell of Leon adjusting to having the ghost of Cody in his life, and the story Cody's last days in the 1970s. Cody doesn't know how he died, only that he is dead, and with Leon's help he hopes to obtain some closure and finally move on from his ghostly existence.

That's the basic plot of "Light Carries On", but the deathly mystery isn't the driver of the story in the way that Cody's thirst for a second chance is. Most of us never get to live our life a second time, but Cody gets to experience the Chicago of the 2020s through Leon and his camera. It's moving and thought provoking watching Cody explore his legacy and the world he left behind. We may never get to find out how we're remembered, or what we leave behind, but what if we did?

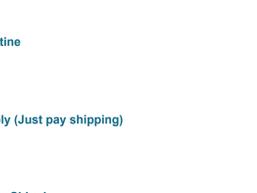


Nadine is interested in the philosophical questions of life and death, but doesn't lose sight of the individual human element. Cody and Leon are richly written characters, with depth and grace. Nadine is really interested in the minutia of our lives, and how we interact with the people around us, and small things such as 7-11 slurpee flavor preference become important character signifiers. It's this rich attention to detail that made me love these characters and care about them.

Leon is easy to root for, he's a scrappy artist with a traumatic past, but it took more time for Cody to grow on me. At first we don't know who he is or why he's haunting Leon, but as I got more into his story and Nadine fed me more details, I started to care. Cody's backstory unfolds at a well paced rate, giving us more and more about him. Despite initially seeming like a stereotype of a seventies punk rocker, Nadine lovingly shapes Cody throughout the book into someone that's easy to really be invested in. By the end of the book I was rooting for Cody and Leon really hard, more than I thought I would be when I first got into "Light Carries On".

I've never been to Chicago, but after reading "Light Carries On" I feel like I've taken a lovely trip. Ray Nadine has a very clear affection not only for the city, but its people and its history. There's some comics that could be set in any city, but "Light Carries On" couldn't be set anywhere else. From the trains to the restaurants, to the museums, parks, and shops, almost every scene is set in a specific, tangible part of Chicago. The art lovingly renders these locations, adding small details such as specific station stops or store names to give specificity and realism. Besides just serving as a love letter to the city, it grounds the more supernatural elements of the story, making it more impactful and tethering it to something real.

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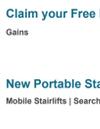


The art in "Light Carries On" is also done by Ray Nadine, and is drawn almost exclusively in three colors: black, white and blue. Occasionally red is used, although there doesn't seem to be much consistency as to when; sometimes it's for emotional impact and other times it's just to add flavor to the darkroom setting. Nadine's style isn't especially flashy or distinctive, but it's strongly realized and carries the story well. The faces are expressive, and convey character emotion well. If there's a real plus, it's how Nadine does backgrounds, which are often realized with great detail and add a phenomenal sense of texture and place.

Stylistically, Nadine alternates between dialogue heavy scenes and more spare silent work. Dialogue heavy comics can sometimes be a chore, but Nadine never lets word bubbles overwhelm her characters. There's always something going on with the character poses or the backgrounds that catches the eye. They mix up the compositions frequently, so the reading never becomes repetitive. The silent scenes too have great energy, as Nadine uses small things like cigarette smoke or a whip of a guitar cable to create movement. Overall the art does a great job of keeping the viewer engaged, and never gets repetitive or dull.

I really was strongly invested in "Light Carries On". It's a touching, tender romance with great characters and a beautiful setting. Passion flows from every page, and it's clear that Ray Nadine has created this book with absolute love and care. I was left with a lot to think about, and a fuzzy and warm feeling inside.

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