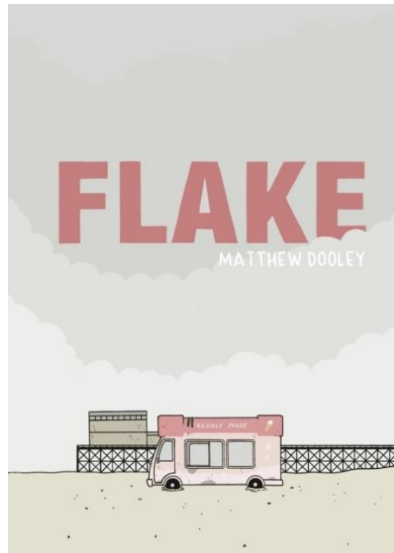




Flake h/c by Matthew Dooley

[Comedy]

“Every significant moment of Howard’s life had happened in Dobbiston.
“All the forgettable ones had too.”



FLAKE is as smart as it is delicious, as it is very, very British. Raymond Briggs and Alan Bennett are both reflected in the cast, their environment and their quotidian observations about their parochial environment: pride in local history, the surprising complexities buried within family history, and the absurdities which can come to dominate any life; the traps therein.

The lateral thinking and succinct wit of Tom Gauld flow freely too, along with stylistic influences from Chris Ware (the facial forms, colouring, occasional boxed layout plus the odd “AND SO...”) and there’s even a bit of Ted McKeever in an elderly lady’s loose-toothed mouth. She should floss more.

Like this father before him, Howard is an ice-cream van man – a master of his craft, with all the local knowledge and subtle skills: “Identifying the best places to stop. Sensing the optimum moment to switch on his signature tune. His ears were acutely attuned to the sound of children laughing. And, more importantly, the sound of children crying.”





Unfortunately, Howard's finances are dwindling and this summer's seen a downturn which Howard at first dismisses as one of the vagaries of his seasonal trade. It's not. It heralds the North-West English Ice Cream Wars. Vans had for generations peacefully patrolled their family territories but now sly Tony Augustus has emerged, seemingly from nowhere, and his *entente* ain't so *cordiale*. Tony was born of one of the Families, but not into it, and this has given him quite the chip on his fishy shoulder. His vans have begun encroaching on others' routes, swallowing them whole like some Great White Shark of the suburban seas. And there's a reason why he wants Howard's more than anyone else's.

If Howard is FLAKE's naif, then his best mate Jasper is its idiosyncratic buffoon. Jasper works in the local museum, selling both tickets and museum maps which are clear and very concise, boldly noting the most salient features: "museum", "car park", "gift shop" and "entrance". In order to acquire a copy, you'd have to have successfully navigated at least two of those already.

"Jasper had mixed experiences with quizzes and game shows. This included a catastrophic appearance on Countdown. Jasper boldly opened with a nine letter word... iliterate".

Jasper's overriding priorities, however, are his pet peeves, each as irrelevant to any sane human being as they are uncompromisingly and passionately pursued. For example, he spent six months in a French prison for trying to convert continental road signs from metric to imperial then painting his results on their signposts. So he's averse neither to direct confrontation nor overt vandalism, which may well come in handy during the imminent North-West English Ice Cream Wars. (It doesn't.)



All of which is but the tip of the iceberg which finds our protagonist, at the beginning, standing silently and solitarily on top of his own ice cream van, buffeted by the waves and submerged in the sea.

There are so many set pieces to enjoy including the local quiz night, a saunter to the seaside, and particularly the three old ladies of 'The Black Veil Club', Maud, Jean and Frances. Their hobby – their calling, their vocation...? – is to attend funerals, not to mourn the deceased, but to gossip about them, while rating each occasion on score cards according to turnout, eulogy and music. "A funeral is a fine barometer of a life well lead. And this is the turnout of a womanising drunk." But don't be deceived, for these ladies do pay attention, have acquired much local knowledge over the years, and are not backwards in coming forwards with their mid-service pronouncements.

"People these days don't have the common decency to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves."

True, actually.

