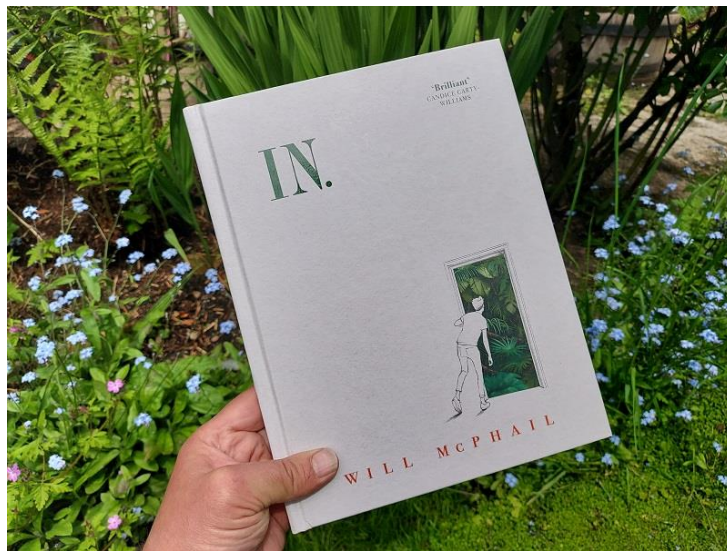




In: A Graphic Novel by Will McPhail.

[Contemporary Fiction]



Only once or twice in ten years does a graphic novel materialise which I'm moved to recommend with all my heart to every adult who walks through our doors, regardless of their personal predilections.

IN is the wittiest, most deliciously drawn and startling profound graphic novel which I've relished since Glyn Dillon's THE NAO OF BROWN in 2012 and NELSON by Rob Davis, Woodrow Phoenix et al back in 2011. Predominantly sketched in supple black ink and grey wash, it's oh so very funny with startling moments of quite unexpected full-colour satori that will totally take your breath away.

Along with its protagonist's – he's been evading it for years.

"Amid the chaos of the chlorinated teen soup that is a water park, The Bowl was a brief moment of blissful, easy solitude where it was just me again. For a few seconds I didn't have to perform. I don't think I've ever been as happy as I was inside that Bowl."



Did that strike a chord in your teenaged memories? Bliss indeed, but as an adult Nick cannot stop performing: it's the easiest way to evade any truly meaningful contact. Make no mistake, Nick's not remotely remote nor cut up about being cut off. Instead our handsome chap is bright, breezy and effortlessly entertaining company. Even when pretending to be a sad man in a sad bar in order to emulate a sad phenomenon as an experiment, Nick enjoys the results too much to stay in character.

Although performance smoothes out the wrinkles, taking the edge off potentially awkward encounters, its slickness slides him forever away from what might perhaps lie within. Nick's far too self-aware not to recognise the gnawing suspicion that he might be missing out, but every time that he teeters on the brink of an opportunity arisen... It's time for more self-effacing comedy, and a plumber to fix his toilet.

"Would you like a coffee?"

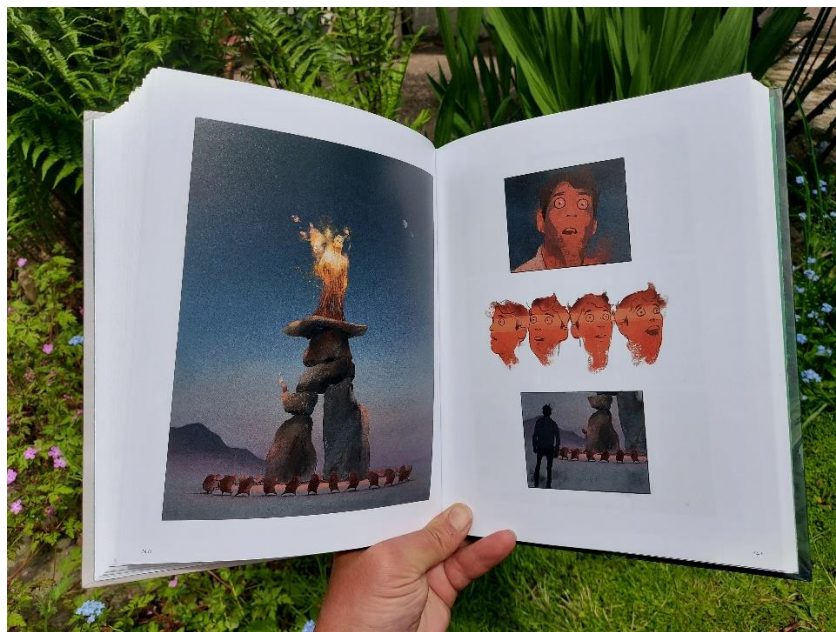
A sure fire way to feel less ashamed of your practical impotence, I've found. I'm a baby that absolutely would have drowned here in my apartment if it weren't for you but hey, if I make us both a coffee, that means we're the same! Chest bump?

"How do you take it?"

"Black, no sugar, please."

Of course. I like *my* coffee to taste like I'm being breastfed by The Honey Monster.

Nick's lovingly drawn with a slight frame, expressive shoulders and the gangly legs of a recently born faun. Innocence and naivety all the way, he wouldn't hurt a fly. But then he wouldn't touch one, either.



With the deft discipline of an award-winning single-panel cartoonist (the New Yorker etc), McPhail fills almost every page with contemporary cultural satire and behavioural comedy which you'll recognise. Vacuous coffee houses with pretentious names and awful-sounding ingredients which smell even worse than the whiffs of desperation which fight through their aspirational slogans to be worn on their figurative sleeves and literal signage; the free-fall chaos of strictly scheduled but only vaguely pre-planned creative conference calls on Zoom wherein any agenda and quantifiable creativity is all but instantly ditched in favour of nebulous, feel-good but ultimately wasteful waffle or simply catching up with your colleagues before time's up and are you still there...? Also, did you clear all that clutter or at least choose the least god-awful spot in your entire flat for that invasive camera to be pointing at?

And if that's "all" which was on offer here, then I would still rate this comedic *tour de force* as highly as my very highest benchmark of behavioural satire / quality jollity which is Kyle Baker's much missed WHY I HATE SATURN (1990). And let me tell you, I never expected to type *that* sentence in my life.

But then there's the moment. Then there's the moment of awe.

And yet it is as *nothing* to that which comes *later*...