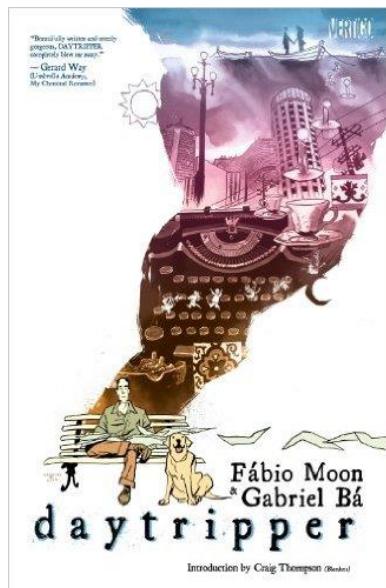




Daytripper by Fábio Moon, Gabriel Bá

[Contemporary Fiction]



"In order to go after your dreams, you must live your life. Wake up, before it's too late."

If you want a comic to encourage you to consider your life, your direction and your sense of perspective, this is it. Quiet, contemplative and so beautiful to behold, every fluid stroke is steeped in humanity and the living world bustling around it. It is so full of grace that I could cry.

Aged 32, Brás is feeling old. His father is such a successful Brazilian author that its literary community is throwing a gala in his honour tonight while Brás, an aspiring writer himself, is stuck in the dead-end job of writing obituaries. Neither his father nor mother appear to have remembered his birthday so Brás is feeling a little morbid, dejected and he's... well, he's sulking. Nevertheless Jorge, his best friend at the newspaper, persuades him to join in the celebrations by donning a tuxedo and making his way to the *Theatro Municipal* in time to grab a beer from a local bar... where Brás is shot dead.



It's unusual, I grant you, for a protagonist to wind up dead in the first of 12 chapters. But make no mistake, Brás *is* the main protagonist. Successive instalments unveil what might have happened had he died earlier or lived a lot longer: if Brás had chosen different paths at life's myriad traffic lights and come to understand what truly matters. He makes bad decisions and stagnates; he finds true love at last and marries. He lives to see some people give birth, others die, and his best friend run away in terror. In one instance he respects Jorge's decision, in another he drives into the night to find him.



"Jorge was his best friend, and that's what friends do. They care. They find each other and stick together when things get rough. Friends are worth every effort. Friends matter."

Twice Brás dies because he believes in friendship, but as young Jorge says, "If it weren't for people, life would be a fuckin' desert". On almost every page there's an exchange to give one pause for thought and there's some very sound advice for Brás (who so often wants to shut out life altogether) from the very source of his ambition, his father, who here speaks of his mother:

"I remember when we first met. I told her I wanted to be a writer and that I knew a great romance was waiting for me to write it. She smiled and said that she hoped a great romance was waiting for me to live it."

The most affecting chapter for me is the one in which an older, wiser and more successful Brás is blissfully married and on a book tour. He's away from his wife and child, yet still there in every corner of the house because he's left notes all around it to make his wife smile, then sends fresh texts and emails every day, observing their happiness mirrored in other couples' love, maintaining he misses her, and always reassuring his beloved that he'll be safely home soon. His son is so proud that he carries his Dad's books to school every day, even though he's far too young to understand them and is bullied because of it. He cannot *wait* for his Dad's return! So reliable is Brás about keeping in touch that when there are finally "No New Messages" it's assumed that the internet server is broken.

It isn't. Because Brás has already died in each preceding chapter we know from the start that he will never come home. It's one of the cruellest, most moving deployments of dramatic irony that I've encountered, while the book itself an exemplary exploration and distillation about the secrets to life, love and happiness in appreciating what we have before something goes so catastrophically wrong that we yearn for the past; dwelling not on others' perceived greater fortune nor resenting what's missing from our own; but acknowledging and embracing instead what we do have in front of us.



There's nothing like death to put life into perspective.

"Wake up, dude. You're missing it."

