

pencil, and ink washes. Absolutely gorgeous stuff. Munroe's gotten the pacing of the story down tight and every chapter's got a cliffhanger that kept me turning pages—I read *Therefore, Repent!* in one sitting and still find myself thumbing through it well after the fact.

All told, this one's a keeper; the ending ties everything together nicely, but it's one fuck of a weird ride before you get there. —Keith Rosson (No Media Kings, 10 Trellanock Ave., Toronto ON, M1C 5B5, Canada)

### Nobody's Nothings, A

By Denis Sheeham, 160 pgs.

I tried. Lord, I really did. You ever go through an old journal from years ago and wonder just what the fuck you were thinking when you wrote down whatever it is you come across? Something where you wrote “fuck” a lot because you were fifteen and, well, saying it was cool at the time? Well, Denis Sheeham's book is sorta of like that, reminding me of the little notebook I carry around all the time full of half-started story ideas and notes and journal-like entries, all of which have a long way to go before being considered “done.” It's a compilation of random ramblings, poetry, excerpts from his zine *Askew Reviews* (including the story with the dude pretending to be Ben Weasel, which I distinctly remember having heard somewhere... it's pretty funny), and various short stories. I tried to describe the book to someone last night, and I basically put it as someone just sweeping some old files, a zine, and whatever scraps of paper are lying around on his desk

and in his pockets into a black garbage bag, then presenting the bag as his manuscript. Now I know that sounds really mean, but like I said, I tried. I'm sure Sheeham's funny as fuck in person, probably, and an incredibly smart guy, but it just doesn't seem to come across here as it should. I'm not averse to compilations of works or non-linear structure in my reading, but *A Nobody's Nothing* just didn't do it for me. Some of Sheeham's fiction is really great, one story called “The Warmth” struck me as being perhaps the standout of the stories. The stories involving sex just seem unnecessarily over the top and not even as edgy as you'd think, and the “Brain Scribbles”—his random notes on anything from one-line thoughts that occur to him—to long rants on a variety of topics, including some girl at a Darkbuster show licking his face, to alcohol, to Oprah Winfrey (another gem), seem disorganized and somewhat shallow. You can make writing about dumb stuff interesting—I've read it before—and I just don't really see it here. When his writing focuses on raising a daughter as a single dad, and some of the unintentionally funny shit that his daughter says, just brings a smile to my face (the closing quote had me laughing out loud on the subway to work in the morning as I read and almost missed my stop), but the fact is that the rest of this book just drags those great moments down. —Constantine Koutsoutis (Bone Print Press, PO Box 684, Hanover MA 02339)



## DVD REVIEWS



### Cantankerous Titles & Obscure Ephemera, Vol. 1: DVD

Although his ideas are interesting on paper, Joe Biel's most recent stab at filmmaking falls flat. Five short documentaries are included on this DVD, along with an explanatory insert. I'll give you the rundown of each short; from the okay to the unbearably boring.

“Last Train Out of North America,” about the decline of passenger rail in the United States, was somewhat interesting and enlightening; definitely the best documentary on here. It features interviews with various train riders and explains how, over the last century, the railroad business has gone from a booming private industry to a failing public service on the bottom of the government's subsidy funding priority list. This short was not too bad at all.

“Of Dice and Men,” takes a look at strategies of obsessive Risk players. It is an original subject to analyze and it would probably have made a fascinating read, but when the concept comes to life on film, it turns out to be thirty-nine minutes of footage of people playing a board game in a room. It wasn't exactly riveting to watch strangers participate in an activity that I wouldn't find the least bit entertaining in regular life.

“Martinis in the Bike Lane” is about bike lane markings in Portland, Oregon that are decorated creatively by bored city employees. Again, a picture and a caption in a zine would have sufficed. Looking at barely remarkable alterations to stencils of a cyclist on concrete for eleven minutes was overkill, to say the least.

“Central Kansas—Canvas Central” features punk kids talking about the cultural importance and personal significance of patches. It's described as a “mockumentary” on the back of the DVD case, but in the booklet that it comes with, Joe Biel complains, “I'm kind of fed up with explaining that all of the interviews, history, and discussion in ‘Central Kansas—Canvas

Central’ are very real; not contrived.” So, it's a “very real mockumentary”? I don't get it.

“Cowboy Hat and a Cane” consists of a couple talking about their dog in a poorly-lit room, showing off snapshots of their dog as a young pup. I couldn't help but wonder if everybody who saw this documentary before it was mass produced was like, “Hell yeah! DIY punk rock youth are totally going to want to watch these people take their dog for a walk!”

Watching this DVD, I didn't get the feeling that much consideration was given to making these documentaries interesting and relevant to the audience. Joe Biel keeps mentioning aesthetics in the insert he wrote, but the documentaries (some shot in offices or the side of the street) failed to produce much visual stimulation. Overall, I was disappointed: I'm usually excited to hear about the novel things that make people's lives interesting, but this film was so dry that I didn't get anything out of it. —Lauren Trout (microcosmpublishing.com)

### China Blue: DVD

From 1985 to 2005, the U.S. trade deficit with China rose from \$0 to \$202 billion a year. Clothing sales account for a large percentage of that imbalance, and America's textile manufacturing industry essentially vanished during that time. On paper, China won that economic battle, but the victory did not extend to the country's workers.

In the beginning of *China Blue*, Jasmine Lee, a sixteen-year-old girl from rural China, travels to the city of Shaxi to find work. She gets a job at a clothing factory and looks forward to sending money back to her impoverished family. But the slogans Jasmine heard in school about China's “new era” of opportunity soon ring hollow. She and the other workers live in crowded quarters on-site and work up to twenty hours a day. Jasmine earns about six cents an hour and the factory's owner, Mr. Lam, holds back pay and makes deductions as he sees fit. Though Chinese law officially bars children under sixteen from the labor force, Jasmine meets a fourteen-year-old coworker. Interspersed with scenes from the factory are comments by Dr. Liu Kaiming, an expert on Chinese labor issues, who provides useful context on the exploitation of young workers in China.

To obtain access to the factory, the director/producer, Micha X. Peled, told Mr. Lam that the film was about him and his style of entrepreneurship. That tactic paid off, because Lam let his guard down and became increasingly comfortable sharing his delusions of grandeur. At one point, he expresses pride in the inspirational signs that he posts for the workers to see. “We shape their basic thinking, like Jesus did,” he remarks. Lam must own a bad translation of the Bible, because instead of the Golden Rule or the tale of Jesus and the money-changers, his signs say things like, “If you don't work hard today, you'll look hard for work tomorrow.”

The main problem with the film is the fact that some portions were clearly staged. Peled acknowledges that three of the girls were paid and that some of the scenes were re-enacted by different workers. He says that the re-shoot was necessary because the authorities seized some footage and at least one of the workers stopped cooperating. It would have been far better to stick to the real footage, since the staged scenes cast doubt on the veracity of the others. It is easy to see why the filmmakers would want to pay these