Conquistador of the Useless

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Nathan Wavelsky moves into the burbs with his wife and two cats. Life is sweet. He’s a successful slacker. He doesn’t want to rock the boat.

But the boat starts to rock anyway. He gives a copy of Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* to a teenage girl next door. Her parents are righteousely appalled. His wife’s hormones start to tango and now she wants a baby. Worse, his best friend wants him to climb Mount Everest. Nathan likes to hike, but climbing in the Himalayas? He could die, for God’s sake. He just wants to be left alone. But no chance.

Shit begins to happen.

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Anyone who grew up at the tail-end of Generation X will find something to love in this book.

---Small Press Reviews---

*Conquistador of the Useless* begins with an engaging, smartsass narrator who believes he keeps all things and all people at arm’s length. As Nathan’s story unfolds, it takes us to deep places he never intended—places of everyday revelation and of epic mortal proportions—without ever losing its funny charm.

—Paul Elwork, *The Girl Who Would Speak for the Dead*

An altogether hip novel.

—Richard Wertime, *Citadel on the Mountain: A Memoir of Father and Son*
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Yeah, what did you two talk about? The music I gave her. Did she like it? She said it was all right. That’s about as good as you’re going to get, Lisa. And, she hates school. Shocking. She’s a teenager. She thinks it’s all bullshit, I say. It is. That’s what I told her. You said that? Yeah, I told her that sometimes you just have to accept with it.

Shit, Nathan. You can’t tell her things like that. Why not? Rayanne’s not your kid. I didn’t tell her to drop out or anything. Actually, I think she has to do better. I told her to read Huck Finn. If she hates school she’d love Mark Twain.

Look, Lisa says, when we have a kid you can send her to school and your own Huck Finn misadventures hopefully won’t matter. But it’s not your business to do that with someone’s daughter. I mean, does Alan seem like a guy who’d tell you telling Rayanne all that? Alan doesn’t seem like he’s OK with anything about his parents. That doesn’t mean you get to mess with his parents. Right, I say.

But, she says, you can tell your dad all about this. We’ll see him tomorrow night. I know, he’ll love it.

ACCIDENTAL REVOLUTION

My father and Mark Twain are somewhat responsible for my love of books. Not in the standard way, not because he read Tom Sawyer to me at night when I was a kid and made a little library for me in my room before I could even walk. He did all that, and it made me literate, but not much else.

My school district was also a role in that, not because I had any friends in the wonderful teachers who made love to me great novels.

I became an avid reader because my high school did not ban The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn during my sophomore year. The superintendent of the district never used that word: banned. He explained that although the book was taken off all curricula and removed from the school’s library, no one would prevent a student from reading it on his or her own time, or even discussing it with a teacher or peer.

But, let’s be honest, they banned the thing.

It happened when the mother of one of the three black students in our school—I don’t know which one—complained to the teachers for the reasons you would think she’d complain. I wasn’t at the PTA meeting where all this went down, but I heard from a few people that she cited Dr. King extensively. The irony that Huck is one of the first literary figures to judge someone by the content of his character rather than the color of his skin seems to have been lost on all parties.