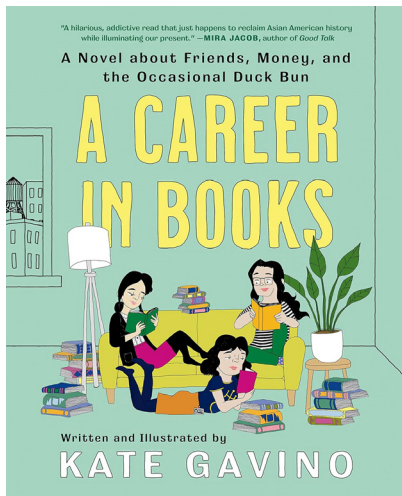


Book Review

A Career in Books: A Novel about Friends, Money, and the Occasional Duck Bun by Kate Gavino

Reviewed by Savannah Aleksic



A Career in Books by Kate Gavino is a graphic novel that explores the lives and aspirations of three twenty-something Asian-American roommates living in one of the largest and most expensive cities in the world—New York City. The three girls each land entry-level jobs in publishing, one at a university press, another with a traditional publisher, and the third at a trust-fund kid’s “indie” publisher. Throughout the novel, Nina, Shirin, and Silvia learn firsthand that a career in publishing isn’t as glamorous as they first thought, marked by disappointing paychecks,

racial microaggressions, and a sense of unfulfillment.

Gavino describes, “*A Career in Books* is a graphic novel for everyone who’s wanted to ‘work with books’ and had NO idea what it entailed.” Our three heroines learn this not just from their new 9-5s, but also from their

nonagenarian neighbor, Veronica Vo, who turns out to be a Nobel Prize-winning “one-hit-wonder” novelist with a long catalog of books that were put out of print because people of the time weren’t interested in reading about everyday Asian-American women doing normal everyday things. Throughout the novel, the girls make it their mission to get these books reprinted for a modern audience who will appreciate their realistic representation of the woes of women who spend their day-to-day working in an office job, a *Vorenaissance*, if you will.

Although the book had its funny moments, it was important to read not only for its strong messages on the realities of entering into the publishing world and the racial and sexist microaggressions that come with the territory of working in such a field, but also for the camaraderie and sisterhood that flowed through the pages. It was a delight to read about the friendship between these three girls as they navigate the complexities of an industry where “more than 70% of the individuals were white,” and despite this, “only 7% of these women are Asian, 6% are Latinx, and 5% are Black.” *A Career in Books* touches on this in an easily digestible way. An example of this is when Shirin’s boss assumes she knows Cantonese and uses her as a figurehead for their Eastern studies imprint.

This novel not only addresses catastrophic mass layoffs in the industry but also showcases the importance of community in a system not designed for everyone to thrive. This novel complements other recent works, such as *Yellowface* by R.F. Kuang, which was reviewed in a past issue of the GWJEP. Both use humor, and comical plotlines, to emphasize what lies behind the curtain of the publishing industry, both the good and the bad, and the duck bun of it all. In *A Career in Books*, Gavino is able to utilize a graphic novel format to amplify how community and allyship can disrupt exclusionary systems, an important discussion to be had on the ethical issues that have historically been prevalent in the publishing industry, and how they are still experienced to this day.

References

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