

Apathy and Other Small Victories: A Novel

By Paul Neilan

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Apathy and Other Small Victories: A Novel By Paul Neilan

A scathingly funny debut novel about disillusionment, indifference, and one man's desperate fight to assign absolutely no meaning to modern life.

The only thing Shane cares about is leaving. Usually on a Greyhound bus, right before his life falls apart again. Just like he planned. But this time it's complicated: there's a sadistic corporate climber who thinks she's his girlfriend, a rent-subsidized affair with his landlord's wife, and the bizarrely appealing deaf assistant to Shane's cosmically unstable dentist.

When one of the women is murdered, and Shane is the only suspect who doesn't care enough to act like he didn't do it, the question becomes just how he'll clear the good name he never had and doesn't particularly want: his own.

“The malaise of cubicle culture may be well-trodden comedic territory by now, but Neilan's debut skewers office life with a flourish for the grotesque.” *The Village Voice*



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Like many a hip young literary antihero these days, the protagonist of this hilarious if aimless debut is sunk in slacker anomie. Shane has a monotonous temp job at an insurance agency, where he is supposed to alphabetize paperwork but instead spends his time sleeping on the toilet. After work, he is besieged by a gallery of grotesques: a vapid girlfriend who sexually brutalizes him; an absurdly macho neighbor with a leather-clad guinea pig for a sex slave; and his dentist's deaf assistant, who sings atonal karaoke, teaches him to sign obscenities and furnishes a wispy narrative thread by getting murdered. In a world both banal and assaultive, Shane can only drink, steal salt shakers and cultivate his sense of irony; "[t]here's only so much you can do," he shrugs, "and even that's not worth the trouble." Shane's malaise doesn't feel earned; job aside, there are just too many gonzo goings-on—the landlord, for instance, is paying him to have sex with his wife—for him to feel so listless. There's not much to Shane besides a defiant dejectedness, but from that Neilan spins many sparkling comic riffs on the tawdriness and sterility of American life. (*May*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Shane's a numb loser in a city full of freaks. He learned to swear in sign language so he could converse with his dentist's deaf hygienist, but now she's dead, and the police want answers and fluid samples. When it's not sending up crime novels, the narrative satirizes soulless corporate life, but Shane is hard to take either way. In a rare moment of honest assessment, he notes, "I have always thought of people as punch lines." And that's what this book is: an onrushing series of twisted gags, some of them hilarious, others not so much. (Neilan would be funnier if he wasn't so smugly sure of how funny he is.) A highlight: "And then there was some sex . . . We were like two dead fish being slapped together by an off-duty clown." Remember those "Deep Thoughts with Jack Handey" throwaways that used to run between sketches on *Saturday Night Live*? This is a (barely) novel-length version of that kind of humor. In other words, juvenile fun for undiscerning lads with two hours to kill. A mystery for the *Maxim* generation. *Frank Sennett*

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Review

"Comprising 50% sheer brilliance, 50% distilled cynicism, and 50% coronary-inducing humor, *Apathy and Other Small Victories* has more life, laughs, and story on every page than should be possible. A heartbreakingly funny paean to supercharged nihilism, it's the best book you'll read in years, and the funniest novel ever. If you don't love it, there's something wrong with you, and if you do, there is also something wrong with you—but you won't care." *Max Barry, author of Company*

"Neilan's wit is a razor that cuts and slashes mercilessly on every single page, in every single paragraph, so that your fingers will bleed even as the tears of laughter soak your face. So basically, you'll be reduced to a bloody, weeping mess, madly reading whole pages aloud as friends and family shake their heads and slowly back away." *Jonathan Tropper, author of Everything Changes*

"Neilan spins sparkling comic riffs on the tawdriness and sterility of American life." *Publishers Weekly*

"The malaise of cubicle culture may be well-trodden comedic territory by now, but Neilan's debut skewers office life with a flourish for the grotesque." *The Village Voice*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ruth Walker:

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Frank Huynh:

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Susan Munoz:

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