



## Far Arden

*Kevin Cannon*

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Meet Army Shanks -- crusty old sea dog and legendary brawler of the high Arctic seas! He's got just one mission: to find the mythical island paradise known as Far Arden, which lies hidden (so they say) in the wintry oceans of the far North. But there's more than just water standing between Shanks and his goal: he'll have to contend with circus performers, adorable orphans, heinous villains, bitter ex-lovers, well-meaning undergraduates, and the full might of the Royal Canadian Arctic Navy! Not to mention he's not so sure how to get to Far Arden in the first place... In his first solo graphic novel, Kevin Cannon (*Top Ten; Bone Sharps, Cowboys, and Thunder Lizards*) proves himself a master spinner of yarns with *Far Arden*.

## Far Arden Details

Date : Published July 1st 2009 by Top Shelf Productions (first published June 6th 2009)

ISBN : 9781603090360

Author : Kevin Cannon

Format : Hardcover 382 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Adventure, Fiction, Fantasy, Graphic Novels Comics, Cultural, Canada

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## From Reader Review Far Arden for online ebook

### Jeffrey says

A solid debut, that seems to be an aimless, winding stream-of-consciousness adventure, until you get to the end and get a quick punch to the gut that makes it all worthwhile and meatier.

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### Seth T. says

How does one talk about a book in which its epilogue either makes or breaks the book for, oh, say: 100% of its readers? Give in and spoil the ending by talking about it or politely ignore what may be the most important thing to talk about for potential readers? Tough questions.

Luckily you have me.

*Far Arden* is one of the best comics I've read in a while. Comedies are ridiculously difficult to pull off over the long haul. Generally, their shtick gets a little long in the tooth well before the halfway mark and the same would have held true for *Far Arden* had it not gradually developed into a compelling story with decently well-realized characters.

Following Army Shanks, a man "as cold and unforgiving as the Arctic herself," author Kevin Cannon treats the reader to a bizarre journey through arctic locales and jaw-dropping onomatopoeia. Shanks makes his way through fishing villages, queer universities, and frozen islands (which apparently actually exist in that nefarious and frigid land known as Canada) along with an entourage of friends, enemies, and former friends and enemies. All to the end of finding Far Arden, the mythical island whose discovery has devoured the lives of almost every principle character in Cannon's book.

Throughout the book Cannon skirts the border of believability, never quite falling into a world that jibes with reality, but never going so far into fantasy that we don't understand there are certain mortal rules common to both our reality and his. Relationships tack as they do in our world, those mauled by polar bears don't get up, and ambition can kill. That said, there are golden narwhals that will direct willing sailors to paradise. So, you've got that going for you.

And then there's the humor.

Despite the fact that *Far Arden* offers a compelling (?) cautionary tale of broken promises and unrelenting ambitions, Cannon makes certain that the driving force of the book is its sense of the humorous. Nearly every page holds something amusing, especially moments catering to those of absurdest sensibilities. Cannon's use of inventive onomatopoeia alone makes *Far Arden* something worth picking up—even if you don't end up liking the ending.

So yeah, the ending. It might make you mad or it might just make you furious. Or maybe it will confuse you.

Or maybe, after a moment's thought, you might just find that you actually liked the ending and that Cannon prepared you for it more than you thought. Or maybe you'll read it and think, *Huh!* and then remember that part with the polar bear and the man-sized bite and promptly forget that there was even an ending at all.

Whichever side of the apparently controversial finale Cannon prepared that you find yourself, I think most everyone should be able to sit back and think: yes, that book was worth my time. If they like, they can even pretend the epilogue didn't exist!

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For those curious about the sloppy-ish art style of the book, Kevin Cannon apparently began the book as part of an extreme 24-hour comic experiment—instead of creating a whole 24-page comic in a single 24-hour sitting, he would perform a year's worth of these sittings to create a single, large book. That lasted for four months, so each of the first four chapters were created in a discreet 24-hour period. After that, he adopted the same style but slowed down his pace to one chapter per month though not in a single sitting. (I believe the time allotted shows.)

*Far Arden* can be read in its entirety (and for free) online at  
<http://www.kevincannon.org/288hour/>

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#### **p.s. (In Which I Spoil Things)**

(view spoiler)

I wanted a different ending, but I appreciated the ending I got.

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[review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

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#### **Chris says**

Never judge a book by its cover sure, but *Far Arden* is aesthetically just a beautiful book. I'll say that for it. It's also a wonderfully fun story that is enriched by how goofy and slight it makes itself out to be with Cannon's loose inking and penchant for goofy, telling sound effects. Rollicking adventure preludes an ending somewhat unexpected but not at all unwarranted, *Far Arden* is easily the most fun I've had with a comic this year.

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#### **Emilia P says**

Full disclosure, Kevin Cannon graduated from Grinnell College the year before I started school there, so 4th star is cuz I felt the Grinnellian wacky sense of humor/half-hearted but necessary activism vibe about it. But yeah, I like the way he draws, it's very much his own, and it started slow but I was surprised by how

much I ended up caring about the weird little characters and not wanting to put it down. The end was yeah, a bummer and not my style, but true to the story, I think.

The layout could have been a little less choppy, but I got used to it.

So yeah, Mr. C. I'll be happy to keep reading your stuff. Way to go.

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### **Batmark says**

*Far Arden* is a humorous book told at a frenetic pace. Heavy on plot, it features an interesting main character alongside some fun, if forgettable, supporting characters. The book's primary virtue is its length. At nearly 400 pages, with most pages containing six panels each, there's a lot of story here. And when it comes to a book that's heavy on plot, that's what I want: a nice, long story that has the space to comfortably fit in lots of action before the payoff.

The payoff, in this case, is the eventual discovery of the island known as Far Arden--a rumored tropical paradise hidden away somewhere in the Canadian Arctic. Our (anti?)hero, Army Shanks, hid a map to the island on his old boat, which resurfaces at the beginning of the story. What follows are 400 pages of fast-paced shenanigans. Kevin Cannon's cartoony art perfectly matches the humorous, over-the-top action. In the fight scenes, everyone's suddenly as flexible as Gumby, and Cannon also makes humorous use of verbs-as-sound-effects (e.g., the word "PUNCH!" accompanying a panel in which Army socks a fish underwater).

I'm not usually a fan of such frenzied storytelling, but Cannon's style is well suited to it. I enjoyed this book.

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### **Rin says**

I am kind of torn on if I like this book or not. It definitely made me chuckle out loud, and I do think it was amusing and clever in places. The thing that bothered me the most was how awful all of the female characters were. The old love interest was a cold-hearted, cheating liar, and the young reporter was a shrill mess, who spent most of her time getting drunk and trying to sleep with the other characters.

On a stylistic note, I am rather enjoying the trend I'm seeing in comics, and which was really played to full advantage in this book, of changing sound effects from the standard 'biffs' and 'pows' to more descriptive terms. I think that was the most amusing part of this book.

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### **Joseph Szabo says**

You can also read the review at <http://pointman74250.tumblr.com/>

It's very rare indeed - happening only a few times - when you read a book you were initially suspicious of because the work is not like what you've read before, and discover it's one of the best books of your life.

Far Arden is a book so simple and direct, so silly yet not all the time funny, who has the deepest respect for its characters.

We often say we love a book but is that really true?

I say we definitely respect a book, feel great affection for it, note how wise and joyful it was but love?

I don't think so, at least not very often.

Far Arden, I can say with clarity, is a book I truly love.

The other books I can say I love and mean it are Peter Pan, Grimm's Fairytales and The Sandman series of books and yes, I am comparing these to Far Arden.

There is almost a universal simplicity here, good for children in old bodies and new, and it's awe-inspiring and fanciful.

It tells the story of a man named Army Shanks, who wants to find a place, a new home called Far Arden. He is a seaman, a pirate but he is unlike most pirates in books, he has a soul and friends and he values both.

The story often goes from one strange place to another, in a world that is our own and yet shown entirely new, from a perspective of a wild and innocent imagination but with regards to the times we live in.

The book was written and illustrated by Kevin Cannon, an artist I never heard of before but will read more of. He doesn't use elaborate art to create pictures that are inappropriate for the story he is telling, just using exactly what he should. It is such a breath of fresh air from the huge in scope and colorful art of so many superhero or high storytelling productions of other comics.

Most, like me, will initially think they wasted their money when it comes to this book, but I was wrong - I like being proven wrong - and so will you because Far Arden is so weirdly, yet passionately told. The visual art here is not terrible because it is different. It's different because imaginations are different but the skill to make them is just as great as anything from Marvel or DC or anywhere.

Far Arden is thoughtful, grand storytelling of the past now made new. It was exactly what I needed when I didn't know I needed it.

Yes indeed, Far Arden is now one of my favorite books....and I love it.

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### **Kristi says**

I had to put this adult graphic novel on my adventure, horror and humor shelves. I don't know if that's enough information for you or not. I still find it hard to describe to myself. By turns really silly and poking fun at common adventure tropes while also having some subtle character development so that it does actually hurt a little when something horrible goes wrong.

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### **Matt Graupman says**

Any book that can bring naval bureaucracy, sideshow strongmen, mythical lands, pirates, orphans wearing

dead foxes, and a damaged seaman together is sure to be a winner and "Far Arden" absolutely is. Teetering between romantic realism and total lunacy, "Far Arden" has an abundance of what most comics lack: fun!

The thing I like most about this book is its humor. Comedy is a very tough thing to pull off on the page and Cannon makes it look easy. The punchy dialogue, ridiculous asides, and (particularly) the written actions all bring a welcome measure of comic relief to what is actually a pretty melancholic story. In addition, the artwork is sloppily creative (it was born from a series of 24-hour-comics exercises) and perfectly matches Cannon's wild imagination. The ending is a bit of a letdown but, overall, "Far Arden" has such a good time getting there that it really doesn't diminish the enjoyment of reading it.

I can't wait until my son is a little older so he can read "Far Arden" (it has a little cursing and nudity; just enough to be naughty but not over-the-top). This is exactly the kind of book I would give to a kid to kindle a lifelong love of comics.

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### **Jamie Felton says**

This is a great graphic novel about modern-day pirates and mythical locales that exist most realistically in the minds of those pirates. This was a really funny and well-drawn read. I loved the artwork and constant amping up of adventure and what-will-happen-next feeling.

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### **Hollowspine says**

A tragi-comic tale of betrayal and intrigue amongst a group of old friends and explorers in the arctic. Army Shanks, our hero, left the RCAN (Royal Canadian Arctic Navy) to become a pirate and explorer. His ultimate goal is to sail to Far Arden, but to do that he must steal back his ship.

On his journey he encounters a young orphan named Alastair Cavendish, his ex-lover Fortuna, her husband and Shanks former friend Pinho, not to mention other friends and enemies from his former days in the "Scrimshaw Club." Everything is connected, every character in the bar during the first scene makes an appearance throughout the book, often creating absurd situations and showing up in bizarre locations.

I was surprised at the tragic nature of the book, though I wouldn't spoil it for anyone reading, but this is not as it seems a light-hearted comedy, but a tale of tragedy and loss in the arctic. Anger's encounter with the polar bear did not surprise me, but the Death MRI scene did, and after that I wasn't sure what to expect...

"I am going outside and may be some time."

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### **Greg Allan Holcomb says**

The first four chapters of Far Arden were four separate 24 Hour Comics. The rest was finished in the same style.

Any other year (not the year Asterios Polyp came out) and I would've nominated this for an Eisner.

I just got my copy back and will be re-reading it soon.

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### **Caleb says**

Probably tied with "Remake" as the funniest and most fun graphic novel I've read this year (so far).

Full review here:

[http://blog.newsarama.com/2009/07/11/...](http://blog.newsarama.com/2009/07/11/)

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### **Scribe says**

Good romp, think I preferred Crater XV which I read first - there were a few too many characters at the start to keep track of here, and a couple of deus ex machina, but as with Crater, some great storytelling, lovable characters, and cracking action twists.

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### **Candice M (tinylibrarian) says**

I really enjoyed it and the quirky art, dialogue and plot reminded me of something that Wes Anderson would do, like a sequel or companion piece to the "Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou." (Imagine Tim Robbins as Army Shanks and of course Bill Murray as Steve Zissou wrassling/fighting over blonde Angelica Huston as Fortuna, only to make reluctant peace with each other after battling a giant squid together. And then one of the Wilson brothers does something.)

While there is no Steve Zissou or giant squid in "Far Arden," there is enough action (Army is a very good fighter), light romance (Does Fortuna love her husband or Army or Alistair? Does Amber love David or Army? Or both?), humor and weird plot twists to keep everyone entertained.

I'm contemplating nominating this for the Great Graphic Novels for Teens list since I enjoyed it so much, but I'm not sure how well it will go over with them. I'm going to toss it out to my teens and see what they think.

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