

Utopia comes with a price

Arsène Schrauwen

OLIVIER SCHRAUWEN

Olivier Schrauwen tells, in alternating monochrome orange and blue, the story of his grandfather Arsène, who leaves for the Belgian colony of Congo in 1947, where he and his cousin Roger have planned a hugely ambitious project: a utopia of modernism, right in the middle of the jungle. Arsène is appointed project manager and soon falls head over heels in love with Marieke, Roger's wife. Whether he is delirious from love or a fever-inducing jungle virus, Arsène's loosening grip on reality is mirrored by the reader's uncertainty of what is real and what is just imagined by Arsène.

Every page reveals an eccentric and original cartooning mind at work.

THE COMICS JOURNAL

Only in Olivier Schrauwen's world could a story be set in Africa without a single black character being depicted: the unworldly Arsène seems terrified of what lies outside the thin walls of his hut and drinks only Trappist beer, for safety reasons. He does not experience adventure; it's something that happens to him. And, with him, to the reader. This first full-length graphic novel by the critically acclaimed Olivier Schrauwen is an engrossing narrative that is sometimes funny, slightly surreal and often beautiful.

It reads like Conrad by way of Kafka, as drawn in pen and ink by Rousseau.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Occasionally, a creator kicks the comics-medium football not only over the goalposts but into another stadium entirely.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



AUTHOR



Olivier Schrauwen (b. 1977) calls himself a tinkerer. His first graphic novel, *My Boy*, was awarded a prize as the best debut in Flanders, and it was among the nominations for the prestigious Angoulême 2007 prizes. A number of books later, Schrauwen's work has achieved international success, and the author has become something of a phenomenon. Art Spiegelman (of 'Maus' fame) referred to him as 'the most original cartoonist I've fallen onto since Chris Ware or Ben Katchor'.

ORIGINAL TITLE *Arsène Schrauwen* (2015, Bries, 256 pp.)

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