

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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Weedeater: An Illustrated Novel.

Gipe, Robert (Author)

Mar 2018. 280 p. Ohio Univ., hardcover, \$27.95. (9780821423097).

The two main characters, Gene, aka Weedeater, and Dawn, meet inauspiciously after a car crash, but by the end of the novel, that circumstance seems less surprising, given that Dawn's life in eastern Kentucky is pretty much a metaphorical wreck. As tragedies befall Dawn, she absorbs them with the help of her aunt, a do-good art teacher. Enter Gene, who appears to be a country bumpkin but who turns out to be a dependable guy, devoted to helping others, and really quite clever. The dialogue, with its distinct Appalachian dialect, charges Gipe's (*Trampoline*, 2015) illustrated story of a tight-knit community in coal country, in which people struggle to make ends meet, raise families, maintain friendships, and survive the opioid epidemic. The many cartoons add emotional complexity to the evocative language and terrific character development. Gipe's novel from the heart of fictional Canard County can be read as a cautionary tale from a Lake Wobegon where not everyone is attractive or above average.

— *Dan Kaplan*