



American Elf: The Collected Sketchbook Diaries, Vol. 1

James Kochalka , Moby (Introduction)

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A deluxe compilation of the first five years of James Kochalka's ground breaking daily diary comic strip. Since October 1998, James Kochalka has kept a daily diary, drawn in comic strip form in his sketchbook. Drawn with relaxed and beautiful brushwork, these strips perfectly capture the rhythm of daily life. From the hilarious to the sad, from the poetic to the drunken, these strips offer a direct and intimate portrait of the life of one of America's most important alternative cartoonists. This ambitious and deluxe, perfect-bound volume collect the first five years of Kochalka's diary.
Contains a full-color section.

American Elf: The Collected Sketchbook Diaries, Vol. 1 Details

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From Reader Review *American Elf: The Collected Sketchbook Diaries*, Vol. 1 for online ebook

Isaac says

If you're going to read James Kochalka you have to let yourself be fooled into thinking that he's a genius, which is preposterous on the face of it. Except that if you put that aside and allow yourself to believe in his genius, it is there, on the page, manifestly in front of you.

Taken one by one his diary strips barely register, but if you read this whole collection in one sitting you will be left with a strange sense of the majestic. A book to make you feel together when apart.

Jon Allen says

This book is the epitome of deceptively simple. By diligently making a comic a day James Kochalka is able to create a work of art that captures the essence of everyday life while still managing to keep you entertained. Kochalka is a master of making the ordinary into something magical. He is also equal parts cutesy and vulgar. A strange but effective combination. Something for everybody. You'll put your guard down because he'll "play dumb" for awhile and because of the cartoony drawing style but then he'll hit you with something truly touching when you least expect it. It's a very addictive read and is a testament to what can be achieved through simple dedication and honesty (and of course talent). The individual comics can be hit or miss but all together I think they add up to an undeniably powerful statement.

Amanda Davidson says

i'm in an all-caps, screaming-inside kind of mood, because of WORK. if i hadn't broken my ipod during the move, i'd set it to the pixies' "debaser." but this book is making me feel better. you know why? because this guy draws a comic EVERY DAY. that's right. we can too, working people. we can, too. for once upon a time, james kochalka earned a living not (as now) by pen and inkpot, but as a humble waiter, which is when he started drawing these daily panels. take that, food service. take that, the library.

Dave Riley says

If you want to have the pants charmed off you *American Elf* has that on offer. It may be the case that nothing really happens day in day out in these sketchbook diaries but celebrating the mundane is all that seems to matter. Look more closely and you'll get a delightful love affair beautifully recorded with yearning and sharing.

A tad too 'indi' perhaps -- as seem a whole personal comic genre -- but then, even though having read one of these seeming autobio comics you may have read them all --- it's always a nice touch that people do, after all, live different lives: even elves.

Kira Nerys says

Diary comics take a lot of patience, for both the creator and the reader. Inherently brief and whimsical, these bits and pieces of someone's day echo the daily need for a story arc and humor found in syndicated strips, yet their factual basis changes the breadth of the story. Kochalka, following five years of his life, gives this volume a distinct sense of growth. His marriage evolves, his relationships do, his living situation, his family. If you aren't predisposed to enjoy diary comics, this may prove a difficult volume to get through; a comic a day means it's slow, evenly-paced, and often repetitive. I enjoyed plenty of sweet moments with his wife and friends; I sat through vomiting, pee jokes, and yelling. I shrugged over rock concerts and comic-drawing and smiled at scenic Vermont views. Only Kochalka can say whether he learned something about his life and the human experience, but for the right reader, this volume offers a form of self-portrait.

After 14 years, Kochalka stopped these diary comics, but they're all published and available in print form. The only other diary comic I've read is Citric Comics, which hasn't been updated in about a year, but offers a fairly good example of how diary comics feel and whether they're to your taste. *American Elf* isn't a volume I'd recommend unless the concept intrigues you. Five years takes a lot of time if you aren't interested in day-to-day moments. If you are, I do love the drawings, and plenty of the comics offer some relatable or evocative thought.

Ariel Caldwell says

I was curious to see what a comic-a-day would look like, from the process perspective. And that's what I got; I saw how a comic-a-day can get ... ordinary. It wasn't really my thing, and I think I wasn't in the mood to "make a new friend," that is, get all personal with a stranger in a one-way situation. That said, I appreciate the commitment that James made to do this thing! For a long time! Through all kinds of changes!

Marc Weidenbaum says

Several things, among them Kochalka being named poet laureate in his native Vermont earlier this year, led me to revisit this great volume of serial quotidian serendipity. Another thing was parenthood. Kochalka's kid's-eye-view on the world may not have an inherent plot, but it does have themes (nature, music, creativity, love, food, and cats among them, often overlapping) and even a climax, when the eternal kid has a kid of his own.

Twan says

BEST.BOOK.EVER.

I'm not shitting you, I love this so much. One of those books that is so good you don't wanna rush through it. The problem with this one is that after reading a few strips, you are hooked like a meth addict and can't stop reading it. Personal, funny, a delight to look at and full of those 'oh shit!' moments where you see the people

in the book doing the same stuff you do in your life that were presumed to be unique to yourself.

Bonnie says

I was introduced to American Elf by a friend and have kept reading the daily strips for more than a year now. I really wanted to go back and read the comic from the start, though, and this book is the best way to do it (unless you have many, many hours to spend at your computer). I read this first volume on my lunch breaks, on and off, and it was always such a pick-me-up. I also would find myself thinking about strips later in the day, reflecting on them. I don't know if this is "deep" material, but it's hard not to feel a connection to James Kochalka and his family. He doesn't shy away from certain topics, which makes it all the more fun and wonderful... though it does make for an interesting glance by coworkers in the lunch room. Reading this is a lot like talking to a friend about what's happening in your life, when maybe you think your life is strange and maybe your relationships aren't working out and you're just not getting it, and then that friend says "yeah, me too!" Okay, it's not quite like that, but that's the feeling I got. I'm happy to be catching up to present day American Elf!

Paul says

An honest look at the "small" parts of humanity. If human beings are grand, then there's grandeur here, and if humans are petty, then there's pettiness here. Really, though, for the most part, this book is everything in between. And just the sheer commitment of James' daily comic blog is enough to impress me two stars worth, and the other three stars are for his talent.

Ariadne says

I'd read other fiction works by Kochalka and enjoyed them so I thought I'd give his autobiographical collection a go. I'm a fan of this idea of writing a comic-journal and I believe Kochalka's intent to 'capture day to day life, to see if there is any pattern' is a good one. However- I am graphically two years into this guy's life and utterly bored. I can sum it up for you in three recurring themes:

- 1) Massive co-dependance on his wife
- 2) Drinking booze or its (after) affects
- 3) and I can't decide which gains precedence but comics and or pee/his penis is definitely third.

Other than that you get to see his comic career grow and there's a mention of him playing about with music. Otherwise I get nothing from this collection than a presentation of a life that only betrays qualities I find undesirable on the surface and perhaps below as well (though you can't really tell- there's not a lot of depth given to work with).

At least Ben 'Snakepit' who did the same experiment and published it in collected volumes had a chaotic punker existence that provided for some laughs at his foolishness, odd situation you wouldn't hear of otherwise, and an accurate portrayal of a music scene and its city.

Renaud Germain says

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-6YH...>
(reportage sur l'auteur)

MyCab says

July 16, 2007

Terri, my wife, and i actually read this book every night in bed together while she was pregnant with amelia. The book is a pictorial diary that actually catalogs five years of his life. James portrays himself and family as elves. Each daily entry is drawn in a four box summary of any event that took place that day. Kind of Seinfeld-esque in the daily entries in that most are really about nothing, but as they build and grow together and you get deeper into the story, you really begin to get a deeper sense of who James is. The entries are funny and personal and intimate and sad and exciting and whatever else.

Really really, a good read.

He is still maintaining the diary entries and you can subscribe to them on his website, www.americanelf.com

Megan Kirby says

Absolutely loved this compendium of Kochalka's early diary comic work. Was especially inspired by the chronicles of his failures—jobs canceled, promises broken. It was really encouraging to hold American Elf in my hands—a collection widely considered to be a paradigm of the diary comic form—and see that Kochalka was plagued with a lot of the same doubts I have as a writer and artist.

I'm a sucker for journal comics, and I love falling into the rhythm of someone's mundane daily life. American Elf is considered a classic for a clear reason. The strips balance humor and grief, poignant moments and moments of no meaning at all.

Sam Quixote says

Wow no reviews!! Ok, well Meet James Kochalka. At the time this diary starts it's 1998 and he's a fledgling comics artist. He lives in Vermont in a flat with his girlfriend Amy. He works part time as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant and Amy works in a school. Each day he draws and writes a 1-4 panel strip about his day. The panels are done in black and white and are about a single moment in that day that stands out for him.

The book is quite large, not quite A4 size but near that, and the pages run to about 400 or so. It's a massive brick of a book. When I found out about it this time last year I was a bit hesitant (especially with no reviews on Amazon to guide me!) but ordered it anyway. I'm so glad as I discovered a fantastic artist. I've now read about a dozen of Kochalka's books and the American Elf strips are among the best of his work.

It's a huge book but I became engrossed in Kochalka's world as I saw him go through the everyday things we all do but also see him get more popular and see his life change in other ways. His music becomes

marginally more well known but his cartooning becomes more popular and the American Elf strips develop with he and Amy deciding to start a family. In Volume 2 you see Kochalka move toward colour strips and the drawing becomes more refined. Looking at the latest American Elf strip on www.americanelf.com today 18 Aug 2009 and the first one way back in 1997 you can see how far he's come as an artist.

I also highly recommend his graphic novels "Fantastic Butterflies" and "Monkey Vs. Robot".

It's fun, it's got energy, and it tells the real life story of James and Amy Kochalka. American Elf Volume 1, the adventure starts here!
