



# Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers

*Sarnath Banerjee*

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## **Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers** Sarnath Banerjee

Eighteenth-century Calcutta. The second city of the Empire is teeming with scandalous gossip and rumour. Abravanel Ben Obadiah Ben Aharon Kabariti, Sephardic Jew from Syria and trader in novelties such as corsets, aphrodisiacs and zebras, befriends the British officers and the local elite by day and records their escapades by night in a leather-bound journal.

1950s Paris. A battered copy of the journal surfaces in a hole-in-the-wall antique shop in Montmartre.

London, 2002. A phone rings in the East End, late at night, announcing a death and an inheritance: a silver lighter, a vintage motorcycle, an ancient radio and The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers.

What follows is a bizarre chain of events involving eccentric zamindars, a decadent aristocrat with a passion for lady footballers, a psychic cartographer, a haunted office building and, at the centre of it all, Digital Dutta, neighbourhood historian and keeper of secrets.

Inspired by the legend of the Wandering Jew, this second work of fiction from India's foremost graphic novelist is an irreverent tale of illicit sex and drunken religiosity, which unravels new riddles with each reading.

## **Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers Details**

Date : Published January 9th 2008 by Penguin Global (first published January 2001)

ISBN : 9780144001088

Author : Sarnath Banerjee

Format : Paperback 280 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Asian Literature, Indian Literature, Cultural, India, Fiction

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# From Reader Review Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers for online ebook

## Pranay says

A graphic novel by an Indian author with a unique topic is always something to look forward to. The first chapter starts with a build up to duel between two English men in 18th Century Calcutta. The build up is filled with innumerable digressions and fizzles out without any substance. The book is full of digressions and has a weak plot.

The saving grace of the book is the author's unique illustration style which captures the city and the people of Calcutta. A one time read.

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## Ritika says

I have no idea what I think of this graphic novel. The narrative device is well- worn but some of the vignettes are interesting. Sadly, the book as a whole does not reach the heights some of the individual tales do. When the book ended, more or less at a point it had definitely no business ending at, I admit feeling let down.

But boy, this book does make a Kolkatan feel homesick. Ah, those North Calcutta bylanes, they never can fade from your memory.

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## Abhishek Roy says

This was the first book that I accidentally purchased owing to which I got involved in the world of Sarnath Banerjee. The graphic novel genre in India is something that needs to evolve and grow further. The period based storyline was wonderful and I finished the book at one go. The hints of comedy mixed with sarcasm made this one really memorable. I am not really fond of the ending though.

I purchased his other books Corridor and Harappa files after reading this one. However I firmly believe that this one is his absolute best.

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## ashok says

This graphic novel is an interesting proposition. It uses the literary device of story-within-a-story to expand its narrative scope across geographies and across time and space - with the core of the plot centered upon the city of Calcutta.

However it didnt quite work for me - some of the digressions seem forced and appear to have a purpose only for the sake of the literary device. This could have perhaps been a good 50-60 pages shorter and made a better read.

The art work is interesting - making use of pop culture advertisements, posters, photographs etc.

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## **Chandrima Samanta says**

The plus point of this book is the illustrations which really attracted me.

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## **Kabir Banerjee says**

Enjoyed Sarnath's ability to seamlessly weave in and out of fiction and nonfiction. It's tactfully done to the point where reality appears just as silly as his imagination. It's a fun story but lacks a satisfying ending.

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## **Nikhil says**

The line blurs between fiction and non fiction. The message could very well be that the wandering jew is present among us even today or it's just symbolism for the existence of evidence to prove every relationship. it's enjoyable. That's all that matters anyway.

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## **Bookchica says**

Sarnath Banerjee has found an unlikely source of inspiration in Indian publishing. Both his books have been very high in kitsch content from a couple of decades back.

Graphic novels, the genre in itself seems a bit rebellious in nature to traditional novels, so criticizing him of not sticking to the usual style seems to detract from the defiant spirit of the genre. But though his mixing of different print forms like old adverts, photos, naked women drawn on ruled notebook paper, history book illustrations is mildly interesting, its no different from a comic book attempt in TimeOut or a MTV collage.

Sarnath Banerjee's habit to use kitsch as a tool seems passe. This worked fairly well for his first book, mainly because of the nostalgic 'Ha Ha!' that looking at old movie posters or calendars propagating hygiene, evokes. Carrying the style through to his next book in a similar fashion takes away from the story telling.

He definitely has a story to tell, going by the oddball Calcutta characters and their eccentricities that he has threaded together using his comeback character, Digital Dutta. The decadent British and just plain crazy Babu's of old Calcutta would surely fill up a lot of pages with their antics.

But when the best illustration is actually a photo with black marker outlines on it, it doesn't say much for the illustrator.

In a graphic novel, you can say so much more with just a few well placed swirls. I would really like to see him do just that, be more brave with the illustrations.

I would say, go back to the drafting table and draw... just draw.

Visit [Encounter With Sarnath Banerjee](#) for an entertaining interview with the author.

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**Vidushi Kala says**

It's a treat not only for the eye but also for the mind. Sarnath Banerjee's surreal humour gets you going. This graphic novel is a treat for the surrealists and a must have in your collection.

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**Khalid Albaih says**

Interesting history and story telling but dragged on.

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**Tathagata Biswas says**

This graphic novel is a must read for all Kolkata-ites. The sketches are much poor though. But the angle and compositions are really good. The author may be an artist, but surely not a product from any art college.

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**Battameez says**

3.75 stars

This book fucks with my head, every time. This is my third time reading the book and that feeling hasn't gone away.

I really like Banerjee's narrative voice, as well as his unique art style. I've loved Corridor: A Graphic Novel, so the style is what drew me to this book. Definitely unlike any graphic novel I've read. I did enjoy the nostalgic moments of Calcutta in the late 80's, Digital Dutta is a treat wherever he shows up. The actual plot leaves me unmoved, but there is so much meandering into history and fabricated cartographies of both London and Calcutta, that it's hard to not love it.

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**Jasdeep Singh says**

"The importance of fish in the life of a Bengali is like the importance water in life of fish "

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**P says**

Dear Calcutta peeps,

please get over yourselves. If you can. And if that is not possible for you, do stop boring the rest of us with your predictable bhadrakok onanism (or, as we might call it, b.o or even bu, the bad smell of a stale self-

regard).

There are other stories in the world. Sometimes those stories are even in your city--but you would have to be less insular and less elitist to notice them.

Also, maybe take a look at a map some time to remind yourselves you are not a city-state in Europe but just another place in this brown country stuck over here among the rest of us Asians.

Thanks in advance!

Sincerely,  
an Uncharmed Reader

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### **Moushumi Ghosh says**

I have been meaning to read this book for ages. So I was hugely excited to come across it in the British Council Library. While it starts off with much promise, I find the ending very unsatisfactory. An afternoon read if you have nothing else to read.

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