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GRAPHICALLY FICTITIOUS

Sorry it's been over a week since the last entry, but I was bound and determined not to interfere with my vacation last week by blogging. Not that it's a chore; I just was vacationing from everything.

One of the things that I, like most everyone else, like to do on vacation is read. Some people use the time to catch up on the latest murder mystery. Some escape even further into the Romance novel. Some even rejuvenate with a self-help work of non-fiction. And then there's the person I ran into at lunch one day.

I was walking by a middle-aged woman sitting outside, enjoying the beautiful weather, and reading what I can only describe as a book big enough to put the latest Harry Potter novel to shame. This thing was 1,000 pages if it was one. Naturally, my curiosity got the better of me. I thought, "Wow, now here is someone of unique intelligence." Not that size matters, but most people shy away from *War and Peace*, *Gone with the Wind*, and even the aforementioned Potter series, just because it takes so long to read some of them. So I naturally thought this was someone with powerful gray matter.

So as I passed by, I glanced down to try and see what this Tower of Intellect was perusing. I couldn't make it out, so I politely asked, "Excuse me, but you seem engrossed in that book, and the sheer size of it has me wondering what it is?"

"Ooooooh, it's a GREAT graphic novel called" OK, to be honest, that's where I tuned out. She held it up for me to see the pages. Now, for those of you like me who have never read or even seen a graphic novel, that's a fancy word for comic book. I know some of you who read this may be huge fans of that genre. Admittedly, I've never read one, so they may be great. But it's a comic book. Yes, I'm sure it has a deeper story than those Flash or Archie comic books I read as a kid. Even more than the Calvin and Hobbes that I read as a younger adult. But it's a comic book, lady. A comic book. Seriously!

I'm not scoffing at people who read them. I'm *really* not. As I said, I still love a good Far Side collection or Calvin and Hobbes. I might even be persuaded to thumb through a Dennis the Menace. Just call the thing what it is - IT'S A COMIC BOOK, LADY!!!

She proceeded to tell me the story that this book told, but again, I could no more tell you what she said than if she were speaking Russian to me. I couldn't decide if I wanted to laugh or cry, I just knew I didn't want to do either in her face, so I focused and let her finish. To be fair, you could really tell she had a passion for this thing. And I know this sounds like I'm making fun, but I don't mean to be. I just think you should call it what it is. To me, it's kind of like reading a play - it's all dialogue. Yes, this one

had some pretty pictures, but when I read a book, I want to paint the pictures in my mind myself. Isn't that why we read? To stimulate our brains?

I guess there are ways in one of these things to get all the elements of a novel - theme, characterization, setting, etc. But it almost seems like a lazy way to read a book if you ask me. The descriptive writing in a non-graphic novel (am I really reduced to saying *that?*), the wonderful setting and scenery that only words can capture, the broad brushstrokes of a writer's pen, the perfect combination of simile and metaphors and symbolism, seem to be defeated by reading a comic bo..., errrr, a graphic novel.

When I think of how words on a printed page (alone, with no drawings for emphasis) can create the perfect picture, I'm reminded of that great scene in the movie, "Throw Momma From the Train," with Billy Crystal and Danny DeVito. Throughout the movie, Billy Crystal is trying to get the perfect beginning to a book he's writing. He believes nailing that first sentence is the key to a successful novel. He cites the "Call me Ishmael" reference from the beginning of *Moby Dick* as an example of how the beginning has to be memorable.

So he tries "The night was hot," and "The night was wet," and "The night was steamy," and tons of other combinations. Nothing works, causing great frustration. Then, later in the movie, as he continues to search for the perfect phrase to capture his audience, DeVito's mother looks up at him and says, "The night was sultry." Perfect. No matter that Crystal wanted to strangle her because she hit it the first time and he had tried for months without success. With "The night was sultry," we can all picture what he was trying to say. How do you draw *that* into a graphic novel?

The right words - WORDS, I said, lady - make a novel great. They make a poem sing. They make a movie script capture our imagination. Who knows, maybe they even make a graphic novel, well, graphic?