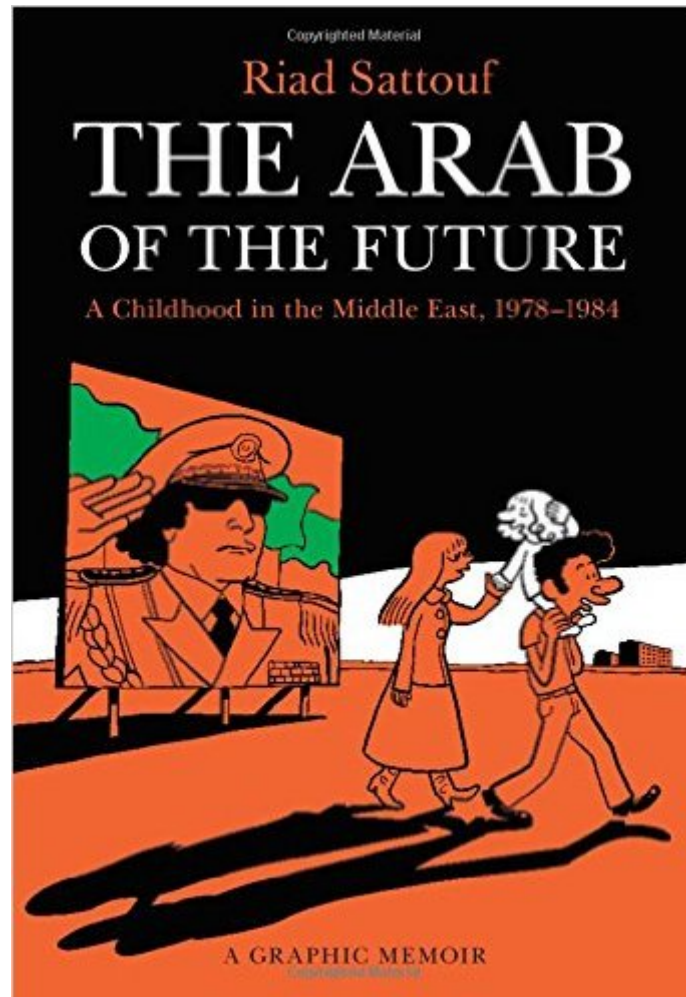


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The Arab Of The Future: A Childhood In The Middle East, 1978-1984: A Graphic Memoir



Synopsis

The Arab of the Future, the #1 French best-seller, tells the unforgettable story of Riad Sattouf's childhood, spent in the shadows of 3 dictators—Muammar Gaddafi, Hafez al-Assad, and his father. In striking, virtuoso graphic style that captures both the immediacy of childhood and the fervor of political idealism, Riad Sattouf recounts his nomadic childhood growing up in rural France, Gaddafi's Libya, and Assad's Syria—but always under the roof of his father, a Syrian Pan-Arabist who drags his family along in his pursuit of grandiose dreams for the Arab nation. Riad, delicate and wide-eyed, follows in the trail of his mismatched parents; his mother, a bookish French student, is as modest as his father is flamboyant. Venturing first to the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab State and then joining the family tribe in Homs, Syria, they hold fast to the vision of the paradise that always lies just around the corner. And hold they do, though food is scarce, children kill dogs for sport, and with locks banned, the Sattoufs come home one day to discover another family occupying their apartment. The ultimate outsider, Riad, with his flowing blond hair, is called the ultimate insult—Jewish. And in no time at all, his father has come up with yet another grand plan, moving from building a new people to building his own great palace. Brimming with life and dark humor, The Arab of the Future reveals the truth and texture of one eccentric family in an absurd Middle East, and also introduces a master cartoonist in a work destined to stand alongside Maus and Persepolis.

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Customer Reviews

I really can't decide how I feel about this book. I can't put my feelings into words. I gave it 4 stars because the graphics are great, and the sarcasm/humor is on point. No one can say otherwise. However, being an Arab and a Muslim myself, I feel torn about where I stand. Yes, this is a satiric account of a boy's life moving around between Libya, Syria and France. A boy who was born to a Syrian father and a French mother. It bothered me how acquiescent the mother seemed to be, it was actually quite annoying. For someone who is not Arab and was not raised in the Middle East, to give up her life so readily for an extremely politically opinionated Syrian man and live the life she has (according to Riad's account that is), it was frustrating. He portrayed her as a woman without a voice. Of course, this is only his account, and I can't be sure how credible or accurate it all is. I mean, we are talking about the life of a boy from the age of 2 to the age of about 6 years old. How can he remember his life at that age in such detail? And if he didn't and this is all based on experiences described by his family (mom, dad, grandparents etc.), then how accurate are those memories? Everyone remembers the same incident differently, so you can never actually be sure. In that sense, this memoir immediately lacks some of its credibility. On the other hand, there's the whole idea of simply taking things at face value and learning to laugh at oneself. And that's something Arabs are not very good at doing. We don't know how to laugh at ourselves and not take things too seriously. Myself included. We don't know how to be satirical or ironic, and those who do - such as Riad here - are always judged and looked at with mild disdain. We also tend to quickly take offense and attack. This book is full of satire, that's for sure. It highlights some key traditions and customs of Arabs - specifically Muslims. Such as the prayers and eating together and so on. I found myself having to constantly remind myself that this is a memoir dating back to early 1980s when things were very different back then. The fact is, nothing portrayed in the book is completely out of line (except we don't go around beating animals or killing them, even Arabs are horrified by those children's actions), and yet I still caught myself occasionally being offended. I've finished reading this book and I've made a conscious decision not to go looking for the other installments.

Entertaining, humorous and disturbing. The insights here are deeply real, very personal. You just want to know more -- how and why is this marriage holding together? When will it end and how? At times, this is a very painful account of a family in some very strange circumstances. It is also the amusing perspective of a tiny, quirky outsider who is forced to bridge different worlds. The insights into the Arabic mindset are electrifying and especially relevant. I will be looking for the next book. Superb.

This is an outstanding memoir. One must acknowledge that it takes place when the author is between 2 and 6. I will have to hunt down some interviews of the Mr. Sattouf, because most readers (including myself) find that his father, Syria and Libya all come across as a bit awful. Riad is half French and half Syrian, and his father (who is educated but incredibly sexist, racist and ethnocentric) hauls the family from France to Libya and then Syria so that he can secure a teaching position. Little Riad is fawned over by relatives for having blond hair. At one family event, he is sent into a room with the women and children and the food they are offered are the gnawed bones and scraps that the men have discarded from the other room where they are eating. Riad's father scoffs at French and Western culture and celebrates Syria, despite the human feces on the ground, rotten fruit, rude people, garbage everywhere and dead bodies hanging from scaffoldings. I find myself sympathetic for the mother, but I also am not sure how she put up with such an awful man (granted, there is nothing here that suggests he cheated on or beat her, but those aren't the requirements for a bad relationship). There are several funny moments, especially at the end on the plane. Riad has a good eye for detail and when he illustrates something that is tough to believe, he slides in "this actually happened" to let us know that he is not taking liberties. It's a fine work. I imagine that some Arabs will find this offensive, and that some Trumpists will cite it as an excuse to ban all Muslims. Both are wrong. Frankly, it's a great story that from a man raised in two worlds.

A very good example of what a young person growing up goes through. An interesting insight into life as an Arab by birth, with a good view of the conflict that can exist between a father and his son.

This book was an okay read, but I won't be seeking out the sequel. Was it a satirical look at Arab life through the stereotypes that exist or are they really middle of the road pooping, puppy stabbing barbarians? Is it an accurate view or was it simply telling the story through the warped view of a six year old where we are to assume things are exaggerated? Are we supposed to support his dominating father and submissive mother? I have no idea. I quickly grew frustrated with watching his father preach hate and move the family from one abusive or unsafe situation to the next, alienating the mother from her culture and family, without so much as a peep from her or her family. She was just horribly complicit. Once the book starts talking about Arabs pooping in the road, beating children, and stabbing puppies, I had no idea what type of book I was reading. It seemed like anti-middle eastern propaganda, but I also wasn't sure if maybe it was an accurate portrayal of what the author saw. It just seemed all over the place without a set narrative or direction, and I wonder how accurate the book can even be since it's based on the authors memories from when he was

2-6 years old.

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