PROFILE

Buddy Bradley

"I find now that Buddy's life is better than mine. I can't enjoy stories about this little shit any more! They just make me feel jealous and miserable that I still don't have a girlfriend and yet Buddy Bradley, who I used to enjoy looking down on as an example of a person with a life more pathetic than mine, does."

From the letters page of Hate, No. 4.

The comic fan's reputation precedes him or her (but they do tend to be hims). Doughy, anal-retentive, weak, doesn't like being touched, chronically intelligent. Comic fans don't even have the pleasurable awareness of a vicarious coolness around them that, say, record collectors or splatter video enthusiasts do. They console themselves with the knowledge that on Neptune it wouldn't matter.

Buddy Bradley is the comic fan's tough dream. For not only does he inhabit his own beautifully drawn comic book, Hate (six issues so far) by redoubtable Seattle artist Peter Bagge, he also wears his individuality, or rather his otherness, on his sleeve.

Buddy was first introduced to us along with the rest of his family in Bagge's previous comic book, Neat Stuff. Since the demise of that publication and the introduction of the newie, we have occasionally been allowed peeks at the lives of the other Bradleys. Bratty Butch, the younger brother, has gone from a squealing brat to a gun-toting neo-fascist, wearing an American flag T-shirt with the slogan "Try burning this, asshole". Their sister Babs, on the other hand, has two kids and a devout religious faith. All in all, the Bradley family went down the toilet—just as you'd have expected, given their wholehearted embrace of loserdom.

But not Buddy. Bagge appears to have accepted the challenge of turning his comic character (who we assume is at least slightly based on himself) into something slightly more three-dimensional than a terminally adolescent delinquent. In fact, this hard-drinking geek with hair in his eyes and a nose that takes up roughly a third of his face seems almost to be taking steps towards joining the human race.

Part of this improbable development is due, it appears, to his girlfriend Valerie—not that she is any less mixed up than him. "I've gone out with plenty of guys who were polite and charming and 'politically correct'," she tells her flatmate Lisa as the object of her affections lies passed out on her bed, exhausted from delivering eight pages of drunken abuse. "And to be honest, they bored the piss out of me. That's why a part of me would hate to see Buddy 'clean up his act'. He may be a crude customer, but at least you always know what he's thinking."

In Hate No. 6 Buddy and Valerie visit Val's parents. "We're not rich, OK?" she screams when they reach her family home. "We were an average family, just like yours! Not rich: average!" A genuine female comic character in comics today is a rare find—even in these post-punk, post-everything days. In fact Bagge's previous main girl character, Girly Girl, was not much more than a horrifically ugly child in a frilly petticoat who liked to smash people up.

It's not just Buddy's love life that's changed, though. When Butch finds him sharing a house with a "goonie looking coon", he can't believe it. "Who woulda thought?" he continues. "I mean, you weren't exactly too fond of coloured people when you lived back home." Buddy's response is atypically subdued: "Yeah, well, I don't want to talk about it" is all he will say. Later, after braining junior with a bottle of beer, Buddy can't sleep. "Where on earth is all that repressed hostility coming from?" he wonders. "I grew up in the same environment he did but I ain't nearly as fucked up!"

The once bombastic, intolerant Buddy seems to have developed an almost liberal sensitivity towards ethnic minorities. After labelling a hairdresser friend of Valerie's a "sweaty faggot" he falls into conversation about music with her gay friend Phil. "Tell me, do you own a CD player?" he asks, to which Phil replies: "Of course not." "Hmmm," thinks Buddy. "I guess this guy's alright."

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Buddy, life's hell and then you die, man. Personally, though, unlike the Hate reader quoted above, I find the neurotic whinings of you and yours just go to make me feel much better about my life. That's Hate's therapy.