Hope and Heartbreak in Kyle Seibel's "Hey You Assholes"

About four years ago I first encountered Kyle Seibel's work while volunteering with this publication (Wrath-Bearing Tree). He submitted a poignant animated story, "Lovebirds," which surprised and delighted me. It is unusual to experience surprise let alone delight at my age when encountering new fiction. This was during COVID. A vignette that didn't beat you over the head with meaning, the story unfolded in a way that allowed the reader to experience the ups and the downs (the hope and the heartbreak) without judgement. I enjoyed it greatly.

So it was that I became greatly excited when Kyle announced that it was part of a book and that the book, *Hey You Assholes*, had a publisher. That was a couple years later, maybe 2022 or 2023. I bought five copies. The publisher shuttered and I got no books.

Fast forward to early March of this year, when between solicitations for money for progressive and reactionary causes I found an email from Kyle telling me that the book had found a new home and in fact was out in paperback.

I’m glad that there are still some honorable (and wise!) publishers out there, and that Kyle found one. Kyle sent me a copy of *Hey You Assholes*, which I read with such pleasure that I was moved to write this review. If some day he ever finds the address of the publisher who stiffed him and me, I only hope that he lets me know and has a seat in the car for when we go on an appropriately misbegotten but emotionally necessary mission of vengeance.

Kyle’s stories have that thing every writer hopes for: a voice, a distinct identity, and a message. Some of the stories in *Hey You Assholes* are very short, no more than a couple pages, snapshots of some weird or messed up situation. Others are proper short stories with a beginning, middle and end. All of them bang.

He writes the kind of story I prefer in short fiction; snapshots of an emotion or a situation. Usually the situation is confused and involves a professional or personal

relationship; someone wants something that another person can't or won't give. Ambition and love thwarted. Few of the stories are, like "Lovebirds," optimistic or encouraging; most of them follow people who derail themselves or who find themselves betrayed. Many of Seibel's protagonists remind me of the main character and narrator in Denis Johnson's *Jesus Son* who just keeps fucking up, no matter how hard he wants to succeed and improve. But they don't give up.

Why would I review this for WBT? Have we turned into another literary magazine, adrift from our original purpose and mission? Absolutely not; *Hey You Assholes* was written by a veteran (Seibel was in the Navy) and is full of stories set on ships and in garrison; many characters and interactions are informed by the mechanical logic of the service, which is a time-honored fabric by which to weave the tapestry that is a person's experience of life. Reading about life on a boat, or on the west coast of California, one cannot help but think that these stories would be just at home in Carthage or Athens; different settings for the wandering, weird life one encounters while navigating a wandering and weird world.

It took me the better part of a Sunday to read *Hey You Assholes*, and if you like books the way I do, you won't regret it. If you're strapped for time, keep it by your bedside and read a story or two before going to bed. It will make you laugh, and it will make you think. It will also support a good publisher, which apparently is an increasingly rare thing in this crazy world. In case you need more reasons to buy an awesome book.