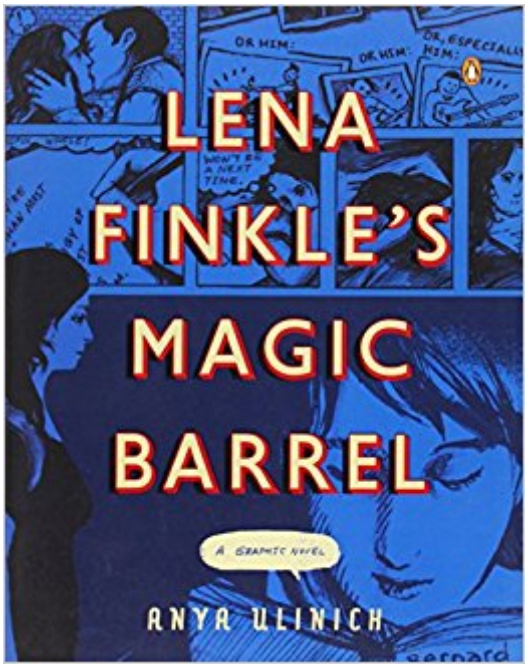
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Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel: A Graphic Novel



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Synopsis

*AÃ Â New York TimesÃ Â Notable Book*Ã¢â ¬Å“Funny, painful, outrageous . . . Anya Ulinich is the David Sedaris of Russian-American cartoonists.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Gary ShteyngartAnya Ulinich turns her sharp eye toward the strange, often unmooring world of Ã¢â ¬Å“grown-upÃ¢â ¬Â• dating in this darkly comic graphic novel. After her fifteen-year marriage ends, Lena Finkle gets an eye-opening education in love, sex, and loss when she embarks on a string of online dates, all while raising her two teenage daughters. The Vampire of Bensonhurst, the Orphan, Disaster Man, and the Diamond Psychiatrist are just a few of the unforgettable characters she meets along the way. Evoking Louis C. K.Ã¢â ¬â„¢s humor and Amy WinehouseÃ¢â ¬â„¢s longing and anguish, and paying homage to Malamud and Chekhov, Lena FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel is a funny and moving story, beautifully told.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Lena FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magic BarrelÃ¢â ¬Å“Lena FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel transcends its influences so thoroughly it creates a form, a language, all its own. . . . The simplest way to describe it is to say that itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s about LenaÃ¢â ¬â„¢s efforts to reconcile herself to sex and love (through OkCupid, among other contemporary intercessions), but that doesnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t do justice to the complexity of what Ulinich has in mind. Rather, Lena FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel works as something of a confessional, a series of notebooks that excavate its protagonistÃ¢â ¬â„¢s life and psyche from the inside. . . . This is the power of the graphic novel, that it not only tells but

also shows us, that by integrating images into the narrative, it draws us into LenaÃ¢ ¬â„¢s experience with the force of memory. Ulinich meansÃ¢ ¬â •not unlike Pekar in American Splendor or Karl Ove Knausgaard in My StruggleÃ¢ ¬â •to set aside literature with a capital L (whatever that is) in favor of the epic textures of the day-to-day.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •David Ulin, Los Angeles TimesÃ¢ ¬Å“An engrossing graphic novel about the vicissitudes of love, family, immigration, and art . . . Its intricate layering of memory, speech, and time exemplifies the sophistication and confidence with which Ulinich, a novelist who trained as a visual artist, approaches comics. . . . Her book can stand beside the work of other writers whoÃ¢ ¬â„¢ve immigrated from the former Soviet UnionÃ¢ ¬â •Gary Shteyngart, David Bezmozgis, and Keith Gessen. . . . She leaves us, her readers, with an unmistakable sense of having encountered a rare, indeed magical, talent.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •Ayelet Waldman, The New York Times Book ReviewÃ¢ ¬Å“Relentlessly in search of a self, Lena Finkle is armed with an OkCupid account, an irrepressible inner voice rendered as a miniature Lena, and a penchant for quickly reducing others to bit players in her one-woman show. UlinichÃ¢ ¬â„¢s subjectÃ¢ ¬â •of sex leading to a womanÃ¢ ¬â„¢s understanding of herself rather than a perfect unionÃ¢ ¬â •shouldnÃ¢ ¬â„¢t be noteworthy at this point in pop culture. But somehow it still is. . . . Pitched toward the same pop culture consumers who are drawn into the best serial shows, Lena FinkleÃ¢ ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel is a fast read but not a dumb one, and, like good television, the visual information is working both to reinforce, and to offer a different take on, the language.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •The New York TimesÃ¢ ¬Å“A bold new graphic novel . . . LenaÃ¢ ¬â„¢s online-dating match-ups range from promising to disastrous, exposing the sexy sensibility and bookish panache of her darkly delightful Russian-American soul.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •ElleÃ¢ ¬Å“A very personal (and universal) book about romance and a breakup. . . . ItÃ¢ ¬â„¢s smart, and itÃ¢ ¬â„¢s wise in a clean-cut journalistic way, and itÃ¢ ¬â„¢s incredibly, incredibly funnyÃ¢ ¬â •and the painting is beautiful.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •SlateÃ¢ ¬Å“Splendid . . . Ulinich packs Lena FinkleÃ¢ ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel with wit, making the most of the absurdities and indignities of online dating. To that, she adds insight into the immigrant experience and startling descriptions of lovesickness that comes from suffering it for the first time at a relatively late age. For its richness and depth, Lena FinkleÃ¢ ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel belongs alongside Marjane SatrapiÃ¢ ¬â„¢s Persepolis and Alison BechdelÃ¢ ¬â„¢s Fun Home. . . . Books such as thisÃ¢ ¬â •beautifully conceived, smartly told, imaginatively illustratedÃ¢ ¬â •are gifts. Serious readers who havenÃ¢ ¬â„¢t ventured into visual storytelling should do themselves a favor. Try this one.Ã¢ ¬Â•Ã¢ ¬â •Cleveland Plain DealerÃ¢ ¬Å“Anya UlinichÃ¢ ¬â„¢s semi-autobiographical work kept me guessing about

FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fateÃ¢â ¬â •will this Russian-American divorcÃƒÂ©e overcome her insecurities, her passive-aggressive mother, and a rogueÃ¢â ¬â„¢s gallery of Mr. Wrongs to revive her romantic mojo? . . . Her writing is so fine-edged that Magic Barrel effortlessly balances its poignant and humorous episodes.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •The San Diego Union-TribuneÃ¢â ¬Å“I really enjoyed Lena FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel, which I read in one sitting. . . . ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s wonderfully evocative and honest and teaches you things about life that only its author knows.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Eric Alterman, TheNation.comÃ¢â ¬Å“An honest and absorbing tragicomedy about love, sex, and everything that goes with them. . . . The result is an affecting portrait of how we become who we are and how we try desperately to be who we want.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Publishers WeeklyÃ¢â ¬Å“An entertaining intellect . . . Ulinich follows her debut with a graphic novel chronicling a young immigrant writerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s adventures through family, friendship, and sex. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s fitting that UlinichÃ¢â ¬â„¢s protagonist shares a first name with the creator of Girls. . . . The book shares terrain with the Dunham verse, being the story of a creative young womanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s emotional fallout from sexual exploits in neobohemia. . . . engagingly expressed as short, comic stripÃ¢â ¬â œlike vignettes.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Kirkus ReviewsÃ¢â ¬Å“Funny, painful, outrageous . . . Anya Ulinich is the David Sedaris of Russian-American cartoonists.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Gary Shteyngart, author of Super Sad True Love Story and Little FailureÃ¢â ¬Å“Intelligent, sincere, and painfully funny, Lena FinkleÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Magic Barrel isÃ Â the divorced womenÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Maus.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Etgar Keret, author of The Nimrod Flipout and Suddenly, A Knock on the DoorÃ¢â ¬Å“Fun, lively, dirty, honest, outrageous, and deep.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Jami Attenberg, author of The Melting SeasonÃ Â and The MiddlesteinsÃ¢â ¬Å“This book will make you laugh so hard youÃ¢â ¬â„¢ll get stares from strangers. In crisp, mordant prose, Anya Ulinich lampoons bohemian Brooklyn parents, bad aspiring writers, and elusive emo boys. But make no mistake: she is deadly serious on female desire and her ultimate subject, the search for selfhood. Lena Finkle will stay with you long after her journey ends.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Amy Sohn, author of The Actress and Prospect Park WestÃ¢â ¬Å“Hilarious and heartbreaking in exactly equal measure. Anya UlinichÃ¢â ¬â„¢s uncompromising artistic vision is glorious, unique, and rare.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Emily Gould, author of And the Heart Says Whatever and Friendship

Anya Ulinich is the critically acclaimed author of Petropolis, which was awarded the Goldberg Prize, named a best book of the year by The Christian Science Monitor and The Village Voice, and translated into ten languages. Her stories and essays have appeared in The New York Times, Newsweek, n+1, and Zoetrope: All-Story, and she has taught at New York University and Gotham

WritersÃ¢â ¬â„¢ Workshop. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Lena Finkle’s is the autobiographic memoir of writer and graphic artist Anya Ulinich.A priori, the story of a divorced mother of two, late 30s, coming back into the dating world sounds too mundane or uncool to be the subject of a graphic novel. However, Ulinich’s alter ego Lena Finkle is not your usual woman. It is Ulinich’s mutifacetal personality and self, her honesty about who she is, and the way she narrates the story what makes the book the interesting entertaining story it is.The book is engaging and entertaining. This is a book for adults as there are nudity, sex scenes and adult themes in it. The story is far from linear because Lena’s adventures in dating, which are pathetic-kinda-funny and very entertaining for the reader, are accompanied by flashbacks of her past childhood and teens ages in Russia and her first years as immigrant in America, conversations with her mother, best friends and lovers.Ulinich is both a graphic artist and a writer, so this graphic memoir is a much visual as it is readable, with much more words than most graphic novels. I found fascinating the way she incorporates long two-people conversations into an image (even with her alternative thoughts while talking!), with a sort of puzzle-ish compound of bubbles that adjust cosily to each other.Regarding the illustration system, Ulinich alternates very realistic virtuoso drawing with childish caricature-ish drawing when she speaks of her childhood and teens in Russia. I love the graphic depiction of her anxiety after the final episode with The Orphan, which is just brilliant.Ulinich is very honest about who she is, how she feels, and how she approaches reality, relationships, love, sex, immigration, gender roles, and Jewish and national identity. She is also honest about her image. She does not beautify herself in the book. She draws herself a bit fatty and ugly at times, with dark circles under her eyes! Ulinich even shares her own bullxt. The little "mini-Lena", a sort of evil on her shoulder, appears when Lena is fooling herself or fooling others, ignoring things she should not, or just to remind herself to follow common sense.I confess that I expected a closure at the end of the book. However, life is not always a novel or has a happy ending, or has an ending, as living is a process. We don’t know what happens to Lena, but we somewhat intuit that she is ready for something good because we see her change and evolve into a more mature woman throughout the book.I would love a follow up graphic novel!I have to say that this rendition for Kindle is way superior to most graphic novels converted to Kindle format, as it allows enlarging of the image as a whole, moving it around, and bookmaking, so it makes the reading less painful and it allows the reader to zoom in the image. On the other hand, the downloadable file size is humongous.

Russian-Jewish immigrants are writing some really fascinating books these days! Here’s a new one,

published this week: Lena Finkle’s Magic Barrel by Anya Ulinich. Since I preordered it, I was able to read it yesterday. I’m not really accustomed to reading graphic novels, so I probably read too fast -- but I completely enjoyed the story of Lena Finkle’s efforts to find love in a baffling world, and the visual nature of the presentation.Almost every book by Russian-Jewish immigrants that I’ve read has a lot of food themes. Anya von Bremzen’s Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking and Lara Vapnyar’s Broccoli and Other Tales of Food and Love focus almost entirely on food in various contexts.Here’s one fun thing about Lena Finkle’s Magic Barrel: the author doesn’t get all nostalgic about Russian foods. The title character/narrator and her lover -- a not-Jewish man from a wealthy American family who hates money -- go out for very cheap Chinese dumplings. They eat burritos and pizza, also very cheap. But no Salad Olivier! No cabbage in any form! No Soviet food!I’m impressed that Ulinich’s character is so assimilated in so many aspects of her life -- but still focused as well on her childhood in Russia. I enjoyed everything about her love stories and about her relationships with her two husbands, her Russian lover from her childhood (who keeps showing up again), her rich American lover, her less successful OKCupid dates, and her all-too-Russian mother and all-too-American daughters. I appreciated her references to classic Russian and other literature, including obviously to Bernard Malamud’s Magic Barrel. The foods are a detail, but they reinforce the theme of how thoroughly American her life has become.I want to follow up with more Russian-immigrant fiction. Gary Shteyngart’s Absurdistan and some of his New Yorker stories were great, and I want to read his more recent books. A Replacement Life by Boris Fishman also tempts me.

When Lena Finkle is sent to Russia for a week to lecture about being a fancy AMERICAN NOVELIST, she reconnects with an old flame, a "creature that was half man, half nostalgia." Though he is married, she’s smitten and spends scads of time contemplating a life with this man. When a female friend discovers that 37-year-old Lena has only been with three men, she suggests Lena try dating and gaining more experience before committing to one man again. And where to meet a veritable smorgasbord of men? Why, online dating, of course!Lena’s dating experiences are both hilarious and heartbreaking. With her daughters away for a few weeks, she has a date a night with men ranging from a "guy who grew up in a cult" to "a revolutionary puppeteer" to "a blind clown." Most of the dates are not detailed in the book, though that would have been something to see. Don’t worry, there are plenty of cringe-worthy dates for the reader to tag along on.Please don’t consider my rating/review to be a recommendation. This book struck a very personal chord with me at this particular time in my life. You see, while I did not exactly marry young (29 is lifelong spinster

territory in some cultures!), I'd only ever had one previous long-term relationship. This line from the book - "...people who get together young and stay together a long time are like two bonsai trees planted in the same pot...they don't grow much..." - really hit me. Have I sacrificed something by spending 23 years with the same man? I've spent a lot of time squashing around with a bad case of the What-ifs.Well, judging from Lena's experiences, I really haven't missed much - some laughs, some heartbreak, some good stories to share. Would I trade it all for an evening with a blind clown? Sometimes, I'm tempted to say yes, but...As Lena's friend Eloise explains, "I love waking up every morning next to a man who really loves me..."Yup. I do.

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