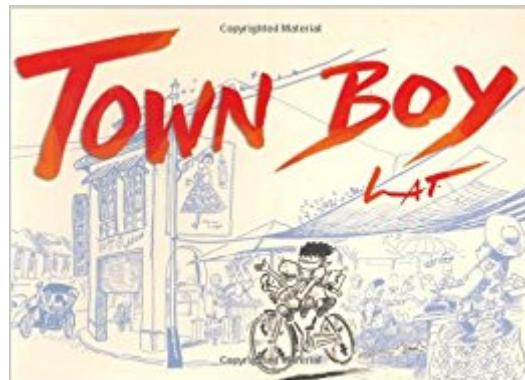


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Town Boy



Synopsis

Malaysian teenager Mat makes a life-changing move from the quiet kampung where he was born to Ipoh, the rapidly industrializing nearby town. Living far from his rural roots at a boarding school, he discovers bustling streets, modern music, heady literature, budding romance, and through it all his growing passion for art. The companion novel to the critically acclaimed *Kampung Boy*, *Town Boy* offers more of Lat's delicious storytelling and enchanting pen-and-ink artwork. At once exotic and familiar, his cartoon world builds a bridge for readers into another world, another culture, and another time.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 5 Up  •The follow-up to the critically successful *Kampung Boy* (Roaring Brook, 2006), this volume spans an equal number of years but with a less-successful focus. When Mat is 10, his family moves from the kampung to the town of Ipoh, and he has to adjust to the new environment. He meets Frankie, a Chinese boy his age, and is introduced to American rock-and-roll and mild rebellion. Readers then transition to 1968 where Mat is a well-acculturated teen, balancing being cool and getting decent grades, and is attracted to the prettiest girl in town. This volume strays from anecdote to wistful remembrance without any real sense of direction. While the large, silent depictions of the town, burgeoning with nascent industry and Westernization, are atmospheric and

quite informative to one who has the visual literacy to decode them as historical depictions, the narration provides readers with almost no helpful context for interpretation. It finds itself content to flit between amusing moments without any real development, save for nods to the fact that Mat is a talented artist— which, it is implied, eventually allowed the author to bring readers this volume. Sweet but meandering, the visual details and charming cartooning fail to provide sufficient cogent substance to make this a successful sequel. — Benjamin Russell, Belmont High School, NH Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This sequel to *Kampung Boy* (2006) takes up the Malaysian cartoonist's memoir in the 1960s, at the point where he arrives in Ipoh to continue his education at a boarding school. Lat's family moves to town as well, but Lat focuses more on his social life than his studies or his parents. Ipoh is a multicultural place, and Lat's friends include Indians, Chinese, and other south Asians. His best friend, Frankie, is ethnic Chinese, and, with Frankie by his side, Lat learns about record players, cheating at PE, and how to ask a girl to the movies. Page layout is more varied than in *Kampung Boy*. There are still many full-page illustrations, and Lat continues to depict himself as a mop-topped, bandy-legged kid, but there are also intervening passages laid out in panels and some wondrously detailed crowd scenes that consume entire spreads. Occasionally, characters speak in their native languages, which remain untranslated, but this won't get in the way of the reader's enjoyment; it simply adds another dimension to Lat's impressive world building. Goldsmith, Francisca

Great book, brings back nostalgic memories.

A friend of a friend recommended this and *Kampung Boy* before I took a trip to Malaysia. I'm so glad I read them--even though they depict Malaysia as it was decades ago, I could still see some of the traces of these stories in the people and the society. And the drawings are wonderful--they made me laugh out loud!

Town Boy continues *Kampung Boy* with a look at life in a Malaysian small city. Lat focuses on the kids he knew growing up and the relationships between them all - an eye-opener for most Americans because his experiences are quite different and yet strike a familiar chord.

I've lived in Malaysia and really liked this book. I'm not sure if someone who hadn't lived in Malaysia would find this book as enjoyable as I did.

Though Town Boy can be enjoyed on its own, I would definitely recommend that readers read Kampung Boy first as its the prequel to this. Kampung Boy follows a Malay boy, Mat's [Lat himself] adventures through childhood till age ten when he gets a scholarship to a boarding school in Ipoh, a town in Malaysia. Town Boy follows Mat's exploits from ages 10-17...and its a bittersweet journey, as he finds a best friend in a Chinese boy, Frankie who like Mat enjoys Western music and other activities that pre-teen boys enjoyed those days [sixties]. Of course Mat and company get into all sorts of mischief and grow into typical teenagers, obsessed with the opposite sex. There is one bit in the book that I found to be so true - the art teacher tells the boys [Mat goes to an all boys' school] that anything can be art, but makes the fatal mistake of mentioning that nude models are common in the West...of course, when he sets the boys a drawing assignment, they all come up with...you guessed it, pictures of women in various states of undress! But, its not just the comical aspect of Lat's work here that is so appealing. The friendship between Mat and Frankie is developed throughout the book, so that by the time the boys reach 17 and make plans for their respective futures, we the readers feel like we've taken that journey with them. That's Lat's gift - the comical and the human coming together and flowing seamlessly in telling the story. I highly recommend this and the rest of Lat's works. Here are some other works by Lat that I would recommend: Lat and His Lot Again! Lat Gets Lost Better Lat than Never Be Serious Lat It's a Lat, Lat, Lat, Lat World Lat's Lot, and many more [I'm not sure if carries the other titles, but readers might be able to get them through other sources online].

Last year I went gaga over a Malaysian comic from the seventies. Doesn't a sentence that like sound cool? Like I'm some kind of obscure comic enthusiast with a penchant for the best overseas comics of decades past? The truth is far less sexy, I'm afraid. First Second brought to our American shores the comic book — Kampung Boy, a title that originally appeared in Malaysia long ago. Initially the format didn't intrigue me, but after a test run I found that I liked Lat (the one-namer author) and his work quite a lot. The story was an unpretentious memoir of growing up in a small kampung (village) and the typical mischievous boy adventures that occurred in one kid's life. At the end of the book our hero leaves his home to go to Ipoh to pursue his studies. This year the sequel, "Town Boy" is out and continues Lat's story. With all the humor and visual aplomb of the first book, this second story crosses the critical boundary from being a boy to becoming a man. Our hero, Mat, has moved

from village boy to city boy and the transition has come with a host of different changes. His family has moved to Ipoh with him and the life and excitement that comes with such a transition is thrilling to them all. Other changes are in the works too. Mat befriends Frankie, a Chinese student, and when they discover their mutual love of music and records the two really hit it off. "Town Boy" follows Mat's growth and adolescence. He falls head over heels in love with Normah, a stunner of a girl. He goes to dances, learns art, and is even in the marching band. But age brings change and soon Mat finds himself losing his best friend and trying to decide whether or not to follow in his father's footsteps or find his own path through life. What I really loved was how much of this book was a buddy story. Mat has never really had a best friend until this moment and Frankie's character offers a direct connection to the time in which this story takes place. After all, he's a fan of contemporary music, so that means a lot of Ricky Nelson, Paul Anka, and The Beatles. The cover indicates how important their friendship is. I also really appreciated the character of Normah "the girl". In the hero's eyes, every man she passes looks at her, but when you see her in person (not just a fleeting eyebrow) you see that though she is quite pretty, she's also very sensible looking. No overthrust boobs or pouty lips. Just a gal who wears jeans and t-shirts and is very much the girl next door. First Second took a bit of a risk publishing a graphic novel as thin and long as "Kampung Boy". Reading the sequel, I was struck by how necessary that move really was. To force this book into a square rather than a rectangle would be to cut off crucial portions of the action (not to mention some great visual gags). It would be the equivalent of panning and scanning a great film. So many portions of the book rely on full landscapes for the joke or the idea to make sense too. At one point we learn that Normah is officially the hottest girl in town. Yet our first glimpse of her is the top half of her head exiting a frame as an entire street scene of men on bikes, buses, and cars stare agog. It's great. Almost as good, really, as the moment when our two heroes attempt to cheat a race by running across an illegal bridge, unknowingly heading towards their principal and disciplinary master hiding in the bushes at the far far far end. I also really gained an appreciation for Lat's art. For example, in one scene we see our hero explaining to his family at dinner how great it would be to own a record player. The next panel shows his father giving us, the viewers, a skeptical sideways glance. Lat does this entirely with the eyes and the eyebrows. It's subtle but you catch the meaning immediately. It has been said that Matt Groening, creator of The Simpsons, has been a fan of Lat for years and I definitely believe it. They both have an eye for getting just the right amount of slack-jawed idiocy in a character's face. I was sorry not to see more of the dad in this book. He was such a strong character in the first story, and though you get a hint of that in the beginning of this book, for the most part he's relegated to the background. I've heard some criticisms of "Town Boy"

that says that this is a weaker follow-up to its predecessor than it had to be. I don't necessarily agree with that. Certainly there's less mischief involved. But where "Kampung Boy" dealt with the fears and trials of a boy, "Town Boy" assumed the much less physical and more emotional rigors of a young man. If the story slows, the artistic sensibilities make up for it by being more sophisticated. Recently I was reading Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and at one point the author mentioned how different comic traditions are from one culture to another sometimes. Symbols that might seem universal in America, like a moth flying from a purse to indicate a character's poverty, don't translate well overseas, and vice-versa. Yet Lat's story doesn't suffer, as far as I can tell, from this particular form of culture shock. Wavy lines over cow patties still mean smell. Lines around the fingers indicate movement and action. Lat could have been influenced by Western comic artists early on, or maybe Malaysia happens to know the same symbols we do. It's hard to say, but at least the book is easy to understand for American kids and adults alike. Altogether, it's a great sequel and well-worth a glance. Even if you've never read the original, "Town Boy" deserves a little love. A great discovery for anyone, regardless of age.

Lat, otherwise known as Kampung Boy, returns in this second volume of his life story, "Town Boy," detailing the second half of his adolescence in the small town of Ipoh in Malaysia. It's an autobiographical tale and Lat masterfully shares with us his tale of growing up in the 1960's in Malaysia--relating not a tale of someone famous or that has great life changes happen to them, but that of the everyday person. A person that we can all relate to, because we can connect with him. We can see our own friends and classmates in the people that Lat describes and remember our own slightly awkward adolescence. And even though Lat illustrates how things are different in his world, there is much that is similar. And while its illustrations are seemingly simple, they are compelling and help us know the characters better. I highly recommend this book and its prequel (*Kampung Boy*) to anyone and everyone, but particularly to the younger generation. Not as a chance to illustrate the differences between cultures, but a chance to illustrate the similarities between cultures and across generations.

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