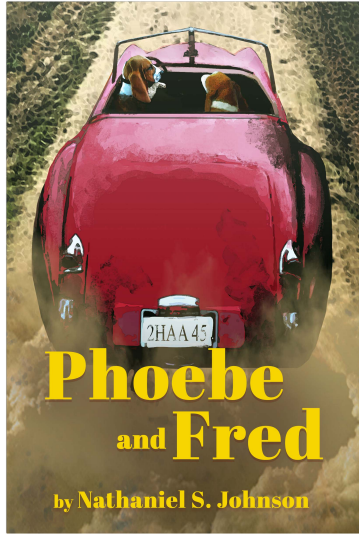




INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



Phoebe and Fred

by Nathaniel S. Johnson

Genre: General Fiction / Humor

Reviewed by Toni Woodruff

A zany, lighthearted drive through the town square with a pair of brilliant, lovable basset hounds

The Watsons live in a big house up on a hill, and the whole town is talking about them. Or, maybe more accurately, they're talking about their dogs.

Phoebe and Fred, a pair of basset hounds, have been drinking some Basset Brain Broth, watching educational television, and eating better food than

you. This doesn't usually bring out near-magical intelligence in dogs, but Phoebe and Fred are no normal dogs.

They're bassets. They can talk, drive, and in this gossip-heavy small town, they're capturing the attention of everyone. Some civilians, like Reverend Treadwell, aren't exactly excited about it. But can those who are unhappy really do anything to stop the bassets from driving?

Phoebe and Fred is a dog lover's dream. Who wouldn't want to wake up to find that your dogs are not only capable of talking and doing math but driving you to work when you're too sleepy in the morning? Author Nathaniel S. Johnson really fulfills the dog-parent fantasy with this light and funny book. If you're in the mood for something that's easy to read, silly to read, and sweet to read, you've come to the right place.

I particularly appreciated the ways in which the town is talking about them. An ensemble voice is shared by quirky characters in this odd small town, and they've

either got a problem with the way the Watsons are doing doggie business or they're fascinated by it. It's hard to pull off the voices of so many different characters in a story so small, but Johnson does it with seeming ease. I could see this author penning a brilliant small town mystery even if it is unrelated to dogs driving cars.

At times, I did long for a bit more from the story though. For the most part, the main pull of the story is that these bassets are very smart, but whenever I'm imagining it'll take a new step in another silly enjoyable direction, it mentions the driving and the math and the reverend again. I'm *definitely* on board with genius dogs, but I do wish Johnson unleashed his creativity and let the weirdness drive us to a place that's even weirder. It may need to include a content warning for those who are feeling a bit sensitive about your beloved former dog, too.

In the end, *Phoebe and Fred* is a novella you'll definitely be telling your spouse and your neighbor and your mom about. It's weird and funny and light and short and has dog main characters, so there's a lot of love to go around.