



# White Rapids

*Pascal Blanchet*

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## **White Rapids** Pascal Blanchet **The rise and fall of a Canadian town**

Award-winning Quebecois cartoonist Pascal Blanchet's graphic novel is a compelling account of the rise and fall of the small northern town of White Rapids. In the first English translation of his work, Blanchet seamlessly blends fact and fiction as he weaves together the official history of the town and snapshots of the quotidian life of its residents. Founded in 1928 in an isolated region of Quebec forest, the town was conceived and constructed by the Shawinigan Water & Power Company to function as a fully equipped, self-contained living community for workers at the nearby dam and their families. Intended as an incentive to lure workers to the remote and inaccessible region, White Rapids provided its residents with all the luxuries of middle-class modern life in a pastoral setting-until the town was abruptly shut down in 1971, when the company changed hands.

Blanchet's unique, streamlined, retro-inspired aesthetic draws on art deco and fifties modernist design to vividly conjure up idyllic scenes of lazy summer days and crisp winter nights in White Rapids, transporting the reader back to a more innocent time.

## **White Rapids Details**

Date : Published October 30th 2007 by Drawn and Quarterly (first published October 1st 2006)

ISBN : 9781897299241

Author : Pascal Blanchet

Format : Paperback 156 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Fiction, Bande Dessinée, Historical, Historical Fiction

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## From Reader Review White Rapids for online ebook

### Stef says

Absolutely gorgeous and creative artwork, reminiscent of the illustration of the era this story depicts, although "story" seems a generous term here. I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop during this story of a small, idyllic village being built around a power plant--surely, disaster will strike? Surely, SOMETHING will happen? It doesn't. The village is created, then eventually the plant closes, and everyone moves away, abandoning the town. It wasn't clear to me what the point of this really was. Did the author have ties to this village? What's going on with the village now? (I'm just assuming the village was real--is it?) The story ends just as what feels like the REAL story -- the village's aftermath -- is meant to begin.

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### Heather says

I have never read anything with this kind of structure before. I found it really fascinating and enjoyable. However, I did find some of the text difficult to read. Would still recommend this book though.

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### Chang says

Most of the stars are for the amazing design.

Story-wise, it's not much. It's about the small town of White Rapids, a company town built for the employees of a hydro-electric dam.

But the way Pascal Blanchet uses images to tell a story is amazing.

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### Jen says

I like a graphic novel now and then - this one was more about the images and less about the text. The images are amazing, clean design. The story is an interesting piece of history I hadn't known.

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### Michael says

I absolutely love this book and have now read it twice (it doesn't take long.) It tells the rise and fall of White Rapids a town in Canada that springs up after a hydro-electric dam is built in a remote area in the 20s and 30s.

The visuals and type in this book are like nothing I've seen in a graphic novel. The back cover describes it as a "streamlined, retro-inspired aesthetic [that] draws on Art Deco and fifties modernist design..." That sounds about right.

This book reminds me of a Richard Russo novel. We don't get to know any of the townfolk like we would in one of his books, but the setting and feel are similar.

If you want to see some interiors of the book go to

<http://tinyurl.com/5mjvd4>

and you can check out Pascal Blanchet's website here:

<http://www.pascalblanchet.ca/>

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## **Sarah says**

Great graphic novel--an excellent choice (a must read) for someone who wants to experience the variety that graphic novels offer.

Wonderful Art Deco and fifties illustrations using only brown and orange hues.

Craftwise- Uses news articles, maps, "discography," dialogue and more. I've seen company towns and this book shows them well, from the individuals to the community, to the fish no one can catch. Emotional power of no words right after page "1971" to 3 spreads showing empty rooms in house, then people leaving. Great page turns and great use of blank pages.

Perfect example of a book without a "real" character; the town is the character.

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## **A says**

Two stars for the story, and an extra for the artwork. The latter is pretty fly: all art deco-y and 1950's modern-ish. The layout and text integration are also interesting.

The story follows the rise and demise of a community built for employees of a Quebec hydroelectric company. We see the community's inception in the company's office tower (heavily reminiscent of Hudsucker Industries), watch the little village grow and flourish, and finally bid it adieu, as improved transportation between company headquarters and the dam it supports makes it irrelevant.

An interesting enough tale in theory, but as it's presented isn't wildly absorbing. I just never...felt it. I didn't give a dam (heh!) about any of the townfolk and their weird little experiment in forging a community out of whole cloth or the subtle tragedy of relocation. In more capable storytelling hands, I get the sense that this coulda been something.

Mostly, this book is real purty to look at.

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## **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

Read this at the same time you see/read Our Town by Thornton Wilder.

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## **Boommtl says**

Livre difficilement classable (bande-dessinée à ma bibliothèque) , une véritable oeuvre d'art! J'aurais aimé voir un petit supplément à la fin du récit du genre entrevue avec des gens ayant vécu à Rapide-Blanc.

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## **Bryn (Plus Others) says**

This is a beautiful graphic novel about a small, very isolated Quebec town that was created in the 1930s in order to staff a hydroelectric dam project, and eventually destroyed when the project no longer needed staff. Based on a combination of history and imagination, there is not so much a story here as a set of idyllic impressions -- the town being founded, community life, how people kept busy during the harsh winters. I enjoyed it for the clever, heartfelt art, which is very much a take on the period it is portraying, but I did not find that it left much behind when I had finished reading except for a curiosity about the real town behind these nostalgic images.

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## **Lindsay says**

What a lovely little book. The storytelling is sparse, which is just fine because the stylistic beauty totally carries this little tale of a short-lived, rural Canadian town.

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## **Sam Quixote says**

In the early `20s, the Shawinigan Water & Power Company decides to make more money by setting up a dam further upriver near Quebec in an isolated region. In order to make the dam work they decide to build a town in the area for the workers and it's called Rapide Blanc. The dam and town are built and the workers move in. The town and company prosper from the dam and live well through the years until 1971 when the Shawinigan Water & Power Company is sold and the dam shut down. With the dam shut, the workers leave Rapide Blanc to seek work elsewhere and the town becomes all but abandoned. This is the story Pascal Blanchet writes and draws beautifully in this book.

While the story might be a bit light as to almost be no story at all, merely a retelling of facts that happened in the 20th century, it's the art that really grabs the attention. Blanchet's style is reminiscent of `50s art-deco and it's really well produced here. Every scene is lovingly brought to life like Christmas parties, office meetings and holidays and yet exaggerated to suit the style of flamboyant storytelling. The President of the Shawinigan Water & Power Company and the goings on in that office are similar to the Coen Brothers' film "Hudsucker Proxy" both aesthetically and in tone.

It's a really well produced book and the rise and fall of Rapide Blanc mirrors similar stories of towns that flourished and then emptied such as mining towns in the UK. Blanchet does well to tell a familiar story well and imbue it with a distinctive appearance to enrich it for the reader. Not particularly essential reading but enjoyable nonetheless.

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## **Michael says**

Awesome. Highly recommended.

Blanchet's art is what grabs you most. The story is about the birth and disappearance of a small Canadian town called Rapide Blanc (White Rapids), which was created in 1928 as a home to workers who were employed in the operation of a dam far from the Canadian road system.

Done in the style a pastel, 1950s advertising/pop/design-intense poster, each page is a single illustration. Blanchet incorporate's the town's history into the design of each page, and casts Rapide Blanc as a idyllic image of smalltown utopia. Such was probably not really the case in a far north Canadian village, but White Rapids is more style and beautiful artwork than fully rounded narrative.

It's a beautiful book. If you see a copy, I strongly recommend paging through it. Nothing can sell you more than seeing the pages themselves.

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## **Steve says**

White Rapids is a graphic novel that defies description in many ways, for to even call it a graphic "novel" seems a bit of a misnomer. The book gives an account of life in the small, idyllic town of Rapide Blanc, a place that was at once both pastoral and filled with modern conveniences, both isolated from the world and perfectly in tune with the ideals of the time. It is in many ways the paragon of 1950s ideals, like an image straight out of *Leave it to Beaver* or *The Andy Griffith Show*, and thus it seems almost too good to be true, so much an archetype that it must have been constructed.

And it was in fact constructed, but that also doesn't prevent it from being true. Rapide Blanc was a real town built in the late 1920s in a secluded area of Quebec by a Canadian power company. The Shawinigan Water and Power Company had put up a dam on the St. Maurice River, and they erected the town as a home for the workers there. As an incentive to entice their employees to move to such a remote location, the company made sure that the town was fully stocked with all manner of luxuries and amenities, as well as every convenience necessary for modern life.

The book then is a stunning portrait of this setting, brimming with nostalgia. Pascal Blanchet, the artist behind *White Rapids*, is primarily known as an illustrator, and it shows in his work. His Art Deco depictions of the town look like they could have leapt directly out of magazine advertisements of the time period. Similarly his use of color throughout the book is inspired, as he limits his color palette to orange and brown, casting everything with a sepia hue that evokes a feeling of a bygone era.

Blanchet also brilliantly uses the montage technique of combining his narration with the pictures, actually working the words into the image itself. A key example can be found in the early parts of the book, when he places his narration of the board meeting in which the town's construction was planned in the office directory

of the company's corporate headquarters. In another instance, he fits his narration of the town's trips to the local cinema into the image of closing credits rolling across the silver screen, juxtaposed with a recreation of an iconic image from *Singing in the Rain*.

There are no characters to speak of in the book, however, save for the head of the Shawnigan Water and Power Company who orders his architects to build the village and approves the plans. (A case could be made that the only other "character" in the book is a fish nicknamed the General, whose mammoth size and uncanny ability to elude capture becomes the stuff of local legend.) The plot is similarly threadbare and focuses simply on how the town was initially built in 1928 and why it was eventually shut down in 1971.

Instead Blanchet fills the book with snapshots of life in this beautiful little town, showing us charming visions of life in the 1930s as the people of Rapide Blanc shop at the Co-op, clown around at the local "beach," and throw elaborate dinner parties. On every page, he uses his picturesque imagery to send the reader back to a simpler time, as he does when he shows the town in winter in the '40s: children frolicking in the snow and building snowmen, people kissing under mistletoe at Christmas gatherings, a boy perched on Santa's lap.

If there is one drawback to the book, then, it is that it seems in some ways a bit inconsequential. As stated in the beginning, it is difficult to classify this book as a graphic "novel" when there is so little to it in the end, and at a price of \$27.95 the book's gossamer "plot" might not seem worth the steep price to some. But cost notwithstanding, *White Rapids* is still a superlative work of art that fondly recalls the days of yesteryear and sends its readers back to a scenic setting that seems to have sprung from dreams.

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### **Mireille Asselin says**

J'ai adoré ce livre! Histoire, images, la justesse, petit bonheur de vacances des Fêtes! Merci!

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