



Easy Chain

Evan Dara

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--So what's the book about?
--It about this British guy who goes to The University of Chicago?
--Nah. And it really isn't about his getting this, like, social illness--
--The one where... Come on: it's impossible to become allergic to lying--
--Exactly -- the book isn't about that at all...

One of the best novels of the decade... The magic of his writing and what he accomplishes through it is...manifested in how mesmerizing, hypnotic and just plain readable Evan Dara is. --The Quarterly Conversation

It's good to know that writers like Dara exist, capable of bravely carrying the flame [with this] very intricately crafted and grandly conceived postmodern novel. --The Review of Contemporary Fiction

Recalls David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest: both books offer a jigsaw puzzle of different styles, and construct a remarkably clever and complex plot with many mysteries embedded for the reader to discover after multiple readings. --American Book Review, Stephen J. Burn

If there is any literary justice [The Easy Chain] will appear sometime around 2050 in a New York Review of Books Classics edition with a forward by the aging Dave Eggers. --Conversational Reading

In a just world, this would be the literary event of the year. --The Reading Experience

Just brilliant...a testament to [Dara's] incredible skill. This is, without a doubt, my favorite book of the year. This is a great book. --Triple R Radio (Melbourne, Australia)

This masterpiece left us drooling for days on end. We couldn't put it down. --Lowdown Magazine (Germany/UK)

Uncommon and outstanding. As surely as there will always be an avant-garde, Dara will be there and whatever new guard emerges, they will be sure to have read his books. --The Front Table

Easy Chain Details

Date : Published August 8th 2008 by Not Avail

ISBN : 9780980226607

Author : Evan Dara

Format : Paperback 502 pages

Genre : Fiction, Novels



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From Reader Review Easy Chain for online ebook

Geoffrey says

Do I understand this book? Not very well! But goddamn is it ever stylistically heady stuff.

Steve says

The publisher of *The Easy Chain*--which publisher I'm starting to think is author Evan Dara himself--shot me an email for a pre-release offer for a copy (officially released Aug 8, 2008; I got mine June 16 and read it in 10 days) I guess because I have a personal page for Dara's first novel *The Lost Scrapbook*. [I've since created a page for *The Easy Chain* as well.]

I enjoyed it a LOT and am already trying to figure out when I can get a re-read in.

The novel is the story of Lincoln Selwyn, a Briton who came to Chicago by way of The Netherlands, and who in a short time becomes the toast of the town's business and social scenes. Then something happens that *blows the narrative to smithereens...*

Now, I dig Harry Potter as much as the next guy :-) but my tastes can also run to the unconventional. (Not *Age Of Wire & String* unconventional, mind you, but *House Of Leaves*, *Infinite Jest*, *Gold Bug Variations* are all lifetime favorites.) Unresolved plotlines do not bother me too much, so long as I feel the writing is worth reading. *The Easy Chain* is not especially easy at all, and it might not satisfy readers who liked *The Lost Scrapbook*'s satisfying resolution. (Although honestly, if a reader stuck with *The Lost Scrapbook* long enough to actually experience that resolution, he/she just might have the patience for *The Easy Chain* after all.) In this, his second novel, Dara goes nuts in eight different directions, and if you're up for it, I say DIVE IN. There's all sorts of cool fun to be had here. Stream of consciousness, whack-a-mole POV (Lost Scrapbook style), verse! (VERSE I SAY!)...heck, one section is written from the POV of friggin' *dirt*.

BUT...I've only read it once: there could be--I'm sure there is--much underlying structure that I missed (that big section at the end with the autistic girl??) as I did my first trip through each of the aforementioned lifetime favorites. Still a fascinating read for me. Like I said, it's already on my reread list.

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*MILD SPOILER ALERT: In one memorable scene, a guy just sitting in a restaurant triggers a chain of events that culminates with a large US town being erased from the earth's surface, person by person, building by building, brick by brick, molecule by molecule! (Even weirder for me, I happened to be visiting this very town while I was reading the book, and in fact was sitting on a bench in the very plaza I was reading about! One of the most bizarre experiences I've ever had! I mean, I'm sure that happens to New Yorkers all the time since so many stories are set there. But for a North Carolinian visiting Colorado?? What are the odds?)

Jeff T. says

A friend from the Bay Area told me he saw this at a Berkeley bookstore, and I was insanely excited to read it because *The Lost Scrapbook* is a favorite of mine. However, I couldn't find the book anywhere, and for

months the only reference I saw to it online was a cover-imageless listing on Amazon.com. I was disappointed that I did not live in the same dimension in which this book existed. Eventually, I found it on the publisher's web site, so I ordered it.

The style in which it is written is striking. Much of it is written in free dialogue--no quotes, no removed narrative voice or exposition. Faceless, nameless people talk about the protagonist, Lincoln Selwyn; that's the bulk of the novel. As it progresses, we follow Lincoln around as he meets with various entrepreneurs, con men, investors, and straight-up nutbags. Those are my favorite scenes, because they give Dara a chance to do what he does best--float oddball theories and mess around with the worlds he creates.

Dara also breaks into repetitive, not-so-hot verse and incoherent ramblings and stuffs a bunch of blank pages in there. The novel seems to explode a few times. The good parts are so good that I'll follow him just about anywhere, but Dara definitely tried my patience in this book.

But: skronk!

No one seems to know who Evan Dara is, by the way. I've been speculating about it with a friend since we read *The Lost Scrapbook* together, and this novel didn't do much to dissuade me from our theory: that Evan Dara is a pen name for David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen, Richard Powers, William T Vollmann, or all of them--a collaborative project. If I had to pick one of these writers to be the man behind the Evan Dara mask, it would be DFW. I like to imagine Wallace writing under a pen name to escape the pressure of following *Infinite Jest*. Of course, the big problem with that theory is that *The Lost Scrapbook* came out in 95 and *Infinite Jest* came out in 96. Still, there are plenty of stylistic similarities and shared preoccupations between the two writers. In the final pages of *Easy Chain*, Dara even uses a pet phrase of DFW's ("and but so") and makes a Wittgenstein reference (DFW's Broom of the System is full of them). Also, the end of *Easy Chain* makes for a pretty moving *Goodbye Cruel World*. Now I'm just bumming myself out.

Rand says

Dara's project seems to be one of con/dis/trans-junctive (dis)integration.

Whereas Dara's first novel, *The Lost Scrapbook*, focuses upon a disparate civic unit and its corporate overlord within a pre-futureshock timeframe, *The Easy Chain*'s concern is upon an insanely talented and charismatic (and troubled) Continental wunderkind and the midwest (well, mostly Chicago) during the cusp of the stock market bubble.

This prose flows more than *The Lost Scrapbook* but is also more abrupt at times.

Eugene says

THE LOST SCRAPBOOK debuted dara's original technique of narrative splicing--a kind of collage work done in series, rather than in space. THE EASY CHAIN operates in similar fashion and, like THE LOST SCRAPBOOK, is a political novel, one made of principally two things: ideas--witty analysis of our inept and corrupt culture--and yarns. dara's specialty is in fact the yarn, the almost wholesome tale, ending with a zinger or even a moral. on their own they would be nice bits of entertainment, strung together in series they

make something else, at best it makes a convincing group portraiture of our rattled time... it's a strange accomplishment, and the only one i could think to relate it to was the reaction had after watching linklater's *WAKING LIFE*, where a series of undergraduate-y philosophical discussions, in aggregate, has the larger wallop of showing that we are a species of similar concerns, with similar self-designed thought experiments, and indeed similar fantasies.

it is a slightly lopsided novel—though i don't think it's at all the half loaf that one review had it. the first half has a better-defined gambit, which then disintegrates it's not quite clear how effectively... its lead is a character who happens to be extremely charismatic. that's his super-power—given without much of an origin story. and in the first half of the book we get to watch him wield this power against wealthier chicago. Lincoln “vaulted to the top of the city’s social hierarchy, slept with the majority of its first daughters and racked up an unimaginable fortune.” the second half of the novel then significantly drops the story of Lincoln, concerning itself only obliquely with him and his unexplained reversal. this half has some admittedly outrageous and not-always-successful gambits, including odd punctuation to denote voice stresses, a poor attempt at some kind of echo-affected poetry, and what i think was a long narrative from the POV of a piece of dust. i'm not sure. it gets a little wacky.

but there are really fantastic parts throughout, setpieces, yarns mostly, unsmug moral tales that show us both the hypocrisies and possibilities for hope in our consumerist endtimes. a fantastic one near the end about how a hippie food joint gets taken over and saved by a “one man Information Counterrevolution,” that is: a man of silence (324). another hilarious story concerns a pair of unsavvy buddhists trying to go into business (to practice right livelihood) and getting all kinds of screwed.

other idea riffs are almost equally engaging as his stories. a few eloquent rants about our advertising-based culture where dara defines terms—the “skonk” and “conicons”—needed to make it run; one extremely prescient bit about how markets reward response, not value (187); and here is dara on how progress has us lose sight of fundamental values, the big picture, in our driven chase to get granular:

“In the libraries, he had also seen the affinity between progress and reduction. Day after day, in one library after another, he had noticed the cadenzas of rapt attention played to minutiae, as larger concerns grew foggy with neglect. Increasing acuity of perception driving wider blindness, evident & necessary visions falling on eyes without feeling. It was evolutionary: to continue, to flourish & prosper, whittle yourself to the barest functional minimum, then pass this on. Again, reason has produced its flipside, history has worked its dull revenge” (429).

Downward says

this novel, which is mostly concerned with secondhand accounts of Lincoln Selwyn (a charming british immigrant, who becomes a tycoon of many things) and his exploits leading up to his disappearance. Linked throughout are the vocalizations of various absurdist get-rich-quick schemes, lampooning capitalist ambitions of people who refer to themselves as promosexuals: that is, the fetishization of self promotion. it's almost all unattributed dialogue, with about a hundred pages toward the end that are a numbingly phonetically repetitive poem. the dna (poem aside) here is Gaddis, all the way. What feels like this whole novel is a direct descendant of the party scenes in *The Recognitions*. The ambition alone here is impressive, but it slows and sputters at parts and not all its narrative risks pay off emotionally.

karen says

quick edit three years later to say that i love that when you look up "easy chain" here on goodreads, the second-place match is "the holy bible" by anonymous. pretty perfect, since evan dara is my anonymous deity, and his books are my bibles. meaning, "they give me my faith, but i probably haven't read them as thoroughly as i should." but i digress.

evan dara is not for everyone, but he is one of my all-time favorites. which of course means all of his books are difficult to get ahold of, because that's how the world treats things that appeal to me. he writes huge muddled messy nonlinear whooshes of books that become like a duststorm consuming the reader and leaving us all (even the people not actively reading the book - all of us) breathless and dizzy but crying "when will you write again??"

but he is stubborn and mysterious and no one really knows much about him, although people say he is actually one of many different, already-established authors: richard powers, william vollmann, thomas pynchon, david foster wallace - for someone who very few people have read, he has developed a cult following of amateur detectives/stalkers who would love to read his diary... this is what it says about him on wikipedia.org : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evan_Dara. its brevity makes him even more mysterious. me, i don't care about the mystery part; or i do, because it is cool, but it's not relevant. whoever he is, i want him to keep writing. or at least i want him to fight to get *lost scrapbook* back into print, and making this one easier to get. no one likes an author who is withholding.

i should write this when i am able to make more sense. right now, it is not a strength of mine. i will fix this tomorrow. but feel free to put it on your to-read shelves for now.

in short, and for now. it is untidy, in a really compelling way, and is perfect for people who hate a predictable book.

(i should not write book reviews at work - naughty)

Ian Scuffling says

While I think The Easy Chain is a little hairy with all its experiments in narrative and form, I can't help but admire it for taking the leap and diving head first into new territories. Don't miss this one.

Trenton says

A hundred pages in or so, I'm finding it amazing. I have the feeling Mr. Dara has done it again. After finishing though, I have to say that I was a bit lost in the later portions. Lost in the lyrical, rhythmic and consistently beautiful writing, but also confounded by the import and meaning behind that writing.

Simon Robs says

"Lincoln Selwyn, a young Briton, set Chicago ablaze. Over the course of the last nine months, this charismatic blond with the irresistible accent vaulted to the top of Chicago's social hierarchy, slept with the majority of its first daughters and racked up an unimaginable fortune. Then he walked away, leaving a dazzled city to grieve, and to figure it all out." (There's whiff of Gaddis "JR" up/down locus - jabber start jabber finish.)

And 'figure it all out' you'll be going as this thoroughly engaging the reader, come along slashing prose that bounce steps POVs, lit device & splice technique sometimes full-on 4:33 Cage whiteouts sometimes pages of chopped dio or clipped & spiced Dickensian hyphenated sprawl; a truly mixed blend of pomo fusion pipping at "skonk" and/or "truth" and/or ... Cogito ergo sum, some.

Reread status = affirmative. Should add, this 5star rating hot from just-read really liked book, I'm a Chi-towner of origin know all the places in book and so, am favorably biased. But still!

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

Please.
Read.
Evan.
Dara.

Jeff Falzone says

- well it's really something way beyond what anybody expe-

-it was and, yes, it did but don't let anybody tell you that this one has the glare suggested by...what? by last chances, or, no. It's the pages that are blank I'm talking about.

-But the book is more than that. This one somehow manages to glow from within, whereas the last scrapbook he wrote don't touch it at all like that. No, no. I'm only comparing to suggest what should be obvious. Dara

-Dara pops, rolls and rams this mo' fo' right down your throat and, b#@%#, it's not only the fact that he reveals a dude you only see through oth- you only/cause he makes Lincoln, the main dude, only be the projection of a disparate party of voices. So, see, as you read on and on beyond the notching and ratchelling that Dara is setting up via the "p[lot}", it almost does, yea, take on a light from within itself.

-but nobody understands that source of that light, even those who let Caspier whip them up into an epistemological fit of pleasure. Because this book hates the upper-class pleasures of Tom Wolfe and Andy Beathimulant. This book eat their breakfast and sans the Socratic epitaphs waiting for the sunday paper, baby. This book explodes right in the middle of its own excellence, kiddo. This book evokes only the cash, reversing the charges to change you won't ever give to the guy with his hand wispily and wastefully

extended. Because this/yeabut/ no this book/ yea BUT/ NO BECAUSE THIS BOOK/

- YEA , but you're leaving out what. oh can't you, can't you see can't you know that this is over and beyond what you ever wanted. you wanted this to be an empty void or a space to praise and angry and

a space a space to praise

without the shucks or locks or poses

a space a trace to praise

without the shills or shouts our roses

a space to praise a space

without the shocks or shouts or poses

...

.....

.....

a failed attempt to not mock but unlock and it's gross what just happened here

DAra's not failed the water in a city that want to give it to the \$. Da 'a wants a pool in which expectations replace the desire to get tanner. 'ara is expecting us to lock down and let it get lit from the :]]]]within.

Christopher Waller says

This is a very weird book
