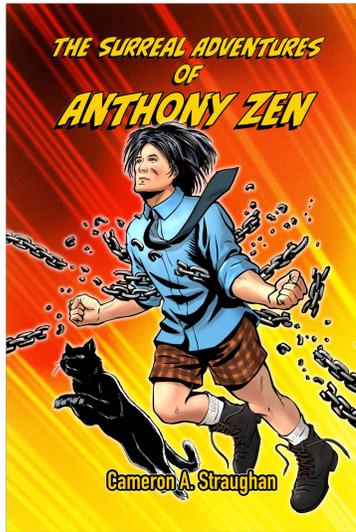




# INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



## *The Surreal Adventures of Anthony Zen*

By Cameron A. Straughan

Genre: Urban Fantasy

Reviewed by Joshua Bligh

---

**A one-man anthology of surreal antics scaled up until every installment is a supernova of absurdity**

Cameron A. Straughan's *The Surreal Adventures of Anthony Zen* is a collection of snapshot stories following the eponymous Anthony Zen as he navigates quagmire after quagmire of daily life, all too often after having forgotten to put on his trousers.

He attends his job, his parents come to visit, he collects round objects. Normal enough, right? Let's also mention that his commute is a 32-mile jog plagued by aggressive giraffes, his mother staples notes to his chin, and one of his more recent round-object-acquisitions is a turnip gifted to him by his boss (a literal, curly-tailed swine).

Part slapstick, part Saturday morning cartoon, part fever-dream, *The Surreal Adventures of Anthony Zen* covers a vast amount of ground in under 200 pages, events unfolding at a pace that is not so much break-neck, but neck-disintegrating. From work to family to relationships to shopping to Shakespeare, Straughan sends his character into a slew of situations to rework and rewire the reader's perceptions of even the most mundane features of life. Each installment of this absurdist story collection takes the reader along, rubberbanding them into situations that may start familiar, but rapidly diverge into the surreal, only to come full circle and then see the absurdity of the things we take as normal.

Straughan opens one chapter with the line, “*For some people, fun is an acquired taste.*” But for both Anthony Zen and his creator, that certainly is not the case.

For every single story, in every single line, you can see the author rolling up his sleeves and wrangling fun into every corner of his stories. This playful and dauntless attitude ensures that the author never shrinks away from the chance to keep beating out a rapid rhythm of events, every nook of which is filled with a new surprise. One moment your eyebrows settle back into place, the next they are shooting back up.

All of which makes these escapades best digested in measured doses, partitioned out for the occasional side diet of insanity and some escapist fun. With the absence of an overarching plot or in-depth characters, the book can start to have a sense of weightlessness to it, which ends up as both its most significant strength and the feature that may not mesh with every reader, particularly those who prefer having a narrative and fleshed out characters. However, for audiences who enjoy a Looney Toons-esque spectacle with their Saturday morning breakfast, Zen’s adventures will make an excellent side dish.

As a one-man exquisite corpse game of sorts, *The Surreal Adventures* lives up to its title and then goes beyond to new heights ad absurdum, literally. While it may lack a coherent narrative, it puts in the leg work of carrying the reader away from reality with a playful lightness that never shows even a hint of giving out. Bite off a piece of this book from time to time if you want to see what play for the sake of play is like. Pants are optional.