

Arca

Van Jensen

Jesse Lonergan, Illustrator

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Age, class, and lies affect a space-borne society in the science fiction graphic novel *Arca*.

Effie will turn eighteen soon, at which point she'll stop serving the "citizens"—the rich aristocracy of a large spaceship called *Arca*, launched to flee decaying Earth years earlier. She'll soon take her place as a "settler," preparing for the day the ship reaches a planet to colonize. A sinister discovery leads her to question what she's been told, though, and sets her on a path toward revolution.

Mysterious and suspenseful, the book depicts a regimented, role-driven society maintained for the benefit of the wealthy. Effie is an appealing heroine whose secret pursuit of education differentiates her from her non-literate peers and thrusts her into a leadership role. Political commentary on power and justice is present, underlying Effie's efforts to learn more about the system she's grown up within and to change it.

The book's art includes myriad details that enrich the story while keeping sharp focus on the narrative. For example, a confrontation between Effie and the *Arca*'s leader takes place on the ship's farm, in a setting that looks like a sunny day on Earth except for vent grates and some discolored panels in the "sky." The inventive use of inset panels and borders helps to maintain a dynamic flow throughout the book, while allowing an awe-inspiring sense of scale, as when a flashback shows the *Arca* being built, or when a character falls from a great height inside the ship.

Set in outer space, *Arca* is a thoughtful graphic novel in which a young woman reshapes her unfair society.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2023)

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