

★ **Bear**

**Staffan Gnosspelius**

Seven Stories Press (Jan 17, 2023)

Hardcover \$19.95 (80pp)

978-1-64421-231-8

A depressed bear finds friendship with a hare in the wordless, emotional illustrated book *Bear*.

A bear with a cone stuck on his head struggles to free himself in a number of ways, but nothing works. A hare tries to help without success; he is heaped with the bear's invectives and venom. The bear wanders off, encountering a monster and a bear trap, while the hare waits nearby, ever patient, forgiving, and encouraging. When the bear does free himself, it presents a new challenge as the nature of the animals' relationship changes. In frustration and desperation, the bear puts the cone back on, but as his former problems re-emerge, the hare helps him to remove the cone once and for all.

The book is a powerful visual metaphor for depression and its effects. The cone's origin is not revealed, but this only makes the message more universal and relatable as the bear struggles to bear the burden of his affliction. The book ends with the two animals seated together in peace, the cone resting between them, a representation of the ongoing weight of mental illness on their friendship.

The book's artwork is gorgeous and emotive, with incredible detail in some panels and simple sketches in others, so that weight and complexity are manipulated for maximum impact. Though most of the book is black and white, the rare use of color is representative, and the final illustration uses it to hint at a more promising future.

*Bear* is an outstanding graphic story—an example of the power of images to communicate complicated feelings.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2023)

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