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Tales from the Farm

POSTED: Thursday, May 10, 2007

Essex County Vol 1: Tales from the Farm
 Author: Jeff Lemire
 Publisher: Top Shelf Comics
 ISBN-10: 1891830880
 ISBN-13: 978-1891830884

Xeric Award-winning cartoonist Jeff Lemire (Lost Dogs) brings a lonely Ontario farm brilliantly to life in this wonderful graphic novel.

Lester, a young orphan is living on this vast and lonely place with his Uncle Ken, a bachelor who clearly has no idea what to do with the boy. Lester continually wears a cape and mask and wanders the farm imagining that he is watching for aliens. His uncle doesn't understand him but desperately wants to build some kind of relationship with him. He invites him to watch hockey games on television, but Lester avoids it and sits in his room along watching the same game. It's heartbreaking.

One day Lester runs into Jimmy Lebeuf, gas station attendant and damaged ex-hockey star. Jimmy doesn't think Lester is strange for wearing his cape and mask and he completely believes in the possibility of an imminent alien invasion. The two bond and slowly Lester starts to come to life. Uncle Ken finds out and is clearly upset at the two's connection. Flashbacks to Lester's mother dying of cancer give the story added depth and insight into Lester's and Jimmy's connection.

Tales from the Farm is illustrated in sparse, blocky yet amazingly detailed drawings that are imbued with so much emotion and a spare, raw beauty. Each page is a delight and so much is conveyed without words. The strain and miscommunication between Lester and Uncle Ken is written on their faces as clearly as if a whole chapter had been written in text. It's beautiful and so well done.

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