

A Graphic Novel / Comic Series Proposal

**Small Wonders**

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Written by Matt Moscato

Illustrated by Sean Fitzgibbon

Harvest Sun Press, LLC  
Editorial Office

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Matthew Moscato, Publisher  
4109 Broken Arrow Cove  
Springdale, AR 72764

Phone: 479-283-4000 / Fax: 505-526-6930

E-mail: [info@harvestsunpress.com](mailto:info@harvestsunpress.com) / Website: [www.harvestsunpress.com](http://www.harvestsunpress.com)

## Book Synopsis

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### Small Wonders\*

A potential graphic novel series with a diverse cast of characters and subtle multicultural themes, *Small Wonders* features crisp and classic black & white comic art with slick, heavy inking of stories filled with both humor and mystery: ranging from tales of the paranormal to the schoolyard antics of an adventurous trio of oddly adult-minded yet winsome children. (In fact, “graphic novel” has become more a marketing term, and *Small Wonders* may better be described as a collection of four interconnected main stories.) *Small Wonders* opens with an eccentric and haunted apartment building located in an anonymous American town. Readers will delight in the varied and quirky backdrop cast of minor characters and apartment residents, along with the charming and poignant escapades and witty exchanges of three extraordinary childhood friends: Nico Paz, a Mexican immigrant who crossed the border with her father; Anaba Harjo, a Native American and Nico’s best friend; and Philippe, an African American with autism and Nico and Anaba’s trustworthy companion and sidekick. An element of the supernatural enters the story with the apartment’s resident ghost that haunts the top floor; and a darker, more brooding aspect lurks in the form of Nico’s father, Gilberto, who works as the apartment manager. Gilberto will eventually have to come to terms with the sinister and tragic past from Mexico that claimed the life of his beloved and deceased wife—an episode that ultimately resolves in a climatic chronicle of stolen identity and revenge.

## Market Appeal and Sales Potential:

With some brief but dutiful nods to the action or superhero genre (as rendered with young Philippe's theatrical though almost touching homemade costume), the *Small Wonders* series largely encompasses a lively mix of distinctly branded humor and literary epic in a similar vein as such influential predecessors in comics like the seminal Hernandez brothers and Daniel Clowes. Moreover, the authentic characters and carefully woven narratives work in complete harmony with the standout artwork of what is an undeniably stirring, new voice in comics: artist, Sean Fitzgibbon (*DomestiCATed*, *The Horror of Party Beach*). The finely drawn and emotive character portraits—as well as Fitzgibbon's precision detail and eye for architecture and background scenery—have the power to grab a reader's attention with any given singular panel. *Small Wonders* also provides a sprinkling of accounts of village and city settings in Mexico, including meticulous and often faithful representations of real life locations: namely the bustling Guadalajara and the largely unknown but fascinating town of El Téul—all of which will be greatly enhanced by the visual talents of Fitzgibbon. And such foreign locals as depicted by first-hand experience often have a consistent appeal with readers of comics and graphic novels (i.e. Jessica Abel's *La Perdida*, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Gilbert Hernandez's *Palomar* to name just a few). Yet *Small Wonders* manages the difficult task of maintaining that flare and edginess appealing to so many readers of independent comics while also casting a somewhat wider net for a younger or at least more inclusive readership: for one thing, *Small Wonders* is almost completely devoid of commonly offensive language and nudity. And although such elements admittedly can be strengths for some properties, that risqué combination more frequently presents an insurmountable barrier to reaching a broader audience. Another benefit: the straightforward narrative style and cultural diversity expressed also extend the appeal far beyond that rather limited and oft-parodied category of comics readers—single, male WASPs.

*Small Wonders* thus clearly achieves a unique balance that is ideal for a major publisher's marketing campaign: it has both a highly viable, specific target audience (the strong and fast-increasing independent comics and graphic novel readership), as well as mass-market appeal for the trade. In all respects, *Small Wonders* is a perfectly timed product (exemplified by the many publishing houses scrambling to create graphic novel imprints and with national retailers like Barnes & Noble as of late being anxious to find additional graphic novels of slightly more mainstream interest). Yet the previously stated solid marketplace for independent comics and graphic novels also points towards the prospects of this suitably positioned property having a long and profitable shelf-life. Finally, with the proper marketing campaign and distribution, the scope and relevance of this ceaselessly entertaining manuscript and captivating artwork should create enormous potential for a wide array of lucrative subsidiary rights. Considering those profitable yields and the product's exceptional positioning to succeed with both the independent-minded and mass-market readerships, the costs to publish and market this property amount to a relatively small investment for all the limitless potential that *Small Wonders* contains.

## Book Specifications:

The first book in a proposed graphic novel / comics series, *Small Wonders* is planned to be approximately 118-143 pages in length (with black & white panel illustrations), printed pages to measure approximately 6 ½ x 10 inches. (*The range in the page count is flexible due to the number of "shorts" included. While entertaining and amusing, a number of these shorts are not vital to the overall plot; therefore, some of these pages may be cut if the publisher so desires.*)

## Chapter Summaries

### PART ONE (33 pp)

*Nico and Anaba*—The graphic novel opens with an introduction of some of the more pivotal characters and their mutual place of residence: a large, brick apartment building not unaccustomed to its own eccentricities as well as rumors of hauntings. Indeed, the old apartment building is as much of a character as any of its inhabitants. Nico and Anaba, two young girls in grade school, walk to their bus stop in the morning. An odd conversation (about a publicized new method of liposuction) ensues between the two friends and prepares the reader for the more precocious insights and tendencies often articulated by the younger set of characters, which also includes Nico and Anaba's autistic friend, Philippe, who is introduced here, too. Subsequently, the girls arrive at a strangely deserted school yard. At the door of their classroom, they are reminded of the mandatory school assembly, which they begrudgingly attend—sitting underneath the bleachers where another intriguing dialogue unfolds with Anaba's account of her previous school in Oklahoma and the KKK rallies so routinely held there at morning assembly. Unfortunately, the two girls are soon discovered sitting under the bleachers, and they appear to be in trouble for what is likely a repeat offense of non-participatory attendance.

*Gilberto, the Manager*—Nico's pensive father, Gilberto Paz, is in the middle of his duties as manager of the apartment building when he finds a dead rat while cleaning the residential swimming pool. He is interrupted by a call from the principal's office at Nico and Anaba's school. The principal's secretary inadvertently mentions Gilberto's wife, whom the secretary soon after remembers is deceased. Once more troubled by the memory of his dead wife, Gilberto walks to the manager's office and slips into a surreal daydream, which then transitions into an encounter between Gilberto and the peculiar resident manager assistant/janitor, John Darger, who has been painting the last bizarre image from Gilberto's odd daydream. Gilberto asks that Darger look after the premises while he settles the matter in question at his daughter's school.

*The Impossible Mandy Morgan*—Later that day, Nico, Anaba, and Philippe make a not-uncommon discovery by the swimming pool: a mother and her brood of ducklings has made the pool their haven away from the nearby pond in the park across the street. The children return the ducklings to the pond and are talking when Nico and Anaba's nemesis, Mandy Morgan, rides by on her expensive 18-speed bicycle with her lily white nose pointed literally up in the air at the trio of young friends—all three of which are, of course, minorities. The mere brief presence of Mandy Morgan sends Anaba into a fitful rant (filled with pop culture commentary) with bitter traces of socioeconomic and race conflict. Anaba's rant culminates with a brief narrative of a humorous tetherball accident that befell the infamous Mandy Morgan at recess one afternoon.

*In the Forest of el Cucuy*—Nico and Anaba accompany their fathers on a Thanksgiving hunting trip in the woods during the search for the traditional turkey. After Nico witnesses the sad death of a rabbit shot by Anaba's father, Tall Bear, she contemplates becoming a vegetarian. As a safety precaution, Nico and Anaba are told to walk several yards behind the two men. It is not until midway through an involved argument over the superior fighter (Bruce Lee vs. Jackie Chan) that the two girls realize they have strayed too far behind and thus become lost. Meanwhile, Gilberto and Tall Bear approach the sought-

after family of turkeys. However, Tall Bear's chances are foiled by a sudden noise and outcry when Gilberto steps in a concealed beaver trap. Fortunately, either by "super luck" or "super reflexes," only the tip of Gilberto's boot and the very end of his big toe are lost (not even a whole toenail is parted with). Soon Gilberto and Tall Bear recognize the acute absence of their two daughters. All along during the lengthening shadows and oncoming dusk, Nico and Anaba have somehow resourcefully made a fire—mostly through Anaba's talents. The two girls work themselves into a frenzy with stories of wild bears and Nico's Mexican folktale of the notorious "el Cucuy" (the Mexican equivalent of the boogeyman). They are startled by a seemingly menacing figure emerging from the bushes, but the girls are quickly relieved to see that they have in fact just been found by their fathers.

*Shorts, from Stanley*—A comic short (two pages) introduces two additional minor characters and residents at the apartment building: Stanley and his roommate, Chuck—respectively, a languishing film school graduate and an audiophile who make a perfect (if not at times acrimonious) pair. A brief summation of the main characters appearing heretofore is also presented through Stanley's video narrative in this short.

## PART TWO (21 pp)

*Racquet & Bow ~ Balls & Arrows*—Another short (three pages): this one follows Nico and Anaba during their corresponding athletic activities at gym class at school. Not unfamiliar to comics, a recurring theme of innate talents and almost inexplicable abilities is briefly touched upon in this humorous sequence.

*To Kill a Duckling Bird*—From her apartment window across the street, Anaba observes the park and the nearby pond where a young boy is maliciously throwing stones at a brood of innocent ducklings. Anaba's wrath is unleashed, and she will soon teach the young miscreant a lesson. While filled with panels of comedy and action, this longer short (five pages) ends on a more reflective note as Anaba looks with sadness upon one of the slain feathered creatures.

*The Ghost of Sister Isabella*—The central and most substantial segment for Part Two of the graphic novel entails Gilberto's bedtime narrative to his daughter, Nico, about a ghost story from his own childhood in Mexico. Gilberto begins his story in response to Nico's voiced concern about the rumors of the ghost that supposedly haunts their apartment building on the top floor. Gilberto's ghost story takes place in a rural Mexican village called El Téul where students are taught in a local school run by the nuns. There at the school the remarkably stunning Sister Isabella makes an indelible impression on Gilberto. As the school's literature teacher, Sister Isabella opens up an entire and magical world for young Gilberto. However, Sister Isabella instructs the young students in a curriculum that is questionable if not inappropriate at times with works ranging from *Don Quixote* to *The Scarlet Letter* (foreshadowing Sister Isabella's own personal scandal). Eventually, it is revealed that Sister Isabella has been having an affair with Padre Fredo, and the local gossip spreads like wildfire. Shortly after, Sister Isabella goes missing, but her tragic end is soon discovered; it becomes apparent that she took her own guilt-plagued life by throwing her self down a precarious flight of subterranean stairs leading to the well at the bottom of the hill overlooking the small village. In the wake of Sister Isabella's death, strange hauntings begin to occur all through the town; and one night even young Gilberto is visited by the still beautiful specter of Sister Isabella. Gilberto's story ends, and he sees that Nico is already asleep. He walks to the open window in his daughter's room but pauses by the curtains when he spots the

apparition in the window on the top floor where the building's rumored ghost is seen playing her harp by her own apartment window.

### PART THREE (36 pp)

*Philippe's Small Wonders*—A short focuses on Philippe and his superhero fantasies.

*Gilberto's Monomania!*—This short depicts Gilberto's bottled rage as he shadowboxes in the night, thus preparing the reader for the following extended narrative that occupies the plot for much of the remainder of the graphic novel.

*Nico's Letters from Mexico*—Nico's Christmas vacation letters addressed to Anaba serve a dual purpose: they gently further the narrative and gradual transition towards Gilberto's story (which is set in Mexico), while they also provide entertaining accounts of life in Mexico—such as this series of lively panels that depict the unique and colorful world found in the city of Guadalajara with all of its coconut kiosks, lamentable cockroaches, and exotic tarsiers and parrots.

*A Case of Mistaken, Stolen Identity: John Darger's Christmas Eve (Part 1)*—The graphic novel starts to interweave a storyline between what largely becomes an “origin story” dealing with Gilberto and his past in Mexico before he immigrated to the U.S. Gilberto's personal history also becomes relevant with regards to John Darger, the assistant manager in charge of the apartment building while Gilberto is temporarily away in Mexico. Darger shuffles about his duties during a lonely Christmas Eve. He tries to deliver the accumulating mail for the vacationing Paz family, but the mail will not slide under Gilberto's door. Darger keys into the apartment and soon finds himself sitting on the sofa and admiring the photos of Gilberto and Nico Paz. As exemplified by his strange, unspoken fondness and apparent kinship to the myriad lives of the people inhabiting the apartment building—particularly with the longstanding residents of the small Paz family—indeed, Darger feels closer to these people than he has ever cared to articulate. Almost like a guest invited to spend the night on this Christmas Eve, Darger comfortably lingers and drifts off to sleep in the Paz apartment. When he wakes, he finds a gun barrel pointed in his face. The man holding the gun mistakenly assumes that Darger is “Gilberto” Paz, though the gunman addresses him as Octavio Paz.

*How “Gilberto” (a.k.a. Octavio) Paz came to the U.S.A. (Part 1)*—A familiar young man who we know as Gilberto is stirring up trouble at the manufacturing plant where he works in Mexico. (Though the reader has known him as Gilberto Paz up until now, it is apparent through the other characters who address him that Gilberto's former and real name is Octavio.) Gilberto's attempts to organize a union for his fellow workers does not go unnoticed by the sinister and clearly corrupt management at the facility. A vaguely ominous phone call by a manager at the plant indicates that Gilberto's life is in danger as a result of the unionizing efforts. Gilberto heads home shortly after work. On the way, he picks out some produce at a market and continues on down the streets under a darkening sky. Gilberto is greeted at home by his wife, Nicola, and the two parents look lovingly over a still infant Nico. Throughout dinner and the oncoming night, the reader is presented with a glimpse of the brief, happy life that Gilberto once led. That peaceful life literally comes crashing down in the next sequence of successive panels: a hired arsonist sets fire to Gilberto's home, and in the process Nicola is killed.

*A Case of Mistaken, Stolen Identity: John Darger's Christmas Eve (Pt. 2)*—A brief interlude: the gunman hired to kill Gilberto Paz continues to threaten John Darger, still thinking that Darger is “Gilberto” (Octavio).

*How Gilberto (a.k.a. Octavio) Paz came to the U.S.A. (Pt. 2)*—Continuing the retrospective narrative shortly after the arson at the Paz home in Mexico, Gilberto and little Nico attend Nicola's funeral. After some serious thought about the well-being of his daughter in a town and a country where a contract is likely still open on his own life because of his unionizing attempts, Gilberto decides what is in the best interests of his daughter: he will not further endanger her life with his proximity to her. Instead, he will immediately flee to the United States, where he will soon send for Nico once he has established a new life. (For the time being Nico will stay with family.) As circumstances unfold during a series of panels that depict Gilberto waiting in line to cross the border, the only way for Gilberto to cross the U.S.-Mexico border entails an intriguing switch of identity.

*Anaba, in the Morning*—A two-page humorous short presents Anaba at school.

*A Case of Mistaken Stolen Identity: John Darger's Christmas Eve (Pt. 3)*—Back in the kitchen of the Paz apartment, the tension between Darger and the gunman comes to a breaking point as the gunman begins to reveal his disturbing and sinister plans; the gunman even mentions that some vague ill fate waits for Nico, whom the gunman mistakenly assumes will return home shortly. Darger snaps and inadvertently kills the gunman. Holding himself together surprisingly well, Darger understands that the best solution for everyone involved (including his friends, Gilberto and Nico) is to handle the situation quietly, by himself. He methodically cleans up the mess in the Paz apartment and even wraps and dumps the gunman's body. The next day, having gone through a strange sort of epiphany after the events of the previous evening, Darger realizes he does not have to spend yet another Christmas alone: he dresses up in some new clothes, wraps a gift, and takes Blanche up on her earlier Christmas dinner invitation and knocks on her door.

#### PART FOUR (53 pp)

*More of Nico's Letters from Mexico*—Another short in the form of a narrated letter from Nico to Anaba, this letter details the regrettable though not unusual occupation in Mexico known in no less euphemistic terms than “rat stomper.” Nico also concludes with the note that she is returning home ahead of her father, who is staying in Mexico to handle some “unfinished business” before he returns. Nico will stay with Anaba's family for the next week or so until Gilberto arrives back in the U.S.

*Songs, from Chuck*—A short with Stanley's roommate, Chuck: Darger answers a noise complaint one weekend night, and the source of the excessive decibel levels is Chuck's music.

*Library Courtesy*—A short presents Anaba in the local public library.

*No Baby, No Baby*—A somewhat related short to *Library Courtesy*: Nico and Anaba have a provoking conversation about children and parenthood.

*The Ghost of Room 501*—Nico, Anaba, and Philippe embark on a sleuthing adventure to once and for all discover the truth behind the rumors of the mysterious and harp-playing ghost of the apartment

building's notorious room 501. The children even bring along an old camcorder to document the paranormal activity. Upon keying into the long-vacant apartment, the children witness rooms of fully draped furnishings and immediately sense a strange and extraordinary atmosphere about room 501. Unexpectedly, the door shuts and locks the children into the apartment. To pass the time, Nico opens and reads the letter that she has been carrying—the letter that some panels earlier arrived in the mail and is from Nico's father.

*Octavio's Revenge*—The text from Gilberto's letter narrates alternately throughout this extended and climactic series of pages and panels that present what apparently has been a much anticipated vendetta, which Gilberto has inevitably been unable to avoid or put out of his mind despite the passing of the years since his wife's death. The chilling and powerful effect of the ominous narration being addressed to Gilberto's daughter is unmistakable, as one by one Gilberto tracks down the trio of criminals inextricably involved in that ancient fire that claimed the life of Gilberto's esposa.

*The Calico Cat*—Nico finishes reading her father's letter, and the children's misadventure in the haunted apartment resumes. The story concludes with a confrontation in the apartment's kitchen: the children encounter a strange and deceptively docile calico cat who does not take kindly to the young visitors. At the apparent behest of the inhabitant spirits, the unwelcome children are efficiently shown the way out of the apartment.

*Epilogue*—Nico takes a break from her friends and the excitement of the day. She goes to her apartment to get a stuffed animal to keep her company during another night at Anaba's apartment. She then decides to have a snack before she leaves. As she eats a bowl of cereal, Nico notices something unusual when some small, loosened bits fall from the crumbling ceiling into her cereal bowl. She investigates. Spooning at a strange object stuck in the ceiling, Nico soon discovers the bullet fired from that recent night when Darger killed the hired gunman from Mexico. The reader is left with Nico standing on top of the kitchen table, the young protagonist staring with a sense of wonder at the mysterious bullet.

### About the illustrator:

Sean Fitzgibbon has illustrated two previous self-published graphic novels: *DomestiCATed* and *The Horror of Party Beach* (contact Harvest Sun Press or Sean for more information about those properties). Sean obtained his Master of Fine Art at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas (where he currently teaches), and he received his Bachelor of Art from Missouri Southern State University in Joplin, Missouri. He also studied art and design at the Joe Kubert School of Art in Dover, New Jersey. Experiences and people he has encountered during his travels throughout Europe, Mexico, and the U.S. inspire much of his work, while the concepts in his work are inspired by an interest in phenomena that breach the norms of the commonplace.

### About the writer:

Matt Moscato runs the very independent and very “in-house” book publishing and packaging operation of Harvest Sun Press. (Harvest Sun Press has successfully launched the popular bilingual children’s book series, *The Matt the Rat Series*, which most notably appeared on national television when it was reviewed and praised by the famous Latino author and broadcaster, Jorge Ramos, for his book club.) With a select yet diverse offering of other publishing properties currently available by Harvest Sun Press, Matt also continues to work on additional stories for possible future installments of *Small Wonders*.

### About the manuscript:

The full *Small Wonders* manuscript (text) is complete and available upon request. It contains the complete dialogue, narrative, and individual panel outlines for a planned 110-to-143-page graphic novel or initial comic series. Only the first 30 pages have been illustrated. The involvement and commitment of another publisher is required for the completion of the remaining illustrations.