

More about *Life Doesn't Always: The scripts from season one*

An Amish farmer turns 30 and finally realizes that his sexual orientation is not going to change, setting in motion a thought process that pulls him out of the Amish community and outside of faith altogether. His journey leads him to a university in Philadelphia to study computer graphics, a studio in L.A. that produces a purulent computer game called *Bloodbath*, and a house in West Hollywood which he shares with two drag queens, one of whom has an ominous dark side, in this novel written to look like the scripts for a TV drama series. A gay private detective appears on the scene, and he and the ex-Amishman hit it off immediately. Their relationship hits a snag called intermittent rage disorder, and they actually break up for a time when an ex-lover reappears. There are murders, porn studs, a she-male call-girl service, a burglary, a sophisticated hacker, torch songs and more, all in a moody, low-key-lighting atmosphere pulled from the *film noir* classics of the 1940s. It's a fun, suspenseful read that isn't heavy-handed when existentially dissecting certain sacred-cow aspects of modern culture.

Once inside this story of a brainy Amish farmer who leaves his community in Pennsylvania and ends up in that city of surplus screenplays, Los Angeles, the reader will experience the script aspect of *Life Doesn't Always* as an integral part that contributes to the whole. The author takes advantage of film's ability to juxtapose dissimilar images and sounds to convey information, as in, for example, one scene in which a worship service is held in an Amish home. The men and women, segregated to either side of the unadorned living room, are crowded onto timeworn wooden benches, and while they sing an ancient, droning hymn, the author writes, "vestiges of recordings by the Beach Boys and Sonny & Cher are quietly interwoven with the sustained notes. Visible outside the windows is black-and-white footage of the first Gemini spacewalk and women wearing miniskirts." In this way the writer establishes visually that, in the timeless world of the Amish, the year is actually 1965. Once the story moves to L.A. in the second episode, the author uses tools such as "luminosity-dissolves," black-and-white film stock, scratchy soundtracks and time-lapse cinematography to advance the crime-drama storylines. Fortunately for readers unfamiliar with filmmaking terms, a glossary is included.

Recently, Rabih Alameddine wrote the unconventional *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters*. And a couple of other writers come to mind as having created successful variants of the novel format: John Updike (*S.*) and Bel Kaufman (*Up the Down Staircase*). This debut novel is a successful experiment in form enhancing content.

