



Sip

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A lyrical, apocalyptic debut novel about addiction, friendship, and the struggle for survival

It started with a single child, and quickly spread: you could get high by drinking your own shadow. At night, lights were destroyed so that addicts could sip shadow in the pure light of the moon.

Gangs of shadow addicts chased down children on playgrounds, rounded up old ladies from retirement homes. Cities were destroyed and governments fell. And if your shadow was sipped entirely, you became one of them, had to find more shadow, at any cost, or go mad.

150 years later, what's left of the world is divided between the highly regimented life of those inside dome-cities that are protected from natural light (and natural shadows), and those forced to the dangerous, hardscrabble life in the wilds outside. In rural Texas, Mira, her shadow-addicted friend Murk, and an ex-Domer named Bale, search for a possible mythological cure to the shadow sickness but they must do so, it is said, before the return of Halley's Comet, which is only days away.

Sip Details

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Author : Brian Allen Carr

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From Reader Review Sip for online ebook

Paul says

I blurbed it!

“It’s a post-apocalyptic wasteland and are you on team Dome, team Shadowless Army, team Doc, or team shadow-sipping junkies? I know which team I’m on. Brian Allen Carr’s *Sip* is funny, literate, crass, dark, violent, lyrical, oddly touching, and totally bat-shit crazy. I loved it.”

Jason Pettus says

[This was also published at my website, the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography.]

Of all the kinds of bizarro novels that one can write, Brian Allen Carr's *Sip* is an example of my favorite kind, because it has an actual three-act plot that goes from a recognizable beginning to middle to end, unlike so many other bizarro books that are essentially written-out versions of cartoons, just one random outlandish vision strung after another with no narrative thread holding them together. That said, though, I still found myself with a short tolerance for Carr's manuscript, one of those kinds of books that's much more interested in being poetic than in telling a truly great story.

The central premise is that one day the human race wakes up to discover that they can now not only "drink shadows," but that it produces a better high than any other drug yet invented; the narcotic mania swiftly becomes a global panic and then apocalypse, destroying civilized society as out-of-control addicts knock out power grids and enslave entire populations in order to chase the purest high possible, the shadows of humans as given off by the light of the moon. Our story, then, takes place 150 years later, in an America that's now been transformed into a kind of post-apocalyptic "working wasteland;" as we follow the misadventures of the teenage Mira (who now has a psychic connection to forest animals from all the shadow-bits she's stolen from them), her addict friend Murk, and a man named Bale who has recently been exiled from the safe but harshly regimented domed cities that dot the landscape, where diffuse lights from all directions produce no shadows at all.

It's certainly not bad as far as all this stuff goes, with prose that resembles Cormac McCarthy in its rough-edged poetry; but with a storyline that floats this much out in the ether of beautifully strange unbelievability, it's hard to stay attached to any of the characters or care much about what happens to them, knowing as we do with these kinds of stories that there's always a random chance of a magic fairy floating in and making everything right again. A book more to be experienced than read in a traditional sense, your enjoyment of *Sip* will depend directly on how much you can align your mindset with Carr's when he was writing it, destined to be a wonderfully delicate surprise for some and a head-scratching disappointment for others.

Out of 10: **8.0**, or **9.0** for fans of extra-literary bizarro fiction

Rodney says

In a world defined by shadow addiction, domers and outsiders live completely different realities. The first

live isolated and protected. The latter roam and scavenge to survive. A few from each sect cross over by the hand of a rogue group whose purpose is to destroy the domed cities.

The ever-present question is whether there a way to cure those who have had their shadows completely sipped away? It is foretold that a comet due to arrive may be just that.

The short chapter format is punchy and keeps the reader engaged. Carr's is literary southern gothic with a subtly poetic touch. Richly dystopian settings are blended with a tangible humor in the dialogue that can only come from characters living a hard life. For the sake of comparison, I was reminded of both Cormac McCarthy and Malerman's Bird Box while reading.

A few favorite passages:

"He could taste the ash in the air. The gunpowder. The murder. Tears came to his eyes. In his earliest darkened state, he was much like a child. If a whim presented itself, and then was not fulfilled, his emotions tattered and blew piecemeal like shrapnel. Nostalgia stirred deep in his soul, a piteous ache. The train was his thing."

"THEY DOZED IN and out. Dreamed with their eyes open. The shock of the world kept them living in fear. Kept reality blinking on and off like a strobe light-revealing brief snippets, scattering infinite shadows. Promising naught but captivity."

Refined, lyrical and artsy as a whole, Sip is a book I won't soon forget.

Evelina | AvalinahsBooks says

I can't really place this book - at first I thought it was YA, but as I read on, I realized that it's much too gory, violent and sexual to be considered YA. And yet, the tone is definitely YA. New Adult maybe?

Regardless of what genre it is, it had a really good premise. It could deliver. But... it didn't. There were a lot of good story threads, but they were either dropped, or just loosely rounded up. There could have been so much more world building as well.

Thing is, when I finished reading, I wasn't quite sure what I'd just read. Was it a young adult story? Was it mainly a dystopian tale? Was it meant to follow the characters, or was it just like a jumble of unfinished short stories? It felt like a lot of story lines were started, and started well, but never quite came to fruition. The idea of people gorging on someone else's shadows and destroying society sounds amazing. The domes and the towns behind moving trains, so nobody could enter? Also great... never went anywhere. The army of women tired of being victims? Also never went anywhere. So many threads that could have been so good! Ultimately, I just feel like it was too short and didn't have a clear direction or a clear audience in mind.

Love that cover though!

I received this book for free in exchange for my honest review.

Lori says

Like a whisper coming off their hearts...

Brian continues to bring the weirdness with his debut novel SIP. Though there are no motherfucking sharks to be found, or plagues of monsters at the end of the world, we *are* thrown headlong into a future where people are addicted to sipping shadows. Yes, you heard me. Like a hungry little vampires who suck up your blood, humankind discovers an awesome high when they suck up their own shadows.

I know. Sounds kind of harmless, right? Why should we care if someone wants to bend over and sip at their own dark reflection? Well, because once their own shadow is depleted, they begin to prey on others by sipping at *their* shadow which causes a sort of painful and, once sucked up completely, totally permanent condition in the victim - If you're shadow gets sucked dry, you are now ALSO tied to a life of stealing and sipping shadows, or you risk going mad due to sleep deprivation. Because in this brave new world, if you are shadowless, you are unable to find rest until someone's shadow is sitting pretty in your mouth. So it's steal or die. And steal they do.

This is a future of us vs them. Those who still have their shadows intact flee to the Domes, which are safe, established, human outposts. The domes are protected by trains that run nonstop on a circular track and by armed soliders who guard the perimeter. It's a militia-like life, with lots of guns and bland food rations and not a whole lot of fun. But hey, you've got your shadow and a good night's rest.

Those who don't want to live a Domers life remain outside, with the shadow addicts, and run the risk of being shadow-sucked, AKA being 'turned'.

Mira, a young girl whose mother had her shadow stolen, isn't interested in being a Domer. Partly because of the fact that her mother wouldn't be welcome, and partly, I think, because of her BFF Murk, who is a shadow addict. Mira, whose shadow is still whole (because she discovered a way to keep it hidden) helps her mom sleep by stealing shadows for her. From their farm animals. And from birds and wild rabbits in the field. Because, oh, did I not mention? You don't have to just steal HUMAN shadows. You can steal shadows from any living thing. And you don't 'turn' unless you SWALLOW the shadow.

So Mira tucks those little sips of shadows into her cheeks and then breathes them lovingly into her mother's mouth. And then mommy-dearest is out cold, dreaming dreams of flight (if it's a bird shadow) or dreams of tunnels and darkness (if it's a rabbit shadow).

On one of their shadow-hunting excursions, Mira and Murk catch wind of a rumor that the shadow sickness can be cured, but only if you were to find and kill the one who stole your shadow (kinda like chasing down big daddy vamp or the alpha werewolf, right?!). And then, only if they are caught and killed before the comet makes it trip back around the earth, which is scheduled to appear any day now. Did someone say roadtrip?! Mira and Murk join forces with a recently exiled Domer and decide to head towards The Town of Lost Souls.

The world he creates is nothing less than amazing.
It's lyrical. It's violent. And it's somewhat sentimental.

SIP is exactly the type of novel that one would expect from Carr - gory and glorious and downright bizarre.

Charles Dee Mitchell says

Sip arrives billed as Brian Allen Carr's first novel. In addition to collections of his short stories, I actually thought I had read two novels already, *The Last Horror Novel in the History of the World* and *Motherfucking Sharks*. (Yes, that is the title.) They were short and published in individual volumes, but I suppose they are now officially novellas, giving *Sip* pride of place as debut novel.

Sip is longer than the previous works and more ambitiously conceived, but the elements do not always gel as they do in Carr's novellas and award-winning short fiction. We find ourselves a century or so into a crisis begun when children discovered they could get high by drinking their own shadows. Addiction follows, and shadow sippers turn predatory, stealing shadows from others. Victims whose shadows have been sucked dry become vampiric seekers of shadows themselves. Animal shadows will do in a pinch. A decimated population is divided into the addicted, the cursed, those who have retreated into domed enclosures free of the natural light that produces a true shadow, and groups that live on mile-long trains making their slow way along circular tracks that produce the equivalent of a pioneers who perpetually circle their wagons. (I confess, I never quite got that part of the story.)

Sip may have many "first novel" flaws, and readers, myself included, may be suffering from post-apocalyptic fatigue syndrome; but, the story is fueled by Brian Allen Carr's rampant imagination. Settle back for his disorienting dark comedy that is equal parts obscenity and elegy. The violence is outrageous, the imagery grotesque, and the dialogue an artful vernacular that rings true even when at its most literary.

Christoph Paul says

I never thought a book would make me look at shadows with suspicion. Brian Allen Carr is a bad man. Dude is the Aaron Rodgers of indie writers.

<https://i.imgflip.com/1sb4ck.gif>

He's literary AF but his books move and pace as well as any pro genre fiction out there. His last two novellas have been unique, entertaining, artful, and probably some of the best books labeled Bizarro in this decade. He's killed it in the small press & novella scene but I always wondered can he bring the same magic to the novel?

That was some pointless pondering because *SIP* is easily his best book. It has one of the best hooks I've heard in awhile: people can get high by sipping on their shadows. Sold.

<https://giphy.com/gifs/danny-mcbride-...>

But...the only problem with many high concept books is the writers don't pull them off and the characters are plot beats instead of human beings. *BAR* doesn't fall into that trap and I enjoyed spending time with Mira, shadow junkie Murk, and Bale as they look for a way to survive living in the shadows.

I am seeing more and more great books come out that blur in the lines between genre and literary that are as weird as they are artful. I love it and I want more books like his! Writers like Carr, Victor LaValle's & Alissa Nutting's latest, and the upcoming Marlon James series are taking the best of genre fiction and adding a literary level that has me excited about this new direction in fiction. Carr's novel takes genre fiction out of the shadows and shows why stories are the only way we can see the light.

Danger says

Seemingly impossible to define, SIP is a novel that refuses to let you pin it down. It's dark, yes, pitch-black really, and yet, there's enough humor to lure you in and let your guard down. It's violent, sure, and harrowing too, but there are characters in here with hearts and desires that ring true, louder than the gory landscape they inhabit. It's WEIRD, the weirdest thing I've read all year, perhaps one of the weirdest thing I've read ever, but the dystopian world that Carr builds is easily accessible, as told to you with sharp prose and short, punchy chapters. As for the plot, it's tough to summarize, as we roll across a planet ravaged by shadow-drinking junkies and limb-collecting scavengers. Yeah, that's just the setup. From there, it goes places, man. So is this a story about drugs? About friendship and loyalty? Is it a western? A post-apocalyptic road story? A trailer park tale of revenge? A science fiction epic, as told through the black eyes of a few small players in the rotten world-at-large? The short answer is, it's ALL of these things at once. In a word: WOW!

Book Riot Community says

I was so excited to get this book, I literally dropped the book I was reading and immediately started this one. AND HOLY CATS. I am such a huge fan of Carr. He has many short story collections and novellas, most famously Motherfucking Sharks, but this is his debut novel, and it is so effed up and fantastic I can't even. The story revolves around the fact that humans discover they can get high by ingesting shadows. I KNOW, RIGHT??! Carr's brain is from another planet. The novel takes place 150 years in the future, when "shadow sipping" has brought about the downfall of civilization, and most shadow addicts live a grisly existence outside domed cities, with no regulations or law. To help her addict mother, a young woman, her shadow addicted friend, and a former dome guard set out to find a cure for shadow addiction before the end of the world. It's like The Road meets Snowpiercer meets The Wizard of Oz, if it was all written by Kevin from Sin City. This is one of the most gloriously gruesome – and gruesomely glorious – books I've read since...well, since Motherfucking Sharks, really. I will be talking about it all the time between now and August.

–Liberty Hardy

from The Best Books We Read in December 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2017/01/03/riot-r...>

karen says

Sometimes bad decisions keep lasting forever.

the most hardy-esque statement i've ever encountered outside of wessex.

before we get into the review proper, i must confess that at first i was OUTRAGED when i saw this described as a "debut" novel on its back cover, because i thought carr was somehow disavowing penning the magnificent Motherfucking Sharks - one of the best shark books of all time. but APPARENTLY, that book (and all of his others, many of which i own but have yet to read - eep!) are *novellas*, which i guess is technically accurate, but if you write a book as awesome as Motherfucking Sharks, you really need to be boasting about that as much as you can.

squinting at you, carr...

this is a weird little book. (although not as little as a *novella* - hhmph). it depicts an unsettling vision of the future, one in which people have learned how to get high by drinking the shadows cast by living things. once shadow addicts have depleted their own (apparently finite) shadows, their needs drive them to steal the shadows of others - either from animals or from other humans. those who have had their shadow completely sipped lose the ability to sleep, and must either become sippers themselves, or go mad from sleep deprivation. another crime rampant in this world is forcible amputation. i'm not even going to try to explain the reason for that one - it would make me sound like a crazy person, but it definitely makes sense within the context of this world.

and it is a dark world, indeed - pun half-intended. humanity is split between domers - rigid and ascetic militaristic societies protected from the outside world and its new horrors by domes around which trains circle relentlessly, whose occupants are trained to shoot any who approach their enclaves, and well, everyone else. life outside the domes is dangerous and wild, but it is also *human* - with food that isn't squeezed out of a tube, and the luxury of making choices instead of following orders. but also the risk of being shadow-raped or amputated. so it's shitty either way.

this is a difficult book to review, in terms of plot. it's like describing a dream - it totally makes sense, but as you start to describe it, you realize you have to backtrack and explain lots of surrounding contextual details that you can shortcut in your own mind, but which need explaining to others. and the plot of this book *mostly* makes sense - there are a few details i'm still fuzzy about, but the fuzziness in no way diminished my enjoyment - confusion in small doses is invigorating. it's just a tricky plot to pin down and describe in a way that will make you wanna read it without getting bogged down with specifics that'll make your head feel as muddled as a shadow-addict. and you *do* wanna read it. despite its complete absence of sharks.

i will say that one of my favorite things about this book is carr's complete lack of interest in fulfilling a reader's expectations. whenever you're reading a book or watching a movie, there are certain narrative cues that you register subconsciously that set up probable outcomes - this is happening so these two characters can reunite, hook up, have a confrontation, etc., and it may not even be on your radar enough that you're making any sort of conscious predictions about it, but you sure as shit notice when the expectation is subverted. which carr does again and again. some situations resolve in a predictable manner, but there are some wonderful deviations here, where characters aren't given dramatic closure, or absolution - events occur as sudden and messy as life, and i appreciate the balls of that so much.

this is one you need to read for yourself - i'll only make a mess of it if i try to encapsulate it for you with clumsy words. but it's odd and sad and sweet and gross and i laughed aloud at one part, which i would ordinarily quote n' share, but even that would make no sense, or be remotely funny, if you haven't read it, so i will keep it to myself.

go read this one and then show me how to review it.

come to my blog!

Janie C. says

Sip is a haunting and thought-provoking novel. It takes place in a future world of addiction, where people drink shadows to maintain a steady high. Any animated life-form's shadow can produce the desired effect, provided that the light source is the natural sun. What is a shadow? Is it simply the absence of light? Can a shadow be stolen? The nature of absence is a key point in this story. Some people live sheltered from the effects of sunlight in domes, avoiding the influence of shadow. The rest of the world lives wild, either hunting down shadows or dealing with the loss of their own dark reflections. Vigilantes have learned to hide their own shadows, while another survivor can make her own appear and disappear at will. Belief systems are strong in this world, where the immanent appearance of Halley's Comet is meant to change everything.

The vignettes and characters that make up this book are resonant, drawing the reader in with their immediacy. Brian Allen Carr weaves a tapestry of fine language, utilizing words that are crafted with so much substance that you can feel their contours. Their shadows are etched in my memory.

Benjamin DeVos says

If you slice Sip open, you will find a heart. If you tear the heart open, you will find darkness. If you comb through the dark, you will find the most beautiful light you have ever seen. One of my favorite reads of 2018 so far.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Mad Max with shadows.

Andrew Stone says

I've been anticipating this book more than any other for the past two years, and despite the amount of pressure that put on it, I was thoroughly impressed. Carr's first novel might even be his best book, which is saying a lot since Motherfucking Sharks is (or maybe, until now, was) my favorite book by any living author.

Sip has all the strangeness / oddities as Carr's other works, which is something I was a bit worried would be lost here because it's his first book with a mainstream publisher. With that said, the eccentricities here are as strong as ever. From simple things like the characters names: Murk, Mire, Bale, Doc, etc..., to bigger things: The Town of Lost Souls, the incredible and incredibly addicting high a shadow gives you, and the warrior women, among many, many others. Sip is kind of like Cormac McCarthy (think the brutality and beauty of the language in both Child of God and Blood Meridian) meets Thompson's Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

I particularly loved the dialogue of Doc and Captain Flamsteed, the former of which is absurdly philosophical and the latter of which is comically poetic. But aside from these two, every character is well-defined, imperfect, and perfectly lovable, which is crucial because the chapters' POV constantly changes

between characters.

If you're a fan of Carr's novellas and story collections, you absolutely must read this book. If you have no idea who the hell BAC is, then his debut novel is an excellent place to start. If you like your dystopian worlds to be absolutely absurd, then this is the book for you. If you've dealt with addiction and the affects it has on you and those around you, or if you know someone who has, then this is the book for you (it deals with addiction darkly and delicately, and ultimately has something profound to say). And if you're tired of reading well-written books with uninteresting or unoriginal plots, then this wonderfully written and boldly bizarre book is definitely for you.

Take a chance and Sip this shadow. See what all the slaughter is about. If you're willing to take the first step, your life will never be the same.

Justine says

DNF 50%

This is a sharply literate piece of experimental fiction that is a real trip. While I can appreciate in theory what Carr is doing here, it's a bit too much down in the dirt and senselessly violent for my taste at the moment.
