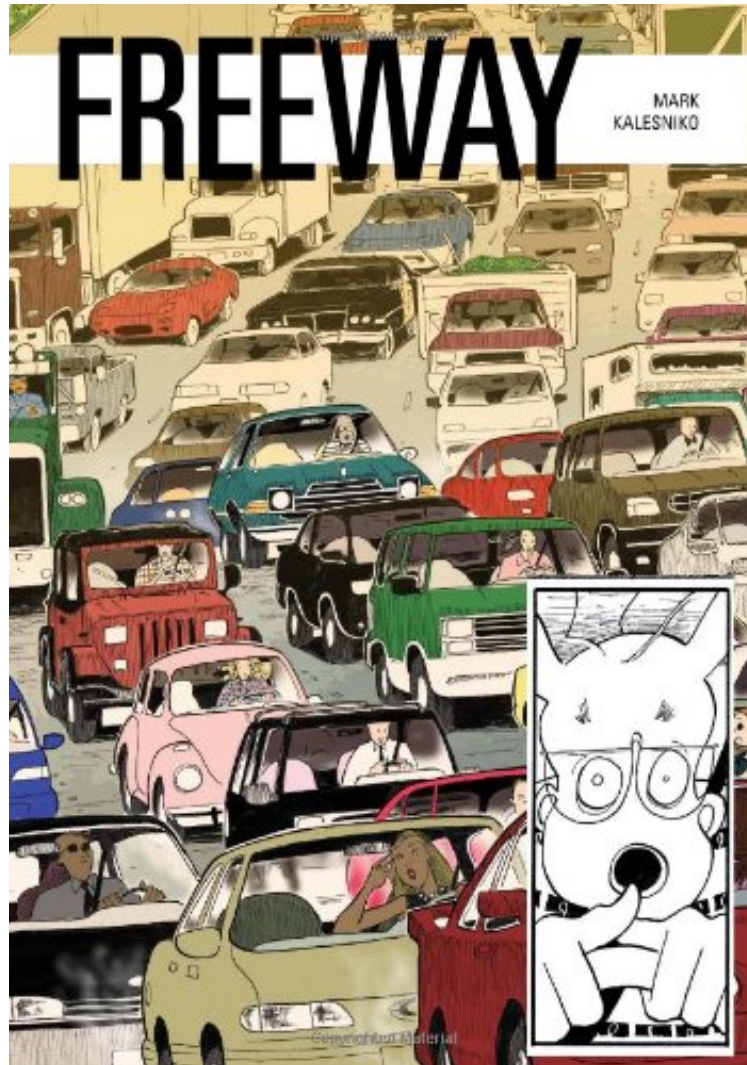


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# Freeway

Mark Kalesniko

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**Mark Kalesniko : Freeway** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Freeway:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Life is just not how you once hoped it to be. From a serious fan, just got the book today, finished it, now writing the review. \*\*\*\*\* SPOILERS \*\*\*\*\* Mark Kalesniko has a trilogy of this half-autobiographical dog-head character Alex. "Freeway" is the third book in the publishing order but its story happened between the first book "Why Did Pete Duel Kill Himself", which is a short description of Alex's gloomy childhood, and the second book "Alex", which tells the story that happened right after "Freeway". "Freeway" tells a story of the devastating conflict between ideals and reality, self and others. Alex was a shy and naive Canadian who

came to Los Angeles for the first time to pursue his dream of being a real cartoon artist. Alex is portrayed to have a dog-head because, referring to the previous two books, he had always been a black sheep in the world of dreadful humans. Even though nothing in L.A. looked as wonderful as what he had imagined, Alex did get hired by his dream company, he did meet some seemingly friendly peer artists and he got a girlfriend too. However things went down quickly afterwards and life ran completely off the track of Alex's idealism. Alex first tried to fit in, he tried to understand and play by the office politics even if he had to compromise his arts. He tried to learn Chinese and get along with his Chinese girlfriend's family. He fantasized a girl in the neighborhood whom he barely know. But nothing worked out at the end and the neighborhood girl turned out to be a bitch after all. Eventually he start to constantly imagined himself getting killed in different ways as a way to escape from the hopeless reality. He used the pain of death to alleviate his desperation in his career and life, only such bigger pains can distract him from his relatively lighter pains. But reality only got more unbearable and eventually he quit the job and went back to Canada. The book presented the plot in a non-linear timeline. The story when Alex first arrived, the story of the current Alex and the story of Alex's imaginary ego who leaves in a perfect world were told alternately, thus gives readers a bold contract between Alex's ideals and reality and a clear look of how Alex transformed from a hopeful young artist into a life beat-down. This book tells the stories of many people who lives in the current world, including the author himself, though his life should be much more successful than Alex's and much less as dramatic. Alex represents a type of people who always had dreams and the passion to go after their dreams, however their dreams do not agree with the pragmatic and money-driven world and to make things worse they are not very socially competent to roll with the cruel reality. And then life became long and drastic and hopeless, people all have their ways to escape and Alex chose to imagine death. I love the book, for the same reason why I loved Mark Kalesniko's previous books, it is so real and true and heartbreaking, it reflected part of my past and so Alex is extremely relatable to me. However, the book didn't end on a positive tone, Alex just gave up and left, which may be disappointing to some readers, but that is just how real life works for the most of the times and I guess the author want to make that point clear. (But the previous book "Alex", which tells what happened to Alex after the events in "Freeway", did have a positive ending) I hope that this book can recognize and support the ones who are struggling with their lives, because that you are not alone, the author has been through the same thing and I think that's why he draw this graphical novel. Remember, despite all that had happened in "Freeway", Alex did look up in the end and you may too.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Mark Kalesniko just gets better and better. By Doug Ready Highly recommended. Well done, uniquely structured story with solid, crisp art. It moves well and quickly. A most entertaining read. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Babbit-Jones and the Business By Keris Nine After the relative disappointment of Mark Kalesniko's failing to rise above the clichs of comicbook geeks and Asian babes in his last full-length graphic novel Mail Order Bride, the long-awaited Freeway, with its much more promising return to Kalesniko's semi-autobiographical character Alex, turns out to be a fabulous return to form. In every respect, Freeway demonstrates a huge maturity in the artist's work, and in some ways it can be seen as the summation of everything he has written so far and - as an Alex book - perhaps also a summation of his life so far. In terms of the artwork, Freeway combines the best of Kalesniko's styles from previous works and employs them fittingly throughout. The loose fluid lines of his first graphic novel Alex are combined with the detailed backgrounds, cross-hatching and animated movements of the childhood reminiscence book Why Did Pete Duel Kill Himself?, with a sense of pacing and storytelling of Mail Order Bride. Freeway consolidates a mature drawing style that manages to be simple, fluid and expressive. Structurally and thematically however, the new graphic novel is another matter, finding a means to draw together the various tones of the previous books and make them resonate in the way that they work off each other. Central to the storyline, as the cover and title make explicit, is a traffic jam on an LA freeway. As an expression of where Alex Kalienko is in his life, it's not the most original of metaphors, but it is appropriate. What is more important however is what takes place in and around Alex in his car, in the traffic jam and in his mind as he reflects on his life. The slow progress along the freeway gives rise to childhood reminiscence, to memories of moving away from the small town of Bandini in Canada to live his dream by working in LA for Babbit-Jones, one of the biggest animation studios in Hollywood. The reality however clearly hasn't lived up to expectations, nor have other aspects of Alex's life, such as his relationship with a young Chinese woman who also works at the studios. But there are other threads weaving through the story - glimpses of a young Alex with his childhood influences in front of a TV screen; a dark car that is menacingly following Alex down the freeway; a young Asian woman from his past visible in a nearby car that he can't seem to be able to catch-up with; a recurring nightmare of crashing; and an alternate non-anthromorphic Alex Kalienko starting out in the studio during the golden period of animation in the 1940s. Kalesniko weaves between these threads marvellously, naturally, fluidly and comprehensively, as an artist should, between all available realities - the past, the present, the alternate reality and the imagination. The significance of all these threads isn't always clear to the reader, but their impact and inspiration on Alex, as well as an expression of who he is, his hopes his fears and his anxieties, are all there. Every panel is terrifically expressive in this respect, from character expression to the environment they inhabit and the relationship between them, given life through the detail, through the line and through the movement from panel to panel. Time is evidently significant and it's captured in the pace of memory, in the falling of rain, in the transition and blending of old LA with new LA, the

past and present all rolled into one. The 26-page "If you were the only girl in the world" downtown LA sequence is one of the single most impressive things I've seen in any graphic novel, not just in Kalesniko's work. But there are countless other little moments and motifs scattered throughout Freeway, some immediately apparent, others quietly creating an indefinable impression, all of them combining to make the graphic novel an infinitely deep, beautiful and mature work from one of the best artists in the business.

A down-on-his luck animator looks back in anger. In his first new graphic novel since 2001's acclaimed *Mail Order Bride*, Mark Kalesniko delivers a 416-page tour de force chronicling a single day a few hours, even in the life of his recurring dog-headed alter ego, Alex Kalienska. Stuck in a horrendous traffic jam on his way to his increasingly miserable job as an animator at Babbitt Jones Studios, a burnt-out and depressed Alex alternately rages, reminisces, fantasizes and hallucinates. Thus flashbacks to his earliest days as a starry-eyed young animator snagging his dream job, through the increasingly depressing political battles and creative compromises, with a love affair gone badly wrong along the way, alternate with scenes of an increasingly agitated present-day Alex, who imagines a series of increasingly violent deaths for himself. Then again, are they in fact fantasies, or prescient flashes? Is a threatening car tailing Alex just a paranoid fantasy or a genuine threat? Readers will have to wait until the very end of this hugely ambitious graphic novel to find out. Moreover, woven into this narrative fabric is a series of imagined moments from two generations ago, a Golden Age of animation, when an earlier Alex made his entry into a much different Babbitt Jones Studios as imagined by the increasingly despondent present-day Alex. Loaded with fascinating insider information on two different generations of animators, skipping seamlessly among present and several different pasts, reality and fantasy, *Freeway* is another step forward for a major cartooning talent. 416 pages of black-and-white comics

Kalesniko is an expert at sophisticated, visually efficient narrative renderings of complex emotions. His drawings are spare and cinematic, and each panel underscores the characters' psychological isolation or another revealing detail. - Publishers Weekly [*Freeway*] captures the frustration of being stuck in traffic, particularly the array of images (violent and otherwise) that traffic brings to my mind (even better than *Falling Down*). - Gene Ambaum, *Unshelved* About the Author Mark Kalesniko is a former Disney animator (his credits include *The Little Mermaid*, *The Lion King*, *Mulan*, and *Atlantis*) born in British Columbia and now living in Los Angeles, CA. with his wife, Jennifer. His books include *Alex*, *Mail Order Bride* and *Freeway*.