



Year of the Rabbit

by Tian Veasna. Drawn & Quarterly, 2020. 380 p. Ill. ISBN 9781770463769 (paperback), \$29.95.

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Veasna's debut is a harrowing autobiographical story of an extended family attempting to survive the Khmer Rouge. In 1975, the Khmer Rouge declare victory and forcibly evacuate Phnom Penh with rumors of an impending American bombing. Three generations of a family, including doctor Khim, his pregnant wife Lina and their newborn son Chan, set off in search of stability. At a checkpoint to cross a river, they narrowly

escape the death reserved for those deemed too Western or educated. The family resettles in a farming village, where they endure privations and threats of random killings as "new people" being reeducated for agricultural life. Dangerous escape plots, constant spying, and denunciation (for things like growing tomatoes and gathering crabs to combat hunger) terrorize them all. Khim is assigned to a traveling work crew as the Khmer Rouge's intensity shows no signs of slowing down, adding additional trauma to the splintering family.

Lacunae and jumps in the story make following the plot a bit complicated, but these also amplify the overall effects of chaotic dislocation and attempted meaning-making. The chaos and upheaval motifs are further reflected in the jagged, hand-drawn frames and his distinctive print style of open letters. Veasna's human figures are drawn with delicate, crisp lines while the backgrounds are more stylized. His thickly cross-hatched night scenes and muted colors communicate anguish and ominous uncertainty. The maps and sketched infographic style chapter breaks help to orient the reader and provide non-plot details about the family's troubles. The emotional resonances and balance of personal upheaval with political turmoil will attract a variety of readers, from those totally unaware of the history of the Khmer Rouge terror to others wanting to understand the actual lived experience. This solid addition to all collections serving adults concretizes the Khmer Rouge terror.