[Mobile book] Solo Pass

Solo Pass

Ronald De Feo
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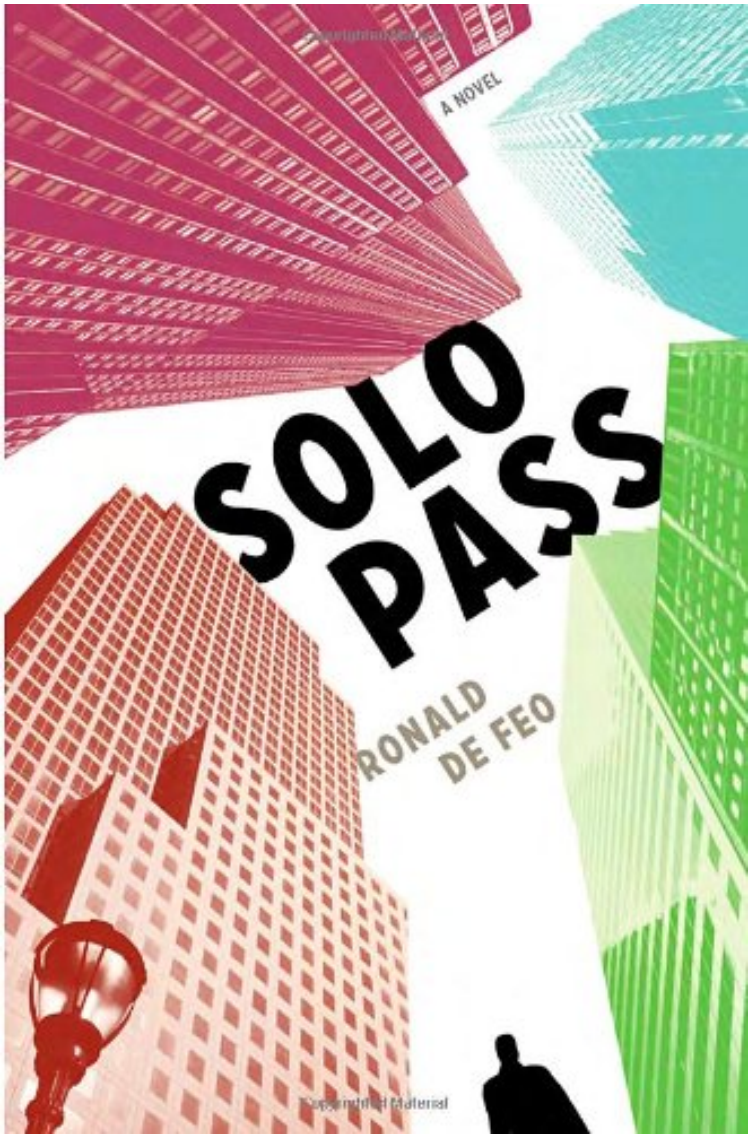

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Ronald De Feo : Solo Pass before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Solo Pass:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A mentally fragile man takes on ManhattanBy Sharon IschI loved Ronald De Feo's first novel Calling Mr. King, about a poor kid from a rotten home in upstate New York who grows up to become an international hit man for "The Firm" and, much to his own surprise one day, while strolling through Paris, becomes fascinated with art and architecture and over the course of this novel morphs into an aesthete. The plot and its leading man are like nothing I'd ever read before. Absolutely riveting.Now, not quite two years later, De Feo's

back with an equally offbeat, and compelling tale, narrated by an odd and socially inept man who's spent the past couple of months in a New York mental hospital, recovering from a breakdown after losing his marriage and his editing job. The story opens on the day before he'll be allowed for the first time to leave the hospital and venture out alone into the big city on a "solo pass," and show his doctors and himself whether he's well enough to go back to living on his own. Is he? And if he isn't, can he fake it? This 202-page "day and a half in the life" story makes for an unusual and intriguing read and I'm guessing most readers will be rooting for him all the way.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "You can't trust life"By TChrisAfter two months in a psych ward, a patient who identifies himself only as Ott is given a solo pass that will let him spend part of a day outside the hospital. He earned the pass by learning to play the game, to say enough without saying too much, to gain the trust of the doctors and nurses who probe him with questions. "The trick is to be chatty yet discreet."Although Solo Pass is written in the first person, it's not clear that Ott is a reliable narrator. He believes he once visited "a quaint little village" in the Cotswalds, although he may have constructed that memory from photographs in a magazine. He vaguely recalls looking bruised and haggard before he came to the hospital but he doesn't remember why. He is careful not to tell staff his true feelings about Prodski, the therapist who "ruins lives." He wants revenge against Prodski but he dismisses those urges as "the leftover thoughts of a once sick mind." Does that kind of self-awareness suggest that Ott has largely recovered, or is he fooling himself? He wants to be the person he once was, but he can no longer trust his life. Whether others should trust Ott is doubtful.Ronald de Feo deftly portrays the inner turmoil of his mentally ill protagonist. Ott is just a little off in his conversations with others, a little inappropriate, always guarded, never quite achieving the relaxed, natural interaction of people who have less troubled minds. One of the novel's best scenes involves a conversation Ott has with his uncle, as he desperately tries to underplay his obsession with Prodski and to pass off as humor a reference to the gun he left in his apartment. On his journey into the city, Ott is disoriented; nothing is quite as he remembers it. He tries to choke down his fears, fights to suppress his ill-tempered impulses, but it is obvious that he is torn between the rational and the compulsive. The realism with which Ott is sketched is impressive.In contrast to the novel's narrator, the supporting characters might be on loan from One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. They cover the gamut of mental illnesses. Maria is paranoid. Tommy is delusional and hyperactive. Mandy suffers from schizophrenia. Carl stares at the wall. Staff members are insensitive and self-contradictory (at least from Ott's perspective). None of them add much value to the story.The drama and humor and poignancy that make Cuckoo's Nest so memorable are muted in Solo Pass. That doesn't make it a bad novel, but it isn't as powerful as it could have been, given its subject matter. The first part of the novel, during which Ott is an enigma, is more interesting that the beginning of the second half, which is largely an information dump about Ott's past. The story regains its momentum in the final quarter, as Ott struggles to make his way through the city.Given the anticipation that mounts as Ott prepares to leave the ward, his actual taste of freedom is anticlimactic. I did, however, appreciate Ott's keen observation in the concluding pages that most people function too well, that they deserve no respect because their lives are too easy. They are untested, "oblivious to everything that could go wrong." That's an interesting way to look at the difference between people who are fortunate to have good brain chemistry and those whose have become unbalanced. Solo Pass reminds us that what happened to Ott could happen to any of us, and that people shouldn't be judged (as they so often are) for being mentally ill.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Disappointingly dullBy Tyler M.I snagged a paperback copy of Solo Pass because the colorful cover art caught my eye and the blurb described a "Dark, unsettling, yet grimly funny" novel. Sure, sounds good! Count me in!What I found was certainly dark and a little grim, but there is nothing "grimly funny" about it. There are absurd images and interesting contrasts (that are humorous? Maybe?) between the two "worlds" explored, the interior and exterior of a psych ward, but nothing really funny. At one point I laughed out loud at the odd phrasing of, "Wally's sloppy puppy," but that was it. Sorry, I spoiled the one good laugh, and it wasn't even remotely grim. If cowardly impetus and cruel circumstance get you chuckling, then grab this book right away.The protagonist is interesting because he is fully realized (and you spend half the time inside among his gloomy, exaggerated thoughts) but otherwise I found every other character totally flat. Substantial time is spent describing the other patients in the ward even though they are just caricatures, as if De Feo went down a list of psychological disorders and picked them out: here's the manic-depressive, the man-child, the token sociopath, etc. The supporting cast is also painfully cliche and consists entirely of stereotypes: the taxi driver who gripes about his superintendent, various nosy children who pop in just to shake Ott out of his thoughts and force the plot along so they can disappear a second later, the psychologists who exist only to pry and then smirk with self-satisfaction, every retail employee who is boring and predictable and yet gets a paragraph of needless description. There's a young girl in heavy makeup working at a fancy cosmetics store? Color me flabbergasted. The curators at an art gallery are dressed nicely but are otherwise nondescript? Thanks for the insight, I would never have guessed!My main gripe with the novel is that is slow and insipid. There is a lot of passive voice, useless conversation, and moments of indecision that go on for too long for too little payoff. Much of the story takes place in Ott's head and there is no justification for spending so much time looking backward--it is abundantly clear after the first 50 pages that Ott, who is recently divorced, had some rough spots with his marriage. He is in a psych ward, and therefore clearly mentally unstable. The entirety of "Part II" is almost redundant because it covers no new ground. There are 25 pages of background that was already implied by the rest of the book. I find it funny that the

character's surname, "Ott" is revealed toward the end of the novel, like it's some kind of thrilling secret. Of course "Ott" implies "aught," or zero, or nothing, and this is presented like some kind of earth-shattering, novel concept, that this man who has lived constantly in fear of dissolving into nothingness is named nothing. The entirety of Solo Pass strikes me the same way, like the reader is expected to be thrilled by each each empty, idle plot point until the whole journey is done and the bottom of the cliche barrel is struck with a hollow thud. Ott also recalls the character "Nada" from the film "They Live!" and it is not an especially flattering correlation.The novel has charm that is obscured by the dreadfully slow pace. Ott reaches all these revelations and battles with himself but for no reason other than to provide him with more obstacles. His struggles become far more obnoxious than they are profound. The events of the novel are mundane and monochrome; Instead of a colorful, eventful story packed with lively characters, De Feo presents a cadre of unimaginative stock figures that exist to needle a protagonist who narrates everything through a tired, monotonous cycle of anxiety, rage, and then resignation.So is the novel dark and unsettling as advertised? Perhaps. Is it "grimly funny"? No. It clearly has a mood which is executed well and it has a smattering of smart ideas, but there is not enough here to forgive a novel that would have been better off further removed from the remarkably boring protagonist who embodies nothingness. It is hard to make "nothing" interesting.If you are looking to experience a remarkable transformation, a perspective-shattering look into the mind of the mentally infirm, a story that will captivate and chill you, this novel falls completely flat.

A dark yet often funny novel narrated by a man who, for the past two months, has been a patient at a New York City mental ward. Having suffered a breakdown—due to his shattered marriage and an irrational fear of fading away as a human—he now finds himself caught between two worlds, neither of which is a place of comfort or fulfillment: the world of the ward, where abnormality and an odd sort of freedom reign, and the outside world, where convention and restrictive behavior rule. Finally on his way to becoming reasonably “normal” again, he requests and is granted a “solo pass,” which allows him to leave the (locked) ward for several hours and visit the city, with the promise that he will return to the hospital by evening. As he prepares for his excursion, we get a picture of the ward he will temporarily leave behind—the staff and the patients, notably Mandy Reid, a schizophrenic and nymphomaniac who has become his closest friend there. Solo Pass is an unsettling satire that depicts, with inverted logic, the difficulties of madness and normalcy.

From BooklistLike his debut novel, Calling Mr. King (2011), in which a successful hit man discovers a love for art and architecture and begins to question his profession, De Feo’s latest features a man who must reconcile his past life with his present reality. Mr. Ott is a resident of a psych ward in New York, hospitalized after a breakdown that left him bruised, incoherent, and stricken with fear that he may gradually fade away. But Ott has been rehabilitated enough to earn temporary release. He heads to his abandoned apartment but not before memories of his unforgiving ex-wife and psychiatrist-cum-saboteur threaten to destabilize what precious sanity he’s restored. The remnants of Ott’s former life cause his fragile sense of coherence, as well as his memories about the events that preceded his hospitalization, to unravel. This has been in the works for years, with portions appearing as early as 1988 in the Hudson . The result is a quirky, funny tale that forces the reader to question the line between inside and outside, insanity and normalcy, confinement and freedom. --Diego Báez "A quirky, funny tale that forces the reader to question the line between inside and outside, insanity and normalcy, confinement and freedom." -Booklist Online"Some parts of the book were really quite funny and others were heartbreakingly sad. The characters were all very human and parts of the storyline kept me guessing. I will definitely seek out more from this author." -Reading in Progress"In this highly engaging novel, Ott presents his version of events, but we are still able to see cracks in the narrative, and eventually a well-formed picture of what really happened emerges...Ultimately, author De Feo shows that the weight of conformity and a desire to belong to a social group can be both a terrible burden, an overwhelming challenge, and oddly enough a liberating choice." -Swiftly Tilting PlanetAbout the AuthorRonald De Feo is the author of Calling Mr. King (Other Press). He has written reviews for the New York Times Book , The Nation, the New Republic, and the National . His short fiction has been published widely in national magazines including the Hudson , Massachusetts , and North American , and he worked for nine years as senior editor at ARTnews. He now serves on the advisory board of Magazine, devoted to Latin American and Canadian literature and the arts.