

Information Books

BIOGRAPHY



Kampung Boy (2009)
 Lat, Wilkins Farago, 142pp.
 978 0 9806070 0 0 \$22.99 Pb

A kampung is a Malaysian rural village and the boy is Mohamad Nor bin Khalid. In other words, an autobiographical depiction of growing up in the 1950s by one of the most popular men in Malaysia, the cartoonist known as Lat.

It is not hard to see why he is so beloved in his home country and also enjoys international acclaim. His pictures are masterfully composed to perfectly capture particular actions and nuances of character. The art is sharply defined pen and ink drawing. There is little hatching; instead he relies on the strong contrast between black and white to create space and suggest substance. Each page of this landscape format paperback bears a single scene with handsript text placed at the edges. The impression is that of an easy, inviting read. And that it surely is; Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, a long-time admirer of Lat's comic books, describes **Kampung Boy** as *sweet, funny, and brilliantly drawn*.

One cannot fail to miss the similarities between **Kampung Boy** and Colin Thiele's autobiographical novel, **Sun on the Stubble**. Essentially, both depict a boy's rural childhood until that pre-teen moment when he is packed off to boarding school. Lat's boy is so very much like Thiele's Bruno. Life is wonderful; there is so much fun to be had, a little mischief to be enjoyed, school to endure, parents to suffer, and a community of singular characters to negotiate. Lat's community is a small Islamic village with all the familiar shops, services and public facilities, located in lush, tropical countryside with tin dredging and rubber growing the main industries. It is a place rich in opportunities for a boy and his mates to get up to shenanigans. They skinny dip down in the creek, go to the movies, skip school, annoy the local

constable, worry their parents and rollick along from page to page. **Kampung Boy** is charming, affectionate and humorous. More than Lat's own childhood, it depicts the commonality of childhood experience. Wherever in the world a child grows up, under whatever creed or religion the child lives, there is that common spirit and innocence of childhood that has children commingling and exploring with typical zest the place and community in which they live.
 Kevin Steinberger