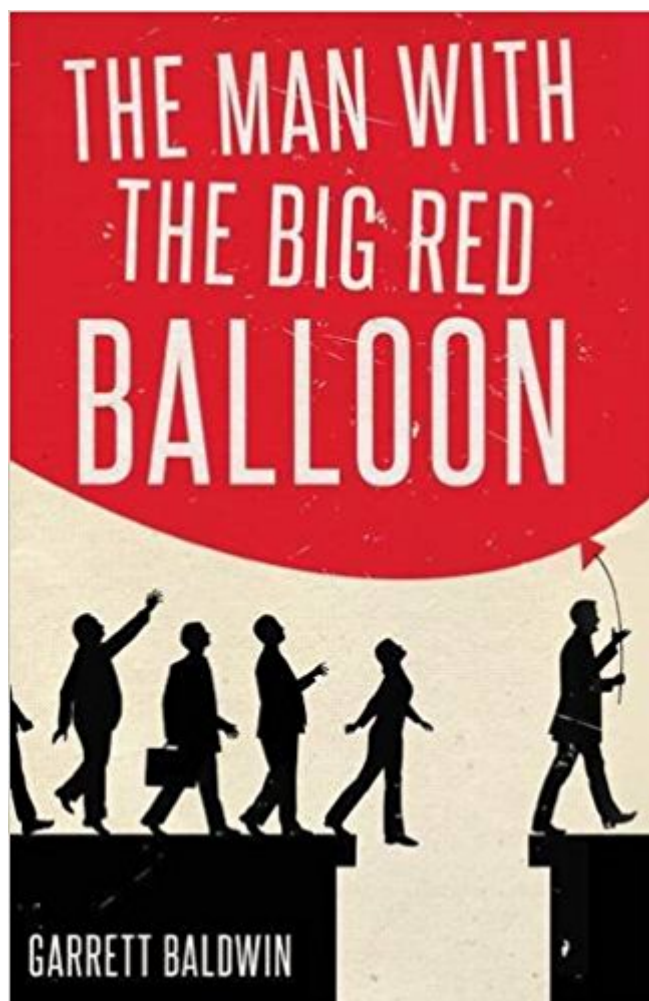


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The Man With The Big Red Balloon



Synopsis

Sharp and enchanting, Garrett Baldwin's *The Man with the Big Red Balloon* is a romping story of when good intentions meet impossible greed and a biting political satire of today's political world. Apple Valley is a pristine, bucolic wonderland shining with the promise of prosperity. Life is as simple as Josie's prized apple pies sold at the town's very first bakery. Farmers harvest plentiful apples, businesses swing open their doors, and life flourishes. Apple Valley is a growing economic powerhouse built on the ideals of productivity, education, and accountability. But one morning, the town's founder fails to rise again, and the town must continue on without him. Determined to uphold his legacy, the town pushes forward trading silver, selling wares, and holding each other accountable in a place where freedom is championed. Here, harvests are plentiful and businesses prosper. But when Arlo Greydon arrives on the heels of the town's economic boom, he doesn't see a fruitful world. All Arlo he sees is excess. Fairness--Arlo argues--is what Apple Valley needs most. The power hungry idealist believes that each farmer, each business owner, each person should have the same amount of food and the same amount of silver. To help him sell his brilliant vision of fairness, he invites a mysterious, charismatic stranger--only known as "the Man"--to help him. And when the Man stokes fear with news of a fresh crisis--that the town is running out of air--the people submit to Arlo's solution to increase taxes and government control of their lives. . . all for the children, of course.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A master work of political fiction." - Modern Trader

Garrett Baldwin is the Managing Editor of the Alpha Pages and the Features Editor of Modern Trader. An author and Baltimore native, he earned a BS in journalism from the Medill School at Northwestern University, an MA in Economic Policy (Security Studies) from The Johns Hopkins University, an MS in Agricultural Economics from Purdue University, and an MBA from Indiana University.

It's been a long time since I've read a book and thought, "I wish I had been required to read this in high school", but that's exactly how I felt reading *The Man with the Big Red Balloon*. The book is an allegorical tale about the economy, the face of government, and the many different reasons the systems we have in place today are so flawed. It teaches the basics of economics, while demonstrating (or, warning the reader, rather) the slippery slope of sacrificing more time and money for the common good. The plot is straightforward. In a utopian town, people conduct business and live life by working hard and operating in a closed system of supply and demand. Every business that thrives does so because it has a perfect niche to fill that simplifies life for others or provides something they can't do themselves. Conflict happens when a character introduces the concept of governing or overseeing others instead of working for himself to make sure everything is fair for everyone. In the quest for fairness, people give up more and more of their money, equating to more of their time until there isn't anything left to give. It's a conservatively leaning cautionary tale that is worth checking out. The prose makes it an easy read, but it's smart and enjoyable and you'll be thinking about how many hours you work each day for other people long after you're through.

Baldwin's *The Man with the Big Red Balloon* is a blistering narrative work of political fiction. An economic allegory that evokes the flaws and ambitions of those who seek power through authority rather than through purposeful productivity or individual achievement. Part Hayekian economics lesson, part dark comedy, *The Man with the Big Red Balloon* is a timeless fable about the struggle between those seeking power and those seeking truth and liberty. After 50 farmers escape a tyrant in a distant nation, they settle upon an untouched land ripe with apple trees stretching beyond the horizon. From nothing, the townspeople build businesses, establish trade and create a financial Xanadu, unshackled from the arbitrary bureaucracy of their former tyrannical king. As the town expands, business disagreements arise. But farmers address them civilly and without the consent of rulers. Until a man named Arlo Greydon arrives. Greydon is obsessed with "fairness." He argues that every farmer should have the same

amount of money, the same amount of food, even the same amount of windows on their homes. It is here where the book kicks into satirical warning about those demanding socialistic sacrifice from the more productive to make everything "fair." Once Greydon's charismatic charm and oratorical gifts enables him to assume power, the real problems begin. Nepotism, influence-peddling, regulatory creep and corruption follow. New self-appointed leaders earn huge salaries on the backs of farmers • all in the name of "fairness." Once corruption is discovered, the town must hold a vote. Do they elect a man who will return them to a decentralized system that historically worked or prop up the corrupted official Greydon, who is an ultimate insider. Again, it doesn't matter if it's a Senate race in 2016 or a Senate race in Ancient Rome, humanity has a way of repeating its flaws. It is during this vote that the true antagonist arrives • a stranger who distracts citizens from the real purpose of the election. The Man, using a big red balloon, convinces voters that a major crisis has arrived. He warns that if they don't vote for the Greydon, the city will run out of fresh air, government and regulatory encroachment. It exposes how career politicians manufacture or stoke crises to maintain power. How illogical coalitions formulate in self-interest. And most of all • how political messaging aims to denounce, demonize and destroy those seeking truth. It's an enjoyable burn, one that leads to a surprising twist and a head-nodding climax that ignites personal reflection. Some key messages aren't necessarily new. American Hero (and its film adaptation Wag the Dog) tells a story about a manufactured crisis to preserve power. Animal Farm taps into the hypocrisy of leaders who say one thing and do the other. And The Road to Serfdom • easily my favorite book on the dangers of centralized planning • provides a deeper understanding of how economic freedom evaporates in society. The Man with the Big Red Balloon achieves those messages in one fictional narrative, and offers an even more compelling lesson: How those seeking power can easily exploit the goals of "the common good" to consolidate power and wealth. You need look no further than Nicolas Maduro's leadership in Venezuela to see life imitate art. But many of you will find enough parallels here at home. Most enjoyable is the writing itself. Colorful characters fill the narrative and embody the main actors in our headlines. Whether it's the shrill councilwoman Priceless Pickett • an amalgam of Hollywood's climate change hypocrites • or Jasper Ames, the town's newspaper reporter who fails as miserably as today's fourth estate in calling truth to power • the story parallels human history. Perhaps

that's the greatest charm: This story will remain eternal as it shows the cyclical nature of how free nations rise and fall and that it is human decisions, not a faceless bureaucracy that are responsible. I began reading Orwell, Hayek and Rand in high school and have returned to them throughout the years. This book will become required reading for my two young teens. It is never too early to learn about the consequences of lost liberty and the ugly dark side of unbridled lust for power. As Orwell reminds us, "The real division is not between conservatives and revolutionaries but between authoritarians and libertarians."

Jeff Joseph, Publisher of Modern Trader magazine & Chief Editor at The Alpha Pages

Always love to read Garrett's writing. This guy knows how to tell a story. Great read - everybody should try this one...

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