



# Idlewild

*Nick Sagan*

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## **Idlewild** Nick Sagan

It is a not-too-distant future in our all-too-recognizable world. It is the late twenty-first century and a deadly virus has seeped into human kind's genetic make-up. In only a few generations this plague will have wiped us off the face of the planet, but we're not going down without a fight. Teams of scientists, geneticists and programmers race to find a cure, but time is not on our side and our only hope lies in one last, desperate gamble...

Eighteen years later and ten individuals are about to come of age. One of them, a young man, is suddenly startled awake. He has no memory. His surroundings mean nothing to him. All he knows for certain is that someone is trying to kill him. Unsure who he can trust, he is reacquainted with his companions, all of whom are being trained at a special establishment run by the elusive Maestro. As he tries to uncover the identity of his would-be killer, it becomes clear that more - so much more - than just his life is at stake...

Smart, stylish, terrifying and thrilling in equal measure, Idlewild fuses the fierce imagination of The Matrix with the chilling social vision of Minority Report, and introduces a singular new literary voice.

## **Idlewild Details**

Date : Published August 2nd 2004 by Bantam (first published August 8th 2003)

ISBN : 9780553815979

Author : Nick Sagan

Format : Hardcover 275 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, Fantasy

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## From Reader Review Idlewild for online ebook

### Greg says

I should change my name so that I, too, can get a book published. I'm down to three finalist for my new name: Camus Capote, Shakespeare Swift, or (something simple) Hemming Way. Any thoughts about which I should chose? (Oh, about the book: the world in which it resides apparently has no rules. Anything can happen, anyone can do anything, say anything, go anywhere. And if you're going to write a book in which anyone can say or think absolutely anything that pops into their brain, you'd better be James Joyce.) Oh, wait, my new name is (drumroll please) : Joy Ces Johnson!

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### Amy says

Hated everything about this book and it took everything I had to finish it.

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### Beem Weeks says

This novel surprised me. I am not much of a fan of science fiction, but not knowing this book belonged in that genre, I picked up a copy and settled in for a read. Immediately I felt myself being drawn inside the story. It became one of those stories I couldn't put down, needing to see where the next chapter would lead. The characters are fleshed out and well-written, the plot is solid, and the story remains interesting from start to finish.

In the late twenty-first century a virus has decimated the human race, leaving scientists in a mad-scramble to find a cure. Jump ahead another eighteen years and there are ten specific individuals remaining--or are there really others? Much of this story takes place in a virtual world, breaking through to the real world only after one of the ten is suddenly jolted from his slumber, realizing that somebody is trying to kill him.

Nick Sagan has written a tight thriller that slips easily away of the science fiction tag attached to it. If I'd have known this was a Sci-Fi read, chances are I'd have left it alone. I'm glad I didn't know. It's worth a read by anybody who enjoys a well-told and thrilling read.

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### Weng says

**4.0/5.0 stars**

*"I look back upon my ignorance with the knowledge that I was much happier then than now. Consider this: children know precious little, but the profound ignorance comes from profound innocence. People really mean to say that innocence is bliss. And bliss is short-lived."*

I chanced upon this book in an aimless bookstore trip at a time when Neil Gaiman was recommended to me by a friend. I saw Gaiman's endorsement and decided to buy this. That and the awesome blurb..

He calls himself Halloween. He is a unique student attending a most prestigious boarding school--the Idlewild Immersive Virtual Reality Academy. While his body sleeps, his mind interacts with those of his fellow students under the tutelage of the enigmatic artificial intelligence known as Maestro.

An inexplicable energy surge has damaged the IVR and fragmented Halloween's mind. Convinced this anomaly was deliberately triggered to kill him, Halloween is desperate to recover his memories--only to discover a devastating revelation about his true existence.

Idlewild is a *futuristic, post-apocalyptic, science fiction* novel that's easily identified with movies such as The Matrix and Minority Report, a mesh of both in fact and more. Imagine being able to create a world of your own choosing, anything your mind can think of, or being anywhere you want to be in a heartbeat, it's possible, but with a catch: you're inside a simulated world and you're trapped in it.

Gabriel Hall is a student of Idlewild Academy with an automatic ticket to Harvard Medical School once he graduates. Except, despite his brilliance and potential, he's not exactly a model student. He prides himself a rebel among his peers along with Mercutio, Tyler and Fantasia--the weirdos of the class. He also has an uncanny fascination with death, hence, his moniker Halloween.

Halloween likes to play a game of virtual skirmishes with his classmates and considers golden boy, Lazarus, his rival in academics as well as in love. But recent events led him to believe that Laz's sudden disappearance may have been a case of murder and is connected to his loss of memory. Now, Halloween suspects that one of his friends may likely be responsible for the attempt on his life and quite possibly the school that sheltered them for years may have been covering up something big--none of them are safe anymore.

Written in a first-person narrative, our *antihero's* voice is smart and bad-ass. I really liked the ending of this book--just, wow. I love it. Nothing is ever what it seems. All in all, great job Nick Sagan. ***I recommend this to all sci-fi enthusiasts.***

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## Keri says

When I started reading this, I had a distinct mental image of the exact setting described in the first few pages. And that mental image kept going through the whole novel.

The story, a mix of sci-fi, post-apocalyptic, and loss of innocence is good for YA and adult readers alike. As I was reading, I couldn't decide which it section it fit best in...before I gave up. A good book is a good book so who really cares?

Halloween is our main character and immediately, he's not exactly the best narrator, considering he can't remember anything. I thought this would irk me, and it did at first but soon I was just as curious as he was to figure out what was going on.

The interludes with the characters in italics slowly clues you in on what's going on and soon you'll have an idea at the same time Halloween does. I enjoyed the twist, though I figured it out before I think I was supposed to.

The second twist, however, took me by surprise. Though the ending, in my opinion, was a bit anti-climactic, I will still read the second book in the series. I think it'll be a good one!

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## **Z says**

*Idlewild* starts out part Orson Scott Card, part Neil Gaiman, and part Chuck Palahniuk - so much so that you start to wonder when the author will find his own voice. Gratifyingly, about halfway through, the themes cohere to hit a note that is uniquely Nick Sagan. I finished this book in two days flat and found myself thinking about it and admiring various aspects of it during the time (read: working hours) that I couldn't read it.

Halloween is a special, genetically gifted student at the Idlewild Academy, a virtual school that he attends with nine similarly brilliant students. How real is Halloween, and how real is the Idlewild Academy? How virtual is the virtual school and the virtual environment in which the students are raised? Exactly how does one define boundaries between real and virtual, anyway?

Bright, gripping, funny, relevant, and altogether intelligent - come to think of it, how can one expect any less of a son of Carl Sagan?

This book had many fine moments for me, but one of my favourite lines, and intensely funny in its context, has to be: *And I'm clawing at the lid of my coffin, unilaterally planning a future with a girl who thinks I'm creepy.*

If you like *Ender's Saga*, *Neverwhere* or any intelligent science fiction / surrealist fantasy in general, you want to give *Idlewild* a shot. A seriously enjoyable reading experience.

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## **Josh says**

I only read the first three chapters but that was enough for me. The writing is fine but the problem is this is a first person story told by an amnesiac. I like some surprises in a book but literally having no idea what is going on is not terribly engaging. If the plot moved more quickly into the main character remembering things it might have grabbed me a little better but in the first three chapters there was a lot of confusion, several deaths, and some patently absurd warring between smiley faces with tommy guns and HP Lovecraft's nightgaunts. I'm willing to suspend disbelief but if you want me to accept something that is completely absurd you really have to give me a reason. Making a world where everything is crazy and even the narrator can't clue me in a little just didn't make me want to keep on going. So I didn't.

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## **Jonathan Prokter says**

*Idlewild*, written by Nick Sagan and published in 2003, is a Science Fantasy novel that centers around a

teenager named Halloween. It begins with him waking up in a grassy field with amnesia, after being attacked. The novel details his journey to understand his world, purpose, and who tried to murder him. *Idlewild* excels in jaw dropping revelations and the use of some interesting quirks that enrich how the story is told and how readers digest it. However, an “intended” antagonist with little development and intrigue and a rushed ending made it feel less than fully polished.

The biggest contributor to *Idlewild*’s enjoyment and quality is the mystery in its world and how it goes about revealing plot twists. The novel almost immediately depicts a scene where Halloween summons monsters inspired by Lovecraft to fight against gang members wielding tommy guns. There are descriptions of multicolored butterflies and flashes of light. This implants an expectation within the reader, that this is a fantasy world with its own rules and inhabitants. However, the book soon reveals that the world the reader has come to know is merely a VR world, made for the main character and his friends to live in and grow. This is both a shocking twist and a logical explanation to the events depicted in the plot so far. It recontextualizes the world the characters inhabit and adds another layer to the plot. Nevertheless, the book does not stop there. It proceeds to depict the characters entering the real world and implants another expectation within the reader that scenes like Halloween interacting with his parents take place in the real world, not the virtual one. Towards the last third or so of the book, the author reveals that what was perceived to be the “real world” by both the characters and the reader is simply part of the VR, and that Halloween is actually a biologically created human stuck in a pod in outer space. They were made to combat a disease that had already wiped out all of humanity. It’s revelations like these that keep the story engaging while also building off of what has been previously established. Instead of peeling off layers to an onion, layers are being added around the core of it.

Another positive aspect is how Sagan showcases and explains two different timelines in his story. One timeline depicts various scientists in the past trying to build the necessary technology to house and create Halloween and his friends. The second timeline follows Halloween’s search for answers in the present. The way Sagan presents these timelines is through splitting each chapter into two sections. The past timeline is all italicized and always begins at the beginning of every chapter and the present timeline follow with normal formatting. This creates a “building of the puzzle” feel to reading the book. Every chapter gives bits and pieces of information from the past timeline so that the reader can constantly have a mental understanding of said timeline that is constantly evolving. Instead of the characters having flashbacks and ruining the pace of the main timeline, Sagan expertly gives each timeline its own pacing and hints at future revelations in the past timeline. It forces the reader to think of both the past and the present at the same time, how they caused each other, and what narrative and thematic through lines can be found between those timelines.

Nonetheless, *Idlewild* is not without its flaws. The ending section of the book left me a sour taste in my mouth for two major reasons. The first being, what felt like, a complete heel turn of one of the characters into the “intended antagonist” of the novel. Mercutio was built up to be one of Halloween’s best friends across the entirety of the plot and it’s suddenly revealed at the end that he was the one who attempted to murder Halloween. Throughout the story, he would always side with Halloween and help him to fight against his enemies, like the teacher of the VR school “Maestro.” It felt off to suddenly have him turn on his own friends, much less Halloween. That sudden twist happening at the end of the novel left no room for characterization and development for Mercutio as an antagonistic character. His motives were not clearly explained and he felt bland as a result. The twist was made all the more baffling when Mercutio was killed as soon as he was introduced as the “intended antagonist.” I qualify him as the “intended” antagonist for I believe the novel was always building up to him. From the central mystery to the very beginning pages, he

was supposed to be the “Big Bad.” However, having such a character hurt the series in the end. As I was reading, I always saw the scientists in the past timeline as the main antagonists. People who were forced to go against the will of many in order to create biological humans to save the human race in the future. They were more compelling antagonists and the final confrontation with them at the end of the novel felt lackluster. They were replaced with a less than stellar betrayal character, who died then and there.

The ending felt as though it was teasing a more interesting plot line, then being a satisfying conclusion itself. Although the ending made me think of Voltaire’s *Candide*, since Halloween abandons his friends and “society” in order to live happily enough by himself, it felt as though things were just getting interesting. I am aware that there are multiple sequels to *Idlewild*, but I was told by a friend that the novel is still an independent piece, which I now disagree with. The ending made it seem that the entirety of the book was merely a buildup, exposition, to tease the interesting plot of them trying to rebuild human society in their image after the plague devastated all of humanity. Halloween’s decision to separate himself from the rest of his friends was given only half a page to develop and breath, and it simply ended after that. Whatever you believe the desire of the sequel in the ending is a good thing or a bad thing, I personally believe that books should stand on their own feet, and not rely on sequels to pick up the slack for them.

Despite these sour negatives, I really enjoyed my time reading *Idlewild*. It’s sense of progression and shifting status quo made it engaging to sit through. Although the ending and antagonist left more to be desired, I cannot deny the enjoyment I received up to the conclusion of the novel. It’s a definite recommendation to all those who marvel at things like The Matrix and the potential virtual reality. Halloween’s debut contains a lot of treats with very few tricks!

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## **Rich Stoehr says**

The first 20 or 30 pages of "Idlewild" frankly had me wondering if I should bother reading the rest of the book. The characters and situations seemed just a bit fake, and the early premise seemed trite. Now, having stuck it out and read the whole book, I think that was intentional. The odd beginning sets up expectations for the reader early on, and then the story carries on to improve upon itself almost constantly. By the end, I was left fairly impressed and pleased with a book I hadn't been sure I wanted to finish at all.

"Idlewild" is a story of some gifted kids living a mostly virtual existence, a world they can shape to meet their own needs and whims, and in which they can't ever really be hurt. It is in this virtual world where they receive their education and are protected. That is, until one of them is hurt in a power surge and loses all of his memory. The rest of the book consists of Halloween, the protagonist, rediscovering who he is through his interactions with the other students, his parents, his virtual Nanny, and the virtual instructor Maestro. As he discovers more about himself, he also discovers more than he ever knew about the world in which he exists, and why he's there.

Sagan does a nice job of creating different worlds in "Idlewild," peeling back each layer of reality like the layers of an onion, keeping the readers always a little uncertain about the meaning of what's going on. While the story of Halloween and the other students is the main focus of the novel, there is another story that runs parallel to it, one which doesn't really become clear until halfway through the book. By the time I understood what was going on, I was hooked into the story and anxious to see how it came out.

Sagan's writing isn't great, but it is serviceable with moments of true talent. The characters, seeming a little flat early on, are given life and depth as the story progresses, and evolve beyond their stereotypes. The prose is mostly transparent and unpretentious, allowing the story to spin out naturally, a style which works nicely.

When I read that Nick Sagan was the son of the late astronomer and writer Carl Sagan, I wasn't sure what to think. I was pleased to find that Nick has at least made the attempt to forge ahead in some original territory, unlike what his father wrote of in his fiction or scientific work. Even better, Nick's attempt was largely successful, and has resulted in a fun book that's an easy read but not a shallow one. The ideas are thought-provoking and original, the story is entertaining and will keep you turning the pages. Not bad at all for a first-timer.

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### **Challis says**

Never considered myself a sci-fi gal. This one is fantasy/reality enough to not be sci-fi, even though it is... Really reminded me of the matrix.

What a fun place to get lost for awhile. Unfortunately it was too quick of a read. Liked the tangle that slowly unravels in different layers. Wanted to stay in this IVR world a lot longer.

One big question unanswered: How does Mercutio find his way to 0?

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### **Dallaslain says**

Huh, I didn't see that coming. Or rather I did and I didn't. Part science fiction, part mystery, part philosophical and ethical question about how far is too far. An easy and fun read that zips along until you look up and think, how the heck did we get here? Recommended for science fiction skeptics and YA readers.

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### **Logan K says**

Idlewild by Nick Sagan is a science fiction and mystery book. I think it is a great page-turner full of suspense and action, and the characters, setting, and story pull you in so you just can not stop reading. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes mystery, suspense, and action in books. Idlewild is one of the best books I have ever read.

Idlewild is about a teenage boy named Halloween who wakes up with no memory of who he is. He soon learns that he is in a school that is in virtual reality, and he knows that someone is trying to kill him.

Halloween also finds out that his rival has disappeared without a trace, and his childhood crush asks him to help find the missing student, Lazarus. Halloween soon learns that there is more to Lazarus's disappearance than anyone could have imagined.

There are many characters in Idlewild, and most of them are students in a virtual reality school for the extremely intelligent, and they are separated into two groups, the clods, and the pets. The pets are the well-behaved students who listen to the teachers and believe whatever the teachers tell them, and the clods are the more rebellious students and question what the teachers tell them. The main character is Halloween, a clod who has no memory of who he is or what happened to him. The rest of the clods are his friends Mercutio, Tyler, and Fantasia. Halloween is the smarter, more of the tech geek of all the students. The pets are Simone, Halloween's love interest, Lazarus and Isaac, Halloween's biggest rivals, Pandora, Halloween's good friend, Champagne, Tyler's girlfriend, and Vashti, the smartest of all the students. There are also many computer



programs who are teachers and tutors. There are many interesting characters the book, and many more than the ones I listed.

I think that the author, Nick Sagan, wrote this book superbly, with a first-person writing style unlike any other. Sagan wrote the book so well that you experience the book as if you were Halloween. He also wrote the story very well with a great plot and many good details. Nick Sagan did a great job writing Idlewild. I think that Idlewild is a great book that deserves five stars. Nick Sagan wrote the book with a magnificent writing style. The book's characters and plot both pull in to the book. I would recommend Idlewild to anyone who enjoys reading.

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### **Silver Thistle {adores JAFF & TEOTWAWKI. Oh, and accronyms :P} says**

Idlewild is very Matrix-esque. It starts when we meet a confused young man, who appears to be in a dark sinister place, and who seems to know as little about his world as we do. It's all very confusing (for him, and for us) but also intriguing. It seems to be a chilling place on the one hand, but as things develop we see that it's actually a place of friendship and fun.....until things start to go Pete Tong.

The confused young man we meet on the first page is Halloween (how cool is THAT for a name?!!) and in his little corner of the world everything is orange and black. The colours are his 'call sign' or 'gimmick' and help distinguish him from his friends who each have their own colour combo's and quirky names.

However, his circle of friends and the world as he knows it are about to become thrown into disarray and come crashing down around him. He comes to the realisation that his survival depends on what amounts to nothing more than computer pixels. He realises that his world is actually a lot smaller than he first thought. A LOT smaller.

He's not who he thought he was, his friends and teachers are not who he thought they were and his life depends on being able to work out what's real and what's not.

Confused? So was I.....but it's a great confusion! I loved this book! I haven't read anything like it before and I'm so glad it's a series. I like the character Halloween a lot in this first installment and can't wait to see where he goes from here. This is a great book to lose yourself in. It's one of my favourite subjects in works of fiction; apocalyptic, end of the world scenario with a bit of plague and 'last man standing' thrown in for good measure.

I didn't realise when I read this that Nick Sagan was Carl Sagan's son (how could I NOT have known, with a name like that? Duh!), but I don't think it would have made much difference if I'd known in advance because I've never read any of his dad's books to compare with. He's a talented author and regardless of who his dad is, he's got a book here that holds up well against some of best SF writers around.

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### **Jessi says**

Ok this is very Sci-Fi, so if that's not your thing then this, this is not your book. A lot of people seemed to

have given this a good rating on Goodreads, me not so much.

I hate when a book makes me feel dumb, like I don't get the joke that they are still laughing about 2 pages later. The characters make reference to things that have not been covered in the book, I am sure that this is a tool the author used to show the comradery between the teens it sort of annoyed me.

It was like "Inception" if you've seen it (if not, get on it) at one point when very few people in the theater audience are clear on what's going on Juno (who is new to the group) says something like

"we will find him, okay. As soon as Arthur's music kicks in just use the defibrillator to revive, We can give him his own kick down below. as soon as music ends we blow up the hospital and we all ride the kick back up the layers."

And I'm like "Really Juno? that's all we have to do? Because WTF comes to mind" that's what "IdleWild" is like the whole time like the answer is elementary and then they start talkin' shit that has not been covered in the book. Also IdleWild does not have Leo DeCaprio or Tom Hardy or banging effects so it cannot getaway with this stuff.

Very matrix-esque story with virtual reality and a bit of world domination mixed in for good measure. I will not be reading the other books in the series.

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## **Cassi says**

Amazing! I knew nothing about this going into it, so it was a great surprise. It was by far the best audiobook I have heard, despite the really poor start. If you are listening to it, know that the author "acts" out the book, so it seems incredibly over-dramatic at the beginning. Keep going!

The story goes from convoluted to intriguing. The characters are young, high school kids, and may feel flat in some places as a result. It takes a few turns that may or may not be expected, but overall, Nick Sagan has an imagination that is part philosophy, part science fiction and a huge amount of fun.

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## **Ryan says**

This book follows the life of a teenage boy -- the archetypal bright, world-weary loner with authority issues - - who is being educated at a special virtual reality-based boarding school along with several other teenagers, while the world outside progresses towards apocalypse. Of course, nothing is exactly what it seems, and a conspiracy reminiscent of The Matrix and other cyberpunk-ish works begins to come to light.

The story has some flaws besides its familiarity: a few of the characters feel inadequately fleshed out, the beginning is a bit confusing, and I found myself questioning the logic of Sagan's world in a few places. (And, please, sf writers, no more comparisons between virtual reality and Plato's cave -- we friggin' get it!!) On the

other hand, there was nothing as dumb as humans in suspended animation being used for power cells (as in the Matrix), the story picks up momentum, and the characters become more involving. Not a mind-blowing read, but still a thumbs up.

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## **Chad says**

This book had a lot of potential, but I often found myself confused at the author's choices, many of which made it harder for me to become immersed in the story and what could have been its amazing world, if only the author hadn't squandered so many opportunities.

The book has the feel of being a young adult novel. Its protagonist is a teenager, and much of his focus is on the relationships between him and his friends. However, the author really likes the word "fuck," and I'm not sure how well that fits in the genre. But the book's tone is too superficial and angsty to appeal very well to an older audience.

The narrator for much of the book is named Halloween. The author does a pretty good job of using a distinct and interesting voice for him. But the very nature of that voice kept me from connecting with the book or any of its characters. The narration is focused on surprise and shock. Instead of explaining things in a natural order, the narrator first says something shocking or surprising, and then writes the rest of the paragraph explaining it. Then, at the beginning of the next paragraph, another surprising or shocking statement, followed by an explanation. This gives the narrator a lot of character, but it makes it difficult to relax into the story, knowing that you're going to be continually jarred out of it. It's possible that the author intended this to be symbolic of the way that virtual reality overcame the senses in sometimes jarring ways but that the characters always found a way to accept those inconsistencies and allow them to become their new reality. But all it did for me is keep me from embracing as full fact any of Halloween's statements, and because of that, I never had any sympathy or concern for him or his plight, and I never cared if he succeeded in any of his goals.

The plot device at the beginning of the book is the trite "oh no, I've lost my memory and my life is in danger but I have no idea what the rules of engagement are" which can be a fun and interesting approach to a story, especially a dystopian science fiction thriller like this book no doubt intended to be. Instead, though, the author seemed to bungle this. There was what appeared to be true confusion and exploration of the environment only in the first 10% of the book or so. And then, even though Halloween continued to claim to have amnesia, he related matter-of-factly all sorts of details, facts, equations, and quotes that had absolutely no bearing on the true dilemma of the story, but only served to make transparent that the author was too lazy to deal with the full complement of effects of amnesia when all he wanted was the few benefits that allowed him to keep certain key elements away from the reader. And then, when I thought about why, I realized that there was actually nothing that his amnesia served to protect us from. All pertinent information was revealed with or without the amnesia, and no revelation later in the story came out as he remembered details. The story could have been written completely the same without the amnesia, and probably would have been a stronger story.

The story had twelve major characters, and the relationships between Halloween and each other character were handed to us as a brief statement of facts that somehow the amnesia didn't affect, and otherwise each character was completely superficial. No time was taken to discover the motives or nature of the characters, and none was given sufficient air-time in the course of the novel to make any kind of connection between the reader and each character. Many of the characters were completely extraneous to the story. (Perhaps some

were included only so they could have a role in the sequels?) And at the end of the book, the revelation of the heroes and villains (if such you could call them), had no emotional impact because the reader had not had a chance to form very detailed opinions of any of them.

The premise of *Idlewild* had a ton of potential. Here was a virtual reality world inside a virtual reality world. Add on top of that the amnesia of the main character, and suddenly you have a world where you can really explore the meaning of reality, the blurred line of an imagined or self-created reality, and the difference between truth, lies, good intentions, and the resulting lack of trust from such uncertainty. The author capitalized on none of these things. Halloween never asked himself any of the questions that should have been inherent in his situation. Sure, he wondered whom he could trust. But he never doubted any of his own assumptions about the environment, any of his way-too-certain statements of the past, or, when he escaped from the second level of the virtual reality, if there weren't an additional level beyond. Everything was way too certain.

And there was no drama in the dangers of the book. Halloween began the story believing that he had killed someone. He dismissed that after about the first third of the book, and then never wondered about it again. He suspected his own life was in danger, but he never took desperate action to try to save it. When there was actual physical danger to him in the book, it was presented in his backward-narration-voice, so it was over and done before the reader had a chance to even be afraid for him. (Except for the scene where he was buried alive. That was pretty well-done.) In one case, toward the end of the book, forces in the virtual reality world are at work to deprive him of oxygen, but another virtual reality program calmly tells him that he is counteracting it. Woo. What danger!

And when he finally escapes the virtual reality world, there is not much thought about going back in, even though that, presumably, is where all of the danger is. No more precautions than "hey, monitor my vital signs and pull me back if anything changes," which would be completely useless against the kind of attack he experienced first hand at the beginning of the book. And then, what was the need to travel in the real world to get information in the virtual reality world? If you have an uplink that can connect you real-time to everyone and everything else in the virtual reality world, how is one physical location any different from any other? Perhaps there is a difference, but that difference was never explained to the reader.

So this sounds like a very negative review, but Nick Sagan did a couple things that I really liked. First, he was very pro-science in his book. Yay! Science! I couldn't help but appreciate that. (I think maybe a more interesting book would be: what kind of world-view would the son of Carl Sagan have? This book, if nothing else, gives us a peek into that.) He included a ton of references to different belief systems of the world. He presented a broad and in-depth knowledge of the world's major actors, from scientists to authors to politicians. He used an extensive and precise vocabulary. Much of this, I suppose, was done to give a sense of how thorough Halloween's education in the virtual world had been. But to me, it showed how thorough Sagan's had been. I liked that.

I also liked the basic premise. The futuristic armageddon that came through the same process that gave us sentient life: evolution of competing species. A disease advancing and becoming so proficient that it had a 100% mortality rate. How would society react to that? Sagan presents one very compelling option. And while the book is science fiction, none of the science he presents is very far from believable.

If you're a young reader (who doesn't mind strong language), you will probably enjoy this book. There's a lot to like about it. For me, though, I doubt I'll be reading any of the sequels.

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## **Sarah says**

I'm unsure how I feel about this book. The concept was great along with most of the execution, but after all that intelligently-crafted build up, the ending fell disappointingly flat. It felt lazy and forced.

Maybe I'm missing something - maybe it was meant to be an arty comment on readers' expectations of plot resolution. If so, someone please enlighten me, because I don't get it. You can't spend the majority of your book focussing on a plotline that will never have any kind of resolution without having a pretty clear ulterior comment to make. I can't see an ulterior comment.

\*A tentative 3.5 stars in the hopes that my perspectives might be changed by someone arty enough to see method behind this madness\*

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## **Deozaan says**

I am still reeling from the ending of this book.

In the first chapter or two, I wasn't sure I would like the book. The writing style is different from what I'm used to. It's more a stream-of-consciousness written from the first person. And it starts out extremely vague and confusing. Lots of questions but very few answers, or answers that just bring more questions.

But it's definitely gripping. I read it in one sitting, taking perhaps 5 or 6 hours.

The story unfolds slowly, methodically, and layer by layer, much like an M. Night Shyamalan movie. If you've ever listened to the beginning of Daft Punk's "Around the World" where at first the audio sounds extremely muffled but every few measures becomes more and more clear; and each time it becomes more clear you start to think you're finally hearing it at a perfect clarity until once again it refines again ever so slightly. If you have heard that and you can relate to that, then you'll have an idea how this book unfolds.

In the beginning it's extremely muffled. You have no idea what is going on, but the puzzle is intriguing enough that you'll stick with it a little while longer to see if there are any clues. Then a layer is removed and you gain a little clarity. You think you have a better idea of what's going on, but there are still many questions left unanswered; it's still confusing and doesn't make sense. Another layer of clarity, and once again you think you're closer to understanding what is happening.

The story continues like that, and you honestly think you've got it figured out (and maybe you really have, I may just have been slow to catch on) when everything speeds up and crescendos toward the climax. At last, at the acme of the tumultuous noise, the final true clarity is reached and it's not what you were hoping for. It declines steadily, much like a greek tragedy.

Nearly 24 hours later, I'm still dazed by the ending; I'm still trying to get the puzzle pieces together and understand why things ended up the way they did. There's just such a contrast from the way it began to the way it ended. In the beginning it was beautiful and fantastic and romantic (not the lovey dovey definition of the word), and the end so bleak, depressing, barren, defeating.

It doesn't have a happy ending, but I wouldn't necessarily say the ending was "bad" either. It's a strange

feeling. I'm having a hard time accepting that things happened the way they did. It was beautifully tragic, and though I'm left saddened by it I suppose that's just how life is sometimes.

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## **Juan Valera says**

Sarcasm. Plain, unadulterated self-loathing, nicotine addiction. None of these are good in the grand scheme of things, nor are they good for you. I *love* them now. Why, I hear you ask? Simple. Halloween likes them. And Halloween is the single most fascinating character I have ever read. I've never smoked in my life, but just reading Sagan's "Idlewild" makes me crave the cloves Hal is constantly lighting up. Hal is the protagonist, but he's one of the best examples of an anti-hero ever: he's sullen, intelligent, hates authority, hates everyone around him but grudgingly sticks with them, and he's confused inside. More so than usual at the beginning of "Idlewild."

My point with this rambling excuse for a review is the following: good books have characters that undergo change and act memorably. Great books have characters that are forced to change and become templates for all such future characters. This is Halloween to me. As a writer, I've tried to put a little of Hal in everything I write, from manuscripts to recipes. The occasional sarcastic snipe in a cookbook is charming and indicative of character, I believe. Ah, there we are, the magic word: *Character*. You, me, Dickinson, and Poe, all of us writers, all could use more *character* in our characters. More oomph, more of a distinguishable taste that makes them themselves. Again, to me, that's Halloween.

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