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Nanoengineers have unleashed machine consciousness. Revenge does not account for it: Something infinitely more sinister has happened. Only Primavera and mad Ignatz Zwakh know what power is really behind the microbiotic army dedicated to overthrowing the human gamete. But Primavera's dying. Can they reach Dr. Toxicopholous before the CIA or the pornocrat Kito or their combined assassins and nanomachines reach them?

Dead Girls Details

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From Reader Review Dead Girls for online ebook

Eloi Puig says

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Tony says

When I do read sci-fi, my preference is for near-future stuff set on our existing planet, which is why I picked this up after reading about it somewhere. It's a great debut, and the first in a trilogy (followed by Dead Boys and Dead Things), which I didn't realize until the end. The story takes place a little less than a century in the future, where nanotechnology and robotics and human nature have combined to create a virus that threatens all humanity.

It seems that in London, when young girls hit puberty, they are transformed into a form of vampiric human/nanotech hybrid/robots called "gynoids" or "Lilim" or "dolls". They have a blood lust toward men, and may also have various telepathic and telekinetic powers. For the safety of humanity, London has therefore been sealed... but there are ways out. One doll who made it out is Primavera, with the help of her boyfriend Ignatz. They made it all the way to Thailand, where they've been surviving as contract killers for hire.

We learn all this via flashback chapters, which are interwoven with their current woes, as various interests come gunning for them. In a sense, the plot of the story is less interesting or important than the overall wild vibe of this vision of future Earth, as well as the themes of mortality, sexuality, love, and humanity. It's a both fascinating and chilling version of the future, full of colorful language and characters. It's also short and sweet, so it's not a huge commitment to try out. Once I catch my breath, I'll try out the next in the trilogy. I'm also curious to see the graphic novelization of the book, which recently came out.

William Thomas says

With scenes comparable to Gibson and the poetry of Bester, this book could do no wrong. Not cyberpunk, but technoir. A fast, achingly gorgeous and brutally written novel that defines my taste in scifi. As much a metaphor for the sex trade as it is for personal sexual relationships. Just beautiful.

Terry Martin says

Well, this isn't out yet but it'll be an awesome collectable graphic novel with eleven new pages not seen in the original pages of *Murky Depths* - where it was serialised - and now in full colour hardback. Just 100 numbered copies printed and signed by both the writer, Richard Calder, and the artist, Leonardo M Giron.

Rachel Popham says

These days, I'm not usually one for dystopic or gender-wars science fiction. But this book is the exception and the reason why the whole badly watered-down subgenres exists. What starts off seeming like an overly ornate piece of second-wave misogyny, with women-reduced-to-concept taken to some new scary level, quickly reveals itself to be a stunning display of genre acrobatics. The tone is less science fiction than classical social-commentary horror, specifically grabbing Bram Stoker's uglinesses and turning them on their head while simultaneously and crushingly following them through to their natural conclusion. A stunning cautionary tale about what lurks behind any closed system of ideals, a brutal discussion of the relationship between cultural observers and observed, a condemnation of the imposition of malignant conceptualization and design upon the trivialized, and a dirty little tragedy of innocence - however ersatz and tortured - betrayed.

Gets a little too into the Hello Kitty goth pop vibe, but even that fits in with the concept of the book. If you trust the story for a few chapters, it'll take you to some really interesting places.

Edit: A shorter version of this review would have been to say, "Wow! So THAT'S what's so creepy about anime!"

Kaley Buck says

So different from anything else I've read, in a good way.

Titan says

In *Dead Girls*, Ignatz Zwakh lives in a highly technological world powered by fear, sex and death. A plague that corrupts young girls by turning them into Lilim--vampiric nanoengineered dead girls--has swept the globe one metamorphosis at a time. Ignatz, as a schoolboy, falls in love with a Lilim, Primavera. Together, they discover the truth and tragedy behind the plague.

By the time I got around to reading *Dead Girls*, *Dead Boys* was a far-off memory that vaguely reminded me of women dying on spikes, perverse sex-driven deaths, stylistic prose and *green*. *Dead Girls* was a far cry from my recollection but not in an unpleasant way. Ignatz's appetite for disaster is so prevalent throughout that, even though the chapters alternate between the past and the present, I can't help but want the same even as I watch its dire consequences. The history and evolution of the world's reaction to the plague felt real and concise. The Human Front, which stands against these young women who use men to pass on their tainted genes, sounds as plausible as any.

Not to discount the strangeness of it all, though.

Cruel Hospitals where Lilim-in-progress are sent by frightened parents; overzealous schoolboys who learn from bad examples and torture for fun; propaganda and escape; the pornocracy of the Big Weird, the life and city that Iggy had followed the woman he loves into; dead girls with gingivitis, hemline psychosis, vagina dentata and a sordid desire to die at the hands of a man mid-orgasm...

That's only the tip of the iceberg.

Shells burst behind my eyes; I was her beachhead, first blood in a guerrilla war against humanity. Fifth columnists leaped from her spittle, a microrobotic army dedicated to overthrowing my gametes. They infiltrated in their billions. Ignoring Y, digging into X, they would wait, wait for me to fill a human womb so that they might stage their *coup* and set up a puppet government.

A blue-white flash.

Tombstones. The coach. The fall of night.

Primavera was eating my brain.

I awoke from post-coital sleep on the hard floor of the pavilion, my head rich with traces of midsummer dreams.

- *Dead Girls*, p. 24-25

Oh, this is a dirty ride. Filthy, nasty and crazy. I loved every minute of it. And, as provided by the excerpt above, the writing was marvelous to boot. It's unapologetic in its use of the unconventional, the frowned-upon, and that's the kind of thing I admire. Not included were the Francophilic and Asian (Thai?) *cordon sanitaires* and *klongs*, etc. They can be hard to read around if you know nothing about any language other than English or how to use context clues; most are, though, pretty transparent. Such as:

Bond Street was a desert of broken glass and gutted shopfronts, a desecrated memorial to the *belle époque*. Primavera rescued some tattered couture from the gutter. She held it up, gauging its appeal.

- *Dead Girls*, p. 61

What begins as a simple story of one young man's attempt to escape a life he doesn't know to get on without quickly transmogrifies into a series of discoveries that all lead back to sex--and death.

Dead Boys is nothing like its predecessor. It's denser, more intricate, less dialogue-heavy and much, much darker.

ALSO POSTED AT MY BLOG.

Dr. Barrett Dylan Brown, Phd says

Even better than Cythera. Another jump into the Calder future with some of the same characters. Very, very, nice. Calder gives me a hard on (literally), then makes me feel guilty, then makes me feel perverse, then makes me feel like an alien.

Szplug says

Dead Girls was a strange and worthwhile trip, a dropkick into an unappealing future Earth circa 2072 in which capitalism, triumphantly and gaudily strutting across the global stage, has conquered all-comers. The United States is the junior partner to a Japanese-led Pacific trading bloc, while Europe, flooded with refugees from the defunct Soviet Empire, has suffered from a catastrophic market-crash and the subsequent spreading of a *plague* that has affected its former number one export: AI-equipped gynoids. Apparently Europe, realizing its inability to compete in standard trade with its North American and Asian rivals, opted to pursue (and master) the field of *decadent luxury*, co-opting and then setting all trends in High Culture; and its commanding success was a line of life-size, female Cartier dolls endowed with all the attributes of sentience through the miracle of nanotechnology.

Alas, life tends to lend itself to slipperiness, easily wriggling free from the arrogant presumption of human-tendered control; and so it has come to pass that these dolls, inherently attuned to the quantum reality that underlies the phenomenal world, have become corrupted, taken on a malignant bent; their vampiric saliva capable of infecting a man's seed such that any female offspring he subsequently sires will, with the onset of puberty, undergo a transformation from flesh-and-blood humanity to silicon, steel, and plastic-limbed dollhood, one in which, bellies aswirl with the emerald energy of their own abdominal event horizon, they possess superhuman strength and senses, exude an erotic *allure* that weakens knees and hardens cocks, and gain the ability to work *magic*. The trade-off? Such rapid and drastic molecular change burns their essence, even while inflaming them with a death-drive impossible to resist—and so these girl-dolls, termed *Lilim*, have a brief lifespan in which to spread their dehumanizing infection. As the *Lilim* have prevailed most in Britain, the authorities there—an extirpating party labelled the *Human Front* and led by immigrant-demagogue Vlad Constantinescu—have tried to contain the contagion within an interdicted Inner London, creating a devasted, shadowy urban hell called *Neverland*, populated by pubescent girls at various stages of their doll transformation striving to avoid the stake-impalement administered to captured *Lilim* at hospitals-cum-gallows together with the enraged or disengaged immigrant families who couldn't afford to vacate ere the quarantine was declared, and are stuck within this gyno-vampiric zone.

A pair of refugees from this infernal environment are early-teen doll-in-*becoming* Primavera Bobinski and her coëval human doll-junkie boyfriend, Ignatz Zwakh. Although *Lilim* are incapable of love, Primavera feels better having Iggy around, while the latter, to his shame and ecstatic joy, has become addicted to the sexual rush delivered by the envenomed saliva of his feline-toothed, metamorphosed girlfriend. In exile from doll-executing England, the pair have wound up in the sleazy technical decadence of Bangkok's *Big Weird*, a pornocracy wherein every perverted sexual desire is catered to by a wide variety of AI-endowed automatons. Working as payroll assassins for Madame K., a non-*Lilim* gynoid who rules a powerful house within the *Big Weird*, and on the run from US government agents, Iggy and Primavera continue to draw strength from their unconventional, but enduring bond, whilst attempting to discover what the actual truth might be concerning the *plague* that created these doll-girls robbed of their lives and their flesh, both in where it came from and what, exactly, it portends.

With *Dead Girls*, Calder launched a heady flotilla of ideas, elements, and styles upon the tide-heavy waters of this dystopian tale—but above all else one must take note of the conducting presence of his elegantly wrought prose. The entirety is mellifluous, potent, and even thornily come-hither, capable of wringing the maximal effect from (and requiring, on the reader's part, a maximal effort towards) Calder's dark themes, philosophical strip shows, and narrative gear shifts: the result being that, whether he is plumbing the psychological connexion between insatiable sexual desire and the immolating ache for existential extinction or emptying his authorial clip in a rapid-fire barrage of kitschy-comical car chases and urban manhunts, the aesthetic reward proves ever sufficient to assuage whatever irritation or confusion or apathy may have arisen within the readership due to this unorthodox, switchback *modus Calderandi*.

Kyle Muntz says

If I'd read this book a few years ago I wouldn't just have liked it—it would have been a favorite. Now, though, I feel a lot more nebulous about it. The writing is incredibly lush, almost baroque, in a world that starts with the intellectual conventions of cyberpunk but injects them with a startling excess of strangeness, surrealism, and the grotesque. There are a lot of fascinating ideas, in particular... which makes it unfortunate that I had a lot of trouble overlooking the book's weaknesses. The action is messy and thin to the point it really bothered me, full of structural moves that mostly didn't work in my opinion, and while there's something really fascinating about the relationship at the center of the book, every other character was a sort of gaudy mouthpiece for worldbuilding. There was a lot of emotion buried in this book, but I had trouble accessing it; and near the end I especially felt the plot was making moves it hadn't earned.

The problem, I think, is this tries to be a narrative driven book but it's uncomfortable with narrative, which made it feel patchy and uneven for me, with too few moments of lucidity despite the fantastic images and prose. Some friends have told me the second and third novels become hyperstylized and more abstract, which seems like Calder playing to his strengths--there's a good chance I might read them eventually despite this one not sitting well with me, since I can't help thinking of my older self (who would have loved the language and ideas despite what bothers me about the book now).

This is more a mindscape than a novel, I think, and if I'd been able to enter into it I would have liked the book a lot. It could be where I'm at mentally right now and the fact I was never able to read as much of it in one sitting as I liked, but I was just never able to get inside, though I'm hoping if I try again with the sequels later I'll be able to.

USOM says

I enjoyed this book, it was pretty fast paced and full of jargon. It reminded me of a few other books I read (Wind up Girl, Neuromancer) and I think that made it a much more enjoyable experience. It was a pretty interesting topic for the world building as well as the unveiling of the plot

Scott says

WTF? Seriously, WTF? This made about as much sense as a music video with the sound turned off. Just a collection of weird images. I want the time and the money back.

Paul Frandano says

Unsure whether anything I've read others have written on this is quite so. Still sorting out my own views here, apart from the certisnty that Calder has a pervy, word-besotted brilliance, his prose a hallucinogenic mix of jet fuel, crack, acid, and Joyce. Or jet-fueled Joyce channeling the Marquis de Sade on crack and acid..maybe I should take in the next two installments before trying to make sense of the experience.

Mark says

Didn't enjoy this at all. Had enjoyed the graphic novel in the past but found this confusing and difficult to follow. Language strange and impenetrable.
