

BOOK REVIEW

In a world crippled by biotech apocalypse...

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

"People with packs are people with purpose."

Jeff Vandermeer beautifully paints a dystopian imagery in his latest title, *Borne*. He welcomes the readers to a dangerous city by a toxic sea, littered by failed experiments and derelict properties, thick with threats and cold blooded scavengers, ruled by Mord – a mammoth flying bear.

The story is told from the perspective of Rachel, who finds a featureless creature in a resting Mord's fur while in one of her scavenging missions. Mord is one of the failed projects of a biotech company, which stands as the main cause of the city's destruction. While resting, the animal is a scavenging hub for many since one never knows what salvage one might pluck off its huge body. At first, Borne (as Rachel calls it) is just a green lump, exhibiting different colours, fist sized. Along with time, it expands, learns reading and talking, and becomes a shapeshifter – rock, lizard, flower vase, etc. To Rachel's woe, Borne's unintentional acts pose a major threat to her and Wick's sanctuary – safely hidden from the gazes of scavengers and other menaces. Though Wick, a former employee of the responsible company, dislikes Borne given its acts often land them in trouble, Rachel always defends it; she grows a deep bond with the biotech salvage. With new threats rising in the city alongside nurturing Borne with its precarious behaviours and stumbling across shocking revelations, Rachel finds herself on a thin rope between the decisions that are beneficial for her and Wick, but harmful for Borne.

I must say, Vandermeer is a talented author. The way he breathed life into a non-living, shapeless lump and made

it one of the central characters of the book was amazing. Other than the unique characteristics of the biotech Borne, Mord the bear also managed to draw a huge portion of attention since everyone in the city is scared of it. For the record, Mord is almost five storeys high. In this strange world of Vandermeer, there are inventions like diagnostic beetles that are frequently used by many to relax and heal wounds. Artificial creatures are also seen throughout the progressions – like the feral children having contaminated claws.

Honestly, the sci-fi-dystopian vibes that met me while reading the synopsis got me hooked. And the book absolutely did justice to my first impression. Even though the "edge of your seat" events begin late, the necessarily slow world building and history telling captivate the readers. The book is strangely intriguing, and I'd totally recommend this to everyone. However, if Vandermeer had introduced more characters, it would've been better. Despite not doing so, he surely nailed a limited character packed setting, each character aptly configured.

If you want to try something new, *Borne* is not to be missed.

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi wants his life to be like stormtroopers: always missing easy kill shots. Send him prayers at tazrian1234@gmail.com



TV SERIES REVIEW

The wholesomeness we needed in our lives

NAFIS IMTIAZ ONISH

In a time when most popular shows are either dark or stranger than most things, comes a show that can easily brighten your day. The critically acclaimed family drama series "This Is Us" takes its viewers on a feel-good trip down the memory lane. In a generation of depressed millennials, the show injects us with the wholesomeness that we did not realise we needed in our lives.

The Emmy and Golden Globe nominated series revolves around the Pearsons, a simple family from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The show follows the lives of siblings Kate (Chrissy Metz), Kevin (Justin Hartley), and Randall (Sterling K. Brown) Pearson and their parents Jack Pearson (Milo Ventimiglia) and Rebecca Pearson (Mandy Moore). It manages to beautifully portray how intertwined all their lives are by hopping through different timelines. The episodes of the first 2 seasons weave through the stories of the past and present of the characters, giving the viewers a better understanding of how the past shapes the future of the characters.

"This Is Us" successfully manages to



reflect the various dimensions of life through its seamless storytelling. The show addresses the issues and insecurities that people go through on a regular basis and it does an extremely good job at making all of it feel relatable. The show touches on strong issues through the characters' lives. For instance, Kate is constantly trying to fight, both physically and mentally, to free herself from obesity and the struggle of feeling inferior hence. Kevin is a famous yet discontented tv star who embarks on a

journey to discover his true self while their adopted brother Randall tries to understand his roots by finding out his actual father and struggles to fit his newfound identity in his otherwise perfect life.

The ensemble throughout all of the four timeframes is spectacular. The deliveries are both strong and memorable even from the younger cast members. The script is beautifully written and the simplicity yet truthfulness of the dialogues helps the viewers

immerse in the series. The screenplay and direction feel grounded on reality which adds to the simplistic charm. The show is aptly tailored for both young and adult viewers which makes the show one to watch with the entire family.

"This is Us" magnificently portrays the emotional roller-coaster that our life goes through and presents the viewers with unique takeaways from every event. Be it the bond between Jack and Rebecca during the flashbacks of their initial days as a newly married couple, the birth of the kids, their subsequent journey of growing up, or their struggles with adulthood – all of it feel so real, like it truly is *us* going through this long ride. The show makes you laugh with it, cry with it. It encourages its viewers to fight through the mishaps of life and never forget who we are deep inside.

So, even if you are not a fan of drama, "This is Us" is definitely worth a shot. The show is sure to leave a mark on you.

Nafis Imtiaz Onish believes grinning is the answer to everything and avidly loves art, astronomy & all things nerdy. Send him Carl Sagan fan art at nafisimtiaz17@gmail.com