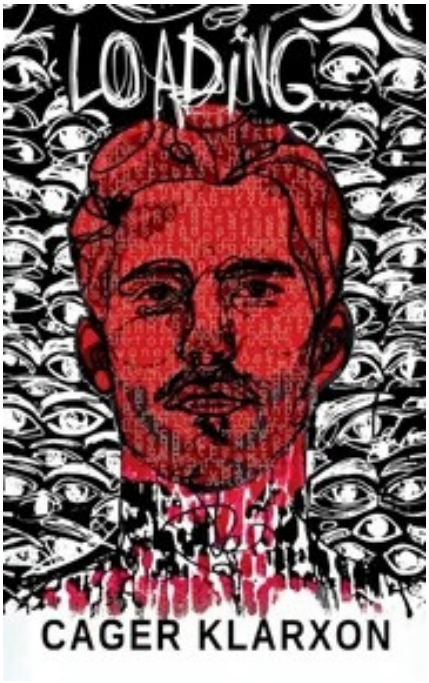
KIRKUS REVIEWS

LOADING...

BY CAGER KLARXON



An inventive body-horror jaunt for readers who like their social critique served up with a dollop of the grotesque.

OUR VERDICT
✓ GET IT

An alien intelligence invades the body of a virtual-pornography performer in Klarxon's body-horror novel.

In a preface, the author isn't joking when he warns that ***Loading*** "isn't a story you'll wanna tell at parties"; rather, it's "what crawls out when the screen gets a hard-on for your eyeballs," and his cleverly designed layout opens each chapter with a warning: "If you want to stop the installation process, press the 'Esc' key." Marshall, born Markus Jensen, endured a nightmarish childhood—a dad who rejected him, a drug-addicted mom, and a raging bully of a stepfather—and things didn't go much better after he hit college, where his ex-boyfriend put their sex tape all over the internet, shortly after their breakup. Now, Marshall is a 30-something sex worker in Thread City who entertains male clients out of his hotel room and uploads the resulting sex videos, all in a grab for attention and money, which he achieves—although he feels like he's starting to lose his humanity. Marshall feels "empty" and "hollow," which, it turns out, makes him the perfect vehicle for a concoction someone feeds him during a feral orgy with 12 men. As it turns out, the participants have more than sex on their minds; they're apostles of a new kind of god, merging humanity and computer code, which now gestates inside Marshall. It won't take high technology for readers to figure out what Klarxon is getting at in this horror tale—in fact, he lays it all out in his introduction: It's about our "hunger for content . . . a portrait of a world where nothing's too extreme, too private, too sacred to be sold." The author is obviously a gifted writer with a strong, if clangorous, voice ("His veins, he could see them, ***feel*** them, glowing from within, / blue lightning beneath translucent, alien skin"); a social conscience; and a salient point to make. Readers who don't mind this book's general lack of subtlety are sure to love it.

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