MIDWEST BOOK REVIEW

Loading... will appeal to readers of horror and speculative fiction who accept elements of LGBTQ+ reflection and explicit language involving body parts. As such, the novella may not be for all readers, but will delight a special segment of horror readers by centering on challenging concepts of body, mind, propriety and social decorum. And, perhaps that's putting it lightly.

If Cager Klarxon knows anything, it's how to spin both a good yarn and thought-provoking insights that border on offense, but edge nicely into enlightening territory. His disclaimer about the novella's approach leaves readers an 'out' at the beginning, preparing them to delve into a world where "This is what crawls out when the screen gets a hard-on for your eyeballs. When the line between you and the filth blurs into a sticky mess."

That intersection between horror and disgust contains the ripe fruit of revelation, for Klarxon's raw mirror of a life program gone awry when college student Markus (now reinvented as 'Marshall') is caught shooting amateur porn in his dorm makes for a sordid and scenic drop into depravity and dream-chasing that offers much food for thought.

Markus/Marshall is not the only focus, here. The chapters "load" scenes that unfold a host of characters, from Kate's discovery of "Project Incarnation" in their father's notes, which gives her a clue as to her brother's experiments and condition, to ghosts of logic, encounters with an alien parasite entity that provokes Marshall's reinvention of body and soul, and viewers that add content to the horror that takes over his life.

These digital and interpersonal references are hard-hitting, moving Marshall from the relatively simple, elementary beginnings of porn film shots to deeper inspections of an unscheduled programming that begins to take over his body and life.

Klarxon is adept at injecting a stream of surprises into the story to keep readers on edge and continually thinking, horrified, and surprised. The nature and level of these very adult, involving introspections and experiences places Marshall on the cutting edge of transformation and hell, all in one.

Libraries unafraid of acquiring and including explicit horror works that stand out from the crowd so far that they are delivered in a class of their own will find *Loading...* an ultimately reflective read that can be recommended to literary speculative fiction audiences seeking something truly different.

Wrapped in the dual guise of horror and dismay, *Loading...*'s foray into a body and soul re-imagined is a powerful blend of technology, sex, and examining social, psychological and political boundaries. It ultimately demands of its readers that they, too, push the boundaries of propriety and horror to appreciate the nuggets of wisdom embedded in Marshall's download of what is, effectively, a terribly alluring foray into the root system of desire.

(D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer)

EARLY READER RESPONSE

"Utterly terrifying and quite possibly a look into the future of our world as it may become... Horrifyingly real and highly recommended. Five Stars from me."

"If Kafka's *Metamorphosis* crawled into bed with *I, Robot* and binge-watched *Black Mirror*, you'd get something like *Loading*."

"Perfect balance between thrilling sequences and deeper reflections on what it means to be human in a machine-driven world."

"Loading... is a whirlwind of body horror and psychological descent that will leave you unsettled in the best way... For a debut, this novella is both shocking and ambitious, leaving me eager to see what the author creates next. Highly recommended."

"This was trippy, eerie, disturbing, and made you re-think how you think about the internet and what you consume on it."

"Nothing like I've read before. Very well written. It is certainly a unique book."

"It's dark, strange, kind of gross at times, but totally gripping. Once I started reading, I honestly couldn't stop."

"There's something here about memories, families, acceptance, and love. About selling out, selling ourselves short, selling our bodies... It's a trippy mess of a book with lots to think about."

"Klarxon masterfully pulls readers directly into Marshall's unraveling psyche. The confusion near the end mirrors his madness, making us feel the chaos he endures, a narrative choice I absolutely loved."

"Klarxon has crafted some powerfully visceral imagery and, in doing so, leaves a poignant message."

"It's not just horror for the sake of it; there's something meaningful going on underneath."

"There is an underlying sense of dread about this story that is jarring. Klarxon has the reader examine modern times and just how dysfunctional we have become."

"I couldn't stop, I read it one shot... this story was so unhinged (in a good way)."

"Great for fans of Dennis Cooper."