



The Readymade Thief

Augustus Rose

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An addictive literary puzzle that introduces an unforgettable young heroine plunged into the twisted world of a secret society with a dark agenda.

Lee Cuddy is seventeen years old and on the run, alone on the streets of Philadelphia.

After taking the fall for a rich friend, Lee reluctantly accepts refuge in the Crystal Castle—a cooperative of homeless kids squatting in an austere, derelict building. But homeless kids are disappearing from the streets in suspicious numbers, and Lee quickly discovers that the secret society's charitable façade is too good to be true. She finds an unexpected ally in Tomi, a young artist and hacker whose knowledge of the Internet's black market is rivaled only by his ability to break into and out of buildings. From abandoned aquariums to highly patrolled museums to the homes of vacationing Philadelphians, Tomi and Lee can always chart a way to the next, perfect hide-out.

But the harder Lee tries to escape into the unmapped corners of the city, the closer she unwittingly gets to uncovering the disturbing agenda of the very men who pull the strings of the secret society she's hoped to elude, a group of fanatics obsessed with the secrets encoded in the work of early-twentieth-century artist Marcel Duchamp. What these men want is more twisted than anything Lee could've imagined, and they believe Lee holds the key to it all.

The Readymade Thief heralds the arrival of an astoundingly imaginative and propulsive new voice in fiction for fans of Marisha Pessl and Ernest Cline.

The Readymade Thief Details

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Author : Augustus Rose

Format : Kindle Edition 384 pages

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From Reader Review The Readymade Thief for online ebook

just.one.more.paige says

This review originally appeared on the book review blog: Just One More Pa(i)ge.

“What do you do when the one true thing in your life turns out to be a lie?” This quote turns up about a third of the way through the novel and, for me, really represents Lee’s story from start to finish. It is by no means a happy story, but somehow, you still come away from it feeling hopeful for her. Augustus Rose takes Lee, and us readers, on a wild ride in this genre-defying novel. And it’s a ride a recommend you take.

The book follows Lee through just over a year in her life. When we meet her, she is a normal-ish 17-year-old high school student, trying to fit in and make friends and stealing/selling drugs to make money for college. But then things take some pretty crazy turns, a betrayal from a “friend” that lands her in juve, abandoned by her family and, eventually, on the run. Homeless and without friends/funds, Lee thinks she finds refuge with a group of others living “underground,” but things are definitely not what they seem. Somehow, Lee gets sucked into the world of a hidden society, founded by a group of fanatical men attempting to decode the secrets of a higher understanding, a mix of science and art and alchemy, left behind by the early 20th century French artist Marcel Duchamp. A society that, for some reason, thinks she holds the key to Duchamp’s secrets and seem willing to do anything (literally anything), or go through anyone, to get their hands on her. And she meets a young artist/computer genius, Tomi, who may or may not be involved with this secret society, that nevertheless manages to insinuate himself deeply into her life (and maybe her heart?).

This was an interesting mix of page turner and slow-moving plot development. I am not actually sure how else to describe it. I was literally always on the edge of my seat, because you never knew when the next development, or devolvment, would happen – it was always fast and sudden. But at the same time, I sometimes felt like some of the details (especially regarding the descriptions on the specifics of “creeping” - the practice of exploring abandoned buildings, “thief training” – for last of a better term, and some of the art and philosophy discussions) dragged on a little. I’ve taken a whole day between finishing the book and writing this review to think about how to categorize this story, but, as I mentioned above, it truly is unclassifiable. I actually wrote to myself at the beginning, probably through the first third or so, that I got a creepy 21st century Oliver Twist sort of vibe. Then, things started to turn a little more mystery/thriller, lots of danger and looking over one’s shoulder at all times. As we start to learn more about the S.A., the secret society tracking Lee, things turn super theoretical and philosophical and treasure hunt-y (with a Dan Brown sort of vibe, but grittier, gothic-ier, crepuscular - in general, way cooler than Dan Brown). And throughout it all, there’s a heavy air of classic tragedy, with everything that Lee deals with, feeling left behind, let down, unable to trust anyone, and struggling to get by without a home or way to make money. Honestly, I have no idea how the author got all that into one book in a way that truly does fit together. Plus, the amount of research, on such a huge variety of topics – from juve to alchemy to hacking/the Darknet to Duchamp, just to name a few - is impressive, really.

A couple things rubbed me the wrong way while reading – there were some times where a person, or persons, took care of or helped Lee to an extent that seemed unrealistic to me (not because I don’t have faith in people, but just based on the logistics of the situations). I felt like Lee was able to accomplish things that bordered on too fantastic/lucky a few too many times (like her return to the Silo at the very end, and what she finds there). At times, as I mentioned earlier, I got a little lost in the descriptions/explanations and things slowed down more than I wanted them too. And, though it is, in fact, totally realistic/possible, it just made me sad how alone Lee was at times.

However, on a larger scale, there were a lot of things I loved about this book. I think Tomi was amazing, as a character in general and also the way his relationship with Lee was written and developed with time (even after things...changed - *no spoilers*). I loved reading (almost) every scene he was in. And though I don't know anything about it (so this could be a completely false representation of it), the parts related to the Darknet/Subnet, the characters there, and the various roles it played in the story were some of my favorite parts to read. The way that Duchamp and his art, theories, and followers' devotion were woven through the entire story was done with great skill. The small things, like the way the title fits in, and how each section is named after one of his works, were nice touches. But it's the overall feel that is most impressive. It's the way that the book is focused around his art and the theories (whether true or not), spun around them regarding science and alchemy and explanations for the world that connect everything, and was simultaneously written to match. At one point, Duchamp is quoted as saying "...the artist is 'a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.'" And that metaphysical outlook seems exactly the inspiration for the way this story was written. The way the author creates that feel throughout the entirety of this tale was beautiful. In addition, you could really tell how much time and effort went into each of the details in this story. There are no ends left hanging or unexplained side storylines. At all. That alone is evidence of the care the author took. But it's more than that too: everything is tied up very adroitly. A clean ending to a very messy tale.

Truly this story defies labels and classifications. It seemed to morph as I read, representing many different genres, existing in a very philosophical, experimental dimension (very apt, really, considering what it's about). Get ready for an atmospheric and immersive reading experience.

Thanks to First to Read and Viking Books for providing this ARC in return for an honest review.

Jessica Howard says

Full review coming for Shelf Awareness.

I genuinely don't know if I liked this or not?? It was dense and disturbing and fascinating and unputdownable. A mix of art and urban exploration and physics and drugs and secret societies... I'm interviewing this author for Shelf Awareness next week and I am going to have to put a ton of time into thinking up my questions for him!

Mohammed Arabey says

A 'Readymade' Novel..

Creative overall.. but with a very ordinary plot..

Could've used the Conspiracy Theories & Mind-blowing twists here in much better -faster- plot.

The Duchamp Code

A young girl became a 'ready-made' thief due to her sad, lonely childhood.

Mysterious 1920s-style parties for selective teens..

..some mysteriously disappear after..

...or back with 'lost' behavior..

Then our young protagonist “heroine?!” finds herself amidst all that..all by chance..

Discovering that she has been watched by some strange mysterious cult or organisation for a long time.
And, also by chance, amidst her tragic, bizarre falling apart life, she steals something that made everything more bizarre..

A ‘Readymade’ Art.. by a visionary artist from the early 20th century..Marcel Duchamp.. the inventor of this kind of art..

The Readymade Art ;

“An ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist.”

And That's exactly what I felt about the plot..

The Plot's very ordinary.. kinda slow -too slow for my taste-

It lingered too much on the drama in a slow way.. and kept skipping wide-open-doors for a massive creepy and fast action scenes and potential wilder storylines.

The drugs.. the parties.. the strange watchers.. the Darknet..

..even the whole theories on Duchamp’s works that preceded Einstein’s theories on physics.. which introduced brilliantly interesting....

“There’s a contradiction in physics that no one has yet been able to solve. Einstein’s theory of general relativity precisely explains the workings of the large- scale universe—from solar systems to planetary bodies to objects as small as a grain of sand. And quantum theory explains with equal precision the workings of the subatomic universe— photons and neutrons and quarks and all the rest.

The problem is that these two theories are incompatible. They can’t be reconciled. What works to explain the macro- universe goes contrary to what works to explain the subatomic universe, and vice versa. Both can’t be correct, and yet somehow both are.”

He paused, waiting for her excitement to catch up to his. “For both to be valid, there must be a theory that ties them together. A unified field theory. It’s only hypothetical, but it’s the Holy Grail of physics. There are those who say that solving it would be akin to reading the mind of God.”

The whole thing is huge... yet at the same time it ended drastically as if it was just nothing you have anticipated..

I always felt The Da Vinci Code went too far... well here it didn't went anywhere for me..

May be it's just how Duchamp's love to do his work...

“ ‘Le hasard est une pute qui butine de maquereau en maquereau.’ ”

***** The Pros *****

**** The detailed analysis of Duchamp's Art and the theories of his scientific hints were perfect.**

As well as the parts of the mind and consciousness, the chances... it was so deep.. the dream to change chances...control minds..

But where did that lead us?

Who knows... may be that's what Duchamp intended from the beginning..

"It's French. Translated it means . . . something like 'Chance is a whore who flits from pimp to pimp.' "

Also the Darknet use, it came here so well and detailed a bit to serve the story..that was interesting.

Also naming each part with an Art by Duchamp was fun specially when adding a scene with the reference to the title.

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### **\*\*\* The Cons \*\*\***

The Problem with the story is the plot is so slow... kinda not much happening as it could have. It's kinda full of Lee's (the protagonist) drama... normal tragic separated parents... small stealings to shoplifting to theft to professional thief (That's why I called her a 'Readymade Thief' herself. - not just a thief who stole a 'Readymade'.. brilliant title really.)

The sad thing is that it's very detailed drama as well, most of it could have removed or fastened a bit.

ALSO the world of the novel building was nothing but dull ordinary 2012 normal world... It's not the bizarre sci-fi or even futuristic or original world setting.

*-as publishers deceived me as a 'new voice in fiction for fans of Ernest Cline.' Come on.. I didn't see a resampling but in the word 'ready' and 2 pages of her living in van at an old car dumb... And a hint of Orwellian government that never mentioned later but briefly once after the first page...-*

Her encounter with the creepy parts like the Silo and parties invitations and the weird eyed young girls was drown into the slow pace.

Those who has been following her, the strange people ... all that almost came and gone without much explanations or answers.. it even proper ends..

Even the character of her boy-friend-father-of-unborn-child wasn't strong for me... unlike Lee.

Then I should be back to the ;

### **\*\*\* The Pros \*\*\***

As I said, Yet.. the detailed theories was a good read.. but detailed drama wasn't matching at all.. The drama of Lee was too much, so sad.. BUT I won't say that didn't help me feeling more sympathy for her character .. her need of a friend most of the time, her feeling of betrayal...yet she kept caring for her friends

and family..

And I felt really close to her... felt the anticipations of unlocking the secret why she had been watched all that time... and kinda disappointed after.

*"It was a book about a man who was hired to investigate another man, unaware that the man he was investigating was himself. Only the man being investigated knew that the man doing the investigation was himself."*

*-Somehow I wished for a kind of twist like this description of the novel Lee was reading... By the way, does anyone know if it was a real novel? -*

And then, although I was totally shocked by the calm ending... I felt satisfied with Lee's fate and her few reunions by the end.. may be that feeling what made me won't rate it 2 and rate it 3 (it's still 2.5)  
I felt despite my disappointment that I cared for Lee after all..

*"It means chance is a fickle bitch."*

May be it's not how they made publicity for... but still it's a creative idea...just in an ordinary plot...  
As a Readymade Art....

The Readymade Novel..

Mohammed Arabey  
An ARC from the publisher Penguin.  
From 2nd July 2017  
To 8th July 2017

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## **Megalion says**

This wasn't a bad book. But I think I was far too distracted by real life and put the kindle down too much.

The bulk of the reviews as of today, 6/27/17, indicate a rather deep experience.

Reminds me of Neal Stephenson's The Diamond Age

In that the first time I read it, I got to the end but wasn't sure what I'd read. My experience was superficial. But this was Neal Stephenson! My bf's favorite author back in 1997. When Amazon was just a brand new way to find and buy books you'd heard of but never was able to find.

So I had to read it again. The era is important because the digital age dramatically changed EVERYTHING and increased at a dramatic exponential level every year.

At that time, I re-read books all the time because I was loathe to waste money or time trying to find new authors to read.

I can't tell you how many times I've re-read the Diamond Age but close to a dozen would be fair guess.

These days, is a luxury to deliberately pick up a book to re-read. Especially with arcs one feels obligated to read instead.

My point is, I wonder if I'd come to love this like I grew to love Diamond Age with another re-read or two.

Thus, I can't say how I feel about the book. It didn't suck. But don't have time or desire right now to re-read first time. Yet.

This isn't an actual review but the best I can offer: a feeling that I'll really like it when I do.

I read an advanced copy provided free by publisher in exchange for honest review. Can't get more honest than this non review. Heh

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## **Kemper says**

*I received a free advance copy of this from the author for review.*

This is one of those impossible reviews because I'd have to get into huge chunks of third act plot to talk about the parts I found the most intriguing so I don't want to spoil it, but on the other hand I suspect that this is the kind of book where a lot of readers are going to think it's one thing and be pissed off when it turns out to be another so providing some warning seems to be in order.

It's a real pickle we got here, folks.

Let's start with the basic plot which is about an introverted teenage girl named Lee who thinks of herself as being completely invisible and unremarkable except for her talent for shoplifting. Lee's life is derailed when she's falsely accused of a crime, and eventually she ends hiding among the homeless on the streets of Philadelphia. (That Bruce Springsteen reference was not intentional.) Eventually she finds shelter in an old building dubbed the Crystal Castle run by a strange group of people that Lee soon grows to distrust. When Lee ends up on their bad side she once again finds herself on the run and caught up in a conspiracy centered around the works of French artist Marcel Duchamp.

That description makes it sound like this is just *The Da Vinci Code*, but that really sells the book short and would be misleading because while this definitely has elements of a conspiracy thriller it's closer to being serious Lit-A-Chur than a genre book even though it also has some sci-fi elements to it. Plus, it's not terrible. So it's probably better to compare it to *Night Film* which is another book that blends some solid real-world thriller aspects with a general tone of uncertainty that makes you scratch your head a lot while reading because you're pleasantly baffled.

The writing is deceptively straight-forward. There's no real lines that blew me away in and off themselves,



but where Rose excels is in creating haunting imagery. Whether it's an abandoned aquarium at night or a rave in an old missile silo with an inflatable clown head by the entrance or a guy in old-timey clothes riding an antique bicycle down the street you really see these things, and they all combine to help create the aura of mystery that hangs over everything. He also does a very good job of breaking down the visual aspects of Duchamp's work which ties into his philosophy about the observation of art.

Since it isn't a straight line thriller that's as concerned with atmosphere as plot there are some points where I found myself wishing that things would move along and that Lee didn't spend quite as much time on the run and in hiding as she does. There's one sub-plot in particular that didn't seem to go much of anywhere other than to provide Lee with one skill that's critical for her a couple of key points. And in fairness the sense of desperation Lee has is built by these extended periods of her in survival mode.

While I enjoyed this quite a bit I also think it's going to be a real Love-It or Hate-It book that will be impossible to predict how another person might react to. It's general WTF tone for much of the book leaves a reader on uncertain footing and that's not everybody's cup of tea, and the payoff is only going to appeal to some folks, not all. Still, it checked off a lot of boxes for me, and it's one of the more unique and original things I've read in a while despite it's basic familiarity of starting out as a conspiracy thriller. It's an intriguing debut novel, and I'll be looking for more work from Augustus Rose.

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## **Quirkyreader says**

First off, I received this as an ARC from Penguin.

Five stars all around for this story. It is an intricate web built upon lies and mistruth. But who is lying and who is telling the truth.

For me one of the things I enjoyed most was the use of the artist Marcel Duchamp in the story. I have seen some of his works in person. Also I liked his concept of readymade art. As you can guess Duchamp's form of art has inspired the title of this book.

Something that might help readers who are a bit confused about the art while reading the story is to look at photos of the works. Because for a time Duchamp flipped the art world on its ear.

Try and get a copy of this fascinating "Art Mystery" when it comes out.

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## **Leah Rachel says**

The Ready-Made Thief is an intellectual thriller that will haunt you in all the right ways. Are you ready to watch a pregnant kleptomaniac teenager kick the asses of a cult? You should be. I enjoyed this book despite starting it at slightly the wrong time—perhaps don't start a thriller when you're already struggling to fall asleep.

Augustus Rose has woven a wild tale of a cult that wades into brain-changing drugs and prostitution in order to fund their exploration of a deep mystery left to them by artist Marcel Duchamp. Lee is a normal teenager who likes to steal and likes to sell, who raises enough money to send herself to college, but a friend's

betrayal will send her life careening off its path. The baseline of this tale is Lee's story of reaching, grasping for success, of wanting to go to college and regain normalcy, and the overlay is a cult that for some reason is desperate to have her. The twists never stop coming, and Rose gives Lee a veracity that comes from both her ability to survive anything and her ongoing panic attacks. The characterization is brilliant, tough but complex. Meanwhile, the novel never gives up, despite the grisly and cruel acts of the cult, on the kindness of the human race, demonstrating itself in the people who take Lee under their wings. It's a fascinating story about so many things, from gaslighting to feeling like you can't trust a soul in the world, to the staunch determination of a young woman that she will escape, will survive, and will somehow make it through to the end. A really excellent novel, and I'm so glad my friend gave it to me.

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## **Dawnie says**

\*Thanks to NetGalley, the publishers and the author for providing me with a free e-copy of this book in exchange for a free and honest review. \*

This book was good.

There was nothing really wrong with it...

other than that it was NOT what i expected it to be and wanted it to be.

And so i was disappointed by it.

And not just a little but HUGLY disappointed by it.

Let me explain!

The title is misleading in my opinion because while yes the main character is in a way a thief, its not a book ABOUT thieves!

And the summary does say it is about a young woman plunging into the world of secret society with a dark agenda but it also says that she is a thief and enjoys being exactly that.

And while yes she is a thief and she does steal stuff its not at all about that.

Its all about -in my opinion!- rather stupidly done secret society things that make NO sense!

I have nothing against secret societies! If you they done well those books can be fantastic! They can be the perfect mixture of thriller and conspiracy theorists and i enjoy those.

BUT this book is sadly just a huge mixture of different things that all don't really work out.

It also reminded me a HUGE amount of Dan Browns books -and he does it better. Sorry.

All in all this book is okay.

But i think it could have been WORLDS better if the author wouldn't have tried to include so much -murder, theft, conspiracy stuff, art history, "rebirth", a girl trying to find her place, a romance... it was just TOO much.

So sadly this book did not work for me.

But i do see why others might enjoy it and might not see the biggest issues i had with the book as something that is such a big deal - so three stars.

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### **Jenny (Reading Envy) says**

This was a really fun read, fast-paced and not at all what I thought it would be when I started. I don't usually like author comparisons but this felt like a combination of Dan Brown and Cory Doctorow, with teen runaways, a secret society, mysteries in the art of Marchel Duchamp, urban explorers, drug culture, and hackers. As in most Dan Brown books, the culminating events feel a little far-fetched, but I liked the character of Lee and how she couldn't easily figure out who was lying, who was dangerous, and I was on her side from the second her friend sold her out.

*The publisher provided an eARC of this title through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.*

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### **Manon says**

*I was provided an ARC via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.*

Lee steals. It's her thing. When she gets arrested for something she didn't do, she is sent to juvenile detention. After escaping, she finds herself in the middle of a secret society. But what is it they want with her? And how important is that object she stole?

This book wasn't bad. It just didn't grab me. It also wasn't what I thought it was gonna be. The beginning was painfully slow and I couldn't figure out where it was going or what the point even was. After a while, I got more into the story but I still couldn't really focus and I mostly didn't care.

The intrigue was technically interesting but it lost me over and over again. The whole alchemy/Marcel Duchamp thing, I found to be really complicated and I couldn't focus enough to try to make sense of it. I mostly skimmed those parts and it's a huge part of the intrigue.

I found the main character layered and interesting though and I mostly liked her. I felt her pain too from time to time, when I could find it in me to care.

Finally, the chapters were soooooooooooooooooo long... I hate long chapters, they make me sleepy as fuck....

Basically, I think this book has amazing potential but it wasn't for me...

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### **Eve Recinella (Between The Bookends) says**

Excellent cover on this book. Great representation of the story. It's very unique and eye-catching and has great composition.

OMG, this book was FAN-FUCKING-TASTIC and it's a debut novel to boot! This reads very much like a Dan Brown book for the younger crowd. Secret societies. Symbolism. Abandoned places. Riddles and codes. Murder and mystery. Art. The Darknet. Science. Twists and Turns. Phenomenal writing. Well paced. An intriguing and unique plot. A cast of interesting and well-developed characters. I am blown away that this is the author's first book.

Not much more to say really. I LOVED every second of this one. I was sucked in and walked around with my nose glued to my tablet. I am hoping there will be more of this story in a second book. My heart hurts over a certain incident, but I am hoping maybe just maybe not all is as it seems. A girl can dream, right? In any case, this one gets two HUGE thumbs up from yours truly.

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## **Paromjit says**

This is a superbly intricate debut novel that I absolutely adored reading. Set in Philadelphia, Lee Cuddy is the invisible girl, vulnerable to any attention that she gets to secure validation of her existence, leaving her wide open to being the fall girl, taken advantage of, and facing betrayal from almost every quarter. She's a thief, professionally expert, a readymade thief that parallels the readymade art of the avante-garde artist Marcel Duchamps. The trajectory of Lee's life feels surreal in the novel, structured like a cubist painting, a puzzle where the pieces feel discordant until they begin to connect. This is a story of love, loss, art, obsession, science and the efforts of Lee to carve her own path, free from shadowy entities with their own sinister plans for her.

Lee ends up in a Juvenile Detention Centre thanks to her 'friend' Edie's treachery until she manages to escape. She gets signs that help will come from the Station Master. This brings her to the Crystal Castle where strange happenings and a disturbing photograph of a woman who looks like her has Lee leaving with a stolen object. There are missing young people and exclusive invitation only parties at the Silo where people are dressed up and Lee becomes the 'Bride'. She is the focus of attention of what appears to be a cult group known as the Societe Anonyme, and the 9 Batchelors, including the Priest, Undertaker, and the Station Master. Lee meets Tomi, and goes on creeps in the city at night with him to abandoned sites like the aquarium, and underground places in the city. Trailing Lee is an intense aura of menace, a rising pile of dead bodies, where places of safety prove to be extraordinarily elusive. Lee encounters love, a deeper knowledge of Marcel Duchamps as she realises she is the target of a murderous group obsessed with the artist, his works and driven with the belief that Duchamps had the answers to the deepest conundrums in the universe.

This is a beautifully written and atmospheric novel that weaves a compulsive hold on the reader. It weaves a mystery, with art, science and the metaphysical interpretations of Duchamps art pieces. Amidst all this, is Lee, a complex and hypnotic character, forced into homelessness and precarious living as the world crumbles around her, fighting a losing battle to untangle herself from the whims of the Societe Anonyme's batchelors

and a blood soaked trail of death that touches those close to her. Augustus Rose has penned an erudite and imaginative debut novel which ensnares the reader with ease. It is hard to believe this is his first book. I highly recommend this to those who like intelligent, imaginative and thrilling mysteries. Many thanks to Random House Cornerstone for an ARC.

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## Imi says

Ouch. This was such a bitter disappointment...

I'm slightly unsure how to go about writing this review, because explaining why I didn't like this may mean going into plot spoilers. It was one of my most anticipated new releases of the year, as I was hoping for something in the vein of Marisha Pessl. A literary puzzle, a dark underground organisation, urban exploration... The blurb really made it sound exciting, so I can't fully express my disappointment. For now I'll just briefly outline why I couldn't stand most of this book:

- The pacing was completely off for a thriller. It started off unbearably slow, picked up somewhat in the middle, but then the conclusion is an intricate hot mess as the author attempts to find links between abstract art and convoluted science. It really felt like the author was grasping at straws to find a plot here.
- A lot of the plot was moved forward due to a level of utterly unrealistic luck for the protagonist. On top of that, several random characters continue to be overly helpful towards her for no apparent reason.
- Use of tropes that I quite honestly *hate* in fiction, but again as that would mean going into spoilers, I'll leave those unnamed...
- The protagonist, seventeen year old Lee, is a one-dimensional cardboard cutout of what the author thinks a teenager must be like. No spark, no charm, no common sense. She's stubborn and immature, which would be fine (at least they're character traits), but everything else about her is *bland*. She's barely a character.
- In fact, all the teenage characters seem completely fake and unrealistic. YA fiction seems intent on convincing me that teenage life is filled with fantastical drugs, "epic" partying, danger and heroism.. but, lets be honest, there is so much more to being a teenage, and indeed being a *person* than this mess. I just don't believe it and I don't care. Even in thrillers, I want believable characters and scenario. It feels like the author tried to pump every trope about rebellious teens that he could think of, to the point that it's just utterly ridiculous and I lost interest. (On a side note, I know this isn't being marketed as YA fiction, but, come on, with such a focus on supposed teenage life, this is most definitely YA. I don't know why publishers refuse to market some books as YA, when it would be completely appropriate considering the characters and subject matter, but then other books are marketed as YA when it seems completely *inappropriate*.)
- Talking of poor characterisation, Lee's family were like something out of a Roald Dahl book, but without the humour and wit, of course... I think we were meant to take these characters seriously? And they also added absolutely nothing to the plot, so what was the point?
- So many characters appear for a moment only to then never be heard from again (or (view spoiler)).
- Trust no-one. Obviously. A betrayal is no longer shocking if it's clear that the protagonist shouldn't trust anyone. Zzzzzz.

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## Jason Pettus says

[Also published at my website, the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography.]

The most heartbreaking thing about screenwriter Augustus Rose's disappointing debut novel, *The Readymade Thief*, is precisely that it's so good during its first half, a slow-burning character-heavy mystery story with just the lightest of supernatural elements, and that wisely takes its time in letting us get to know its complex, imminently rootable hero. To be specific, that would be teen runaway Lee Cuddy, whose compulsive need for approval led to her being her local high school's resident drug dealer; when a deal goes bad and she randomly finds herself with a chance to break out of juvenile detention, she ends up in the community of street punks in the Philadelphia underground, where she ends up stumbling across a shadowy organization known as the Societe Anonyme, producers of an exclusive monthly "rave to die for" in the city and who are obsessed with the Modernist artist Marcel Duchamp.

Do they have something to do with the rash of burned-out teens cropping up in the city, fried on a new type of designer drug and whose eyes have expanded into the size of anime characters? It's those kinds of questions that had me so intrigued and invested during the first half of the book. So how profoundly disappointing, then, to get to the second half and see it turn into such a scene-for-scene ripoff of *The Da Vinci Code* that Dan Brown has a viable claim for a plagiarism lawsuit; only instead of Brown's conceit that Da Vinci left clues in his paintings that show that Jesus had a kid with Mary Magdalene (if that's still a spoiler to you, you deserve at this point to have that spoiled), Rose's premise is that Duchamp left clues in his various absurd Dadaist and Surrealist pieces that indicate that he knew the solution to the unified field theory, quantum mechanics, and how to access the fabled eleven dimensions that modern theoretical physicists insist exist all around us.

That's the point when I found myself throwing my hands in the air and angrily sighing, because that's the point where it felt like Rose had written half of a great literary novel and then suddenly remembered, "Oh, right, I eventually need to sell the movie rights to this sucker!," throwing himself feet-first into the most hackneyed stereotypical cheese he could possibly dream up; it's at that point that the plot suddenly becomes outrageous, the conspiracy theories are cranked up to 11, all the new characters suddenly become cardboard cutouts, and the technology that drives it all becomes laughably implausible. (His explanation of how Tor onion sites work has all the credibility of Sandra Bullock's *The Net*; and his assertion that the members of a 4chan-like troll community would suddenly turn into the Goonies in the face of one of their members being murdered is exactly the kind of groan-inducing concept that makes me immediately think of some Paramount executive lighting a cigar after a thousand-dollar pitch dinner and boisterously shouting, "That's gold, Augustus, PURE HOLLYWOOD GOLD!!!")

Rose should've stuck with his instincts and completed this novel with the poise and restraint he admirably shows in the first half; because by embracing his hacky screenwriter side for the last half, he not only invalidates everything that came before, he makes readers feel like fools for buying into it in the first place. (And yes, I'm aware of the response that fans of the book will have to a statement like this; see SPOILER SPACE below for more.) A book even more disappointing than if it had simply been terrible, it unfortunately does not come recommended today.

Out of 10: Usually **7.0**, but dropped to **5.5** for its bait-and-switch nature

**SPOILER SPACE: DO NOT READ BELOW IF YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW HOW THIS NOVEL ENDS...**

(view spoiler)

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**Mar says**

DNF. Just not my kind of story ?

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