



# The Suburban Strange

*Nathan Kotecki*

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## **The Suburban Strange** Nathan Kotecki

Shy Celia Balaustine is new to Suburban High, but a mysterious group of sophomores called the Rosary has befriended her. Friends aside, Celia soon discovers something is not quite right at Suburban. Girls at the school begin having near-fatal accidents on the eve of their sixteenth birthdays. Who is causing the accidents, and why? As Celia's own birthday approaches, she is inexorably drawn into an underground conflict between good and evil—the Kind and the Unkind—that bubbles beneath Suburban High. Plentiful references to music and art—along with the intriguing underworld mythology—make this supernatural series debut a page-turner.

## **The Suburban Strange Details**

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Author : Nathan Kotecki

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# From Reader Review The Suburban Strange for online ebook

## Greg says

Before I say word one about this book, I feel I must provide a few disclaimers.

1. I know the author. So naturally my real or perceived impressions of the author as an individual may come into play.
2. I am also a writer. As such, I may approach the story much differently. (I'm not being arrogant here -- I don't think a writer's approach to reading is necessarily better or worse than any other reader, just different.)
3. I typically do not read young adult fiction.

Now for the sub-disclaimers to the above to make things even more confusing:

- As an asterisk to both 1 and 2, my experience has been that I should not be friends or even play nice with other writers. We're notoriously harsh and envious and conniving and overly critical in non-constructive ways. In fact, I'd say that my initial reaction to discovering that Mr. Kotecki was also a writer was to make a mental note to be more cautious and distrusting towards him. Add to that the fact that he is a writer significantly further along in the game than I and you've got a recipe for professional jealousy like you would not believe. Before I'd even read the back cover I was relishing the myriad ways to cut him down and gleefully romp through my fields of petty biases.

- As for 3, when I say, "I typically do not," I really mean never. Or almost never. I try not to be a book snob, I really do. I just want people to read what they want. My shameless love of graphic novels can attest to that. But still, when I see typical teen fiction on shelves I judge it in ways normally reserved for the kind of men who watch porn on their iPhones on the subway. Modern young adult fiction usually represents, to me at least, a ridiculous escape. Not the good kind of escape that most books do, but rather an escape from privilege and into a world of even greater entitlement. In my mind's eye I see wealthy white suburban tweens wishing a sparkly vampire would save them from their dreadful life in a giant house in an affluent neighborhood attending a great school. Or lining up for 10 hours to see The Hunger Games, but having gained nothing in terms of political curiosity or activist spark that the book touches on repeatedly. (Or worse than proving oblivious to such messages, making manifest the worst in humanity by being annoyed that characters in the story are of a race other than caucasian.) But I digress. See what I mean when I say I dislike YA?

So here's the thing: these disclaimers may magnify my opinion in some ways, minimize (or trivialize) it in others, or just straight up cancel one another out. In short, there's a great thicket of psychology to get through here before even getting to the cover of the book itself. Suffice to say that whatever the final official scientific tally may be, the odds were stacked against The Suburban Strange with this humble reviewer.

...and yet, I still loved it. A lot.

Despite a block of negative disclaimers that are probably significantly longer than the average online book review itself, I came away from this book incredibly impressed. So without revealing too much, let me tell you what I loved and why you should read this book.

The protagonist, Celia, is a revelation. A strong, positive female lead unlike almost anything else you'll see in the genre. What makes her most impressive is that she is not a caricature or cliché. She's no damsel in distress with no willpower or personality of her own, à la Bella of Twilight, but she's also not a natural and confident warrior, à la Katniss of Hunger Games. She's not even a smart and quirky Hermione, à la Harry Potter. What differentiates her is that she CHANGES. In the course of a story that covers but one year, the reader truly watches and feels her change and grow. Most of all, it's in a realistic and organic fashion. One of the things I'm most sensitive to is the "deus ex machina" aspect of too many stories. I hate it when I can feel the author strong-arming his/her plot or characters into doing something that they don't want to do. I never felt that with Celia. I felt that she wanted to grow strong and find her own way and that the author let her.

The mysteries of the story -- and there are several -- were similarly revelatory. One of the things I hate about YA fiction (and many adult mysteries) is that the mysteries are either A) so obvious that only the most oblivious reader wouldn't figure it out, or B) intentionally designed such that NOBODY will figure it out until the author spells it out for you with clues that weren't really even in the story until just before the reveal (I'm looking at you, Rowling). Here, I feel like Kotecki keeps you guessing on pretty much every mystery of the story without condescending to the reader in any way. There was never a point where I had everything figured out confidently until it was revealed. Even on moments that I thought I had it, I was either totally wrong or remained uncertain enough that a reveal was still a surprise.

And that leads me to the last major appreciation: the characters as a whole. For a YA book, this story has a lot of characters. Good characters. Developed characters. Not just people who appear and do one thing or offer their contrived line and then disappear. Most characters come back again and again, seasoning the story with intrigue at just the right times from exactly the right angles. While I may not have "liked" every character in terms of wanting to have them as a friend or thinking they were good people, I did want to know more about every character. What was their background? How did they get to this point? Where were they going to go next? They all seemed so alive and real that I'd find myself hoping for even the bit parts to get their moment in the sun they were so vivid.

That's about all I can say without starting to spoil it for everyone. Hopefully I haven't already. But if you're wondering whether you should read this book, the answer is an unequivocal YES. It won me over so much that I'm currently brooding alone with a bottle of whiskey. (This is one of the reasons writers drink: the unfortunate existence of better writers.) I almost hate myself for how much I can't wait for the sequel. The Suburban Strange will restore your faith in the young readers of the future and the writers who work for them; go read it.

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## **Ifahh says**

[Drawing the girl when you just laid eyes on her. WHAT THE HELL WERE

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## **Ashley says**

The rating is closer to a 4 than a 3, so like a 3.5. This was a good book to begin a series for many reasons. The writing is great. The characters are well developed and show a great deal of empathy. I have to say that in choosing the names of characters, it was right. The names were not all ones you are used to hearing everyday and that's refreshing. The amount of detail in the storyline was in high amounts. It was in the

characters well as in the environment they were in. The reader could connect to both without being too overwhelmed. It is hard to write a book appealing enough to stand out from the rest of the books within the young adult genre. This genre has gotten rather large. Bringing in an extra element is always a good idea and I believe Kotecki did it with the music. The aspect of the music in the story was a great way to view things in a different way.

The reason for the 3.5 is mostly because the introductions seemed to be a little long winded, but one must remember that it is the first book of a series. Many authors go through the same thing. Other than that there was nothing wrong with this book and I am excited to read the next one.

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## **Elizabeth says**

Celia Balustine is shy, unsure of herself, and new to Suburban High School. By chance, she meets a girl named Regine, who changes her life. At her new school, Celia is accepted into a small group called the Rosary who all act aloof, listen to music not on top 40 lists, dress in grey and black, and generally set themselves apart from the rest of the school population. Celia conforms to her group and has a good time at school for the first time in years. Then strange things start happening at her school. Every girl with who has a 16th birthday suffers some sort of misfortune on the day before consistently throughout the year. As her own birthday nears, she tries to investigate what is causing it. Could it be her chemistry lab partner Mariette, who seems to have odd, impossible things happen around her? Or is it someone completely hidden?

The Suburban Strange has a gorgeous cover that mixes mediums in a very cool way. Despite its beautiful trappings, the actual story is a mixed bag of good and bad. Let's start with the good. I like a lot of the characters, especially Celia. At first, I thought she was a mindless sheep that just cared about being cool, but as the novel goes on, she becomes a force to be reckoned with. She really comes into her own and becomes comfortable with herself, acting how she thinks she should act instead of how others want her to. Her strength and resolve near the end of the novel serves to support her friends and helps her in the main conflict with the villain. She also has amazing artistic talent, which I am always fascinated to read about because I just draw stick figures. Mariette is probably the strongest character because she always stands on her own. She doesn't conform to other people's views or style and accepts that not everyone will like her. For most of the book, I also liked the Rosary. They are basically pretentious, hipster teens who like 70's and 80's music and act like they are better than everyone else, which I know doesn't sound flattering at all. However, they lead Celia into an exotic world of indie clubs, new music, new literature, new clothes and style, and a new way of viewing the world. Kotecki recreates for me how enchanting things are when they are just discovered and how magical they feel.

There are also a lot of flaws in this book. Tomasi is a tolerable character, but the instalove after knowing each other for like two seconds is ridiculous. The pacing of the book is odd. Long stretches of the book have basically no action at all and are just ham-handed infodumps. I get that the world needs to be explained, but there's a better way of doing it through showing rather than telling. The buildup to the end where Celia is doubting herself and trying to find answers is way too long, making the actual finale and denouement rather short. Also, the references to music and art are cool, but made the story completely halt at times, stiling the pace further. It should be used as flavor and not as the substance of the story. I really enjoyed the Kind and Unkind supernatural world aspects. The Unkind are said to be mistaken for creatures like vampires and werewolves. This book doesn't delve completely into that world. Both sides are rather untrained and bumbling, not letting us see the depth and breadth of this very promising world. I did hope that the Rosary were enmeshed somehow in this world, but they proved to be normal, pretentious teens.

The Suburban Strange has a lot of good things going for it, but a lot of mediocre things hold it back. The writing is engaging and made me forgive a lot of these flaws. I would definitely read another book and give Kotecki another try because of his ability to capture emotions and build characters.

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## Charlie says

### 4.5 Stars

This book had me at "Sisters of Mercy," which I still listen to religiously (BTW), but no longer on vinyl or cassette, but on my slim ipod. As usual, I find myself on the opposite end of loving a book, but I predict this series will develop a tightly loyal cult-lit following. Based on this assessment, I can see why *The Suburban Strange* has received some rather mixed reviews from advanced readership. One point that I disagree with is that this book will generally only appeal to kids around 15 years old. Yes, it is a young adult novel, but with a very grown up soundtrack. Those over forty will embrace the music selection. Okay...wait...backup, those over forty who were 'progressive,' will likely find themselves closing the cover and running to the computer to download all the favorites revealed in the book to their ipod so they can flashback all the way to work and back the next day. Now, if you were into radio 90's rock or pop, you might be left just as clueless as many other readers. Ahh, not hip then, not hip now...snark, pow, bam!

Despite the oldies but goodies, I think kids of the alternative music era will understand the classic, thematic importance of the playlist and characterization in the novel, if not, I bet they will look them up and become fans. Being a child of underground Seattle nightclubs and alternative 90's (yes, imports and record stores) I jumped up and down at the high school experience depicted because for me, it was truly relatable.

There is a bit of Twilight meets Buffy meets Harry Potter, meets a dozen other YA popular story lines here, but it does provide something new with a twist, being the 'scene' that is resurrected. Nostalgic? I suppose I am, but it was refreshing to have the modern, paranormal and old melded together in a page-turning series starter.

What else worked? Um....the fact that a YA novel with a female lead was written by a male author! Similar to the literary references, from the Awakening, Alice In Wonderland and Portrait of A Lady, (nope, they weren't lost on me!) made in the novel, Nathan Kotecki flawlessly channels a teen misfit turned heroine. The voice, emotions and characterization were spot on and left me completely believing the authenticity of the story and characters. Looking forward to the second book! Bring on the dancing horses!

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## Amy Jacobs says

90210? Gossip Girl? Melrose Place? These are just some of things that came to my mind while wondering about this book. Was it going to have the drama of 90210? Was it going to have the clique's of Gossip Girl? Was it going to be suspenseful and dangerous like Melrose Place? Or was it going to be something that I grew bored with halfway through like I did with each of those shows?

Well, I can honestly say that the shows had more appeal than this book to me. Too blunt and harsh? Well, I am sorry but I can't lie either. This book had the makings for something great. We had the new girl with discovering the mysterious group of girls at Suburban High. I can see the potential in this book just with the summary. The first few chapters were pretty good and kept me interested. Then about halfway -- or even

slightly before that -- it just started to get boring and unappealing. This could have been my reading taste at the time, but after finishing this book I still find myself even remembering the main details of the book. It just wasn't impressionable and one I found wondering about afterwards.

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## WJ says

**Opening Line:** At the quiet beginning of a clear day, a black sedan rolled slowly down the empty street and came to a stop in front of Celia's house.

*The Suburban Strange* wasn't the book that I thought it would be, based on the blurb provided. Essentially the story is about Celia, a sophomore transferring into Suburban High. She's shy, quiet and artistic. By chance she makes friends with a member of the Rosary and soon joins their little group. However, strange things are happening at her school, where on the eve of a sophomore girl's birthday, bad things will happen to her. Things that endanger her life. It soon becomes apparent that something that's not right at her school. Is it her new friend Mariette causing the changes? Or is it someone else?

The premise of the book seemed to be totally what I was looking for. Some kind of paranormal/faerie story, mixed with high school drama and the angst of fitting in? Sure, sign me right up! HOWEVER, the description is kinda misleading. A lot of the book is devoted to the "alternative" lifestyle that the author seems to be promoting. I'm all for introducing songs/literary references in order to build up atmosphere and all that but honestly, there were just way too many obscure references that were just dumped into the book. I'm not even sure what the club Dabliouque (not sure if I spelt it correctly) has to do with the rest of the story. The weird references really threw me off.

Secondly, the book was really boring. I mean, for a story that's got attempts on the lives of sixteen year old girls, there really ought to be more drama and concern surrounding it right? But nope. It seems like life goes on for everyone else. And the parents are only concerned when there's a rumour going around that it's only sixteen year old virgins that get caught in the mess. What the? There was no explanation given of why the Bad Guy was targeting virgins to begin with. It just seems so random and unnecessary to introduce the idea of Celia having to lose her virginity in order to prevent bad things from happening to her. The rest of the book is more concerned with the Rosary and the bands/lifestyle that they're interested in--which seems to be "alternative" to everyone else. The whole point of the group seems to be to behave as non-mainstream as possible.

I didn't really care about the characters in the book either. I wanted to feel for Celia. I mean, she's shy and artistic which seems like it should be easy to empathise with her. But I never got a good read on her personality. It's also stated that at the start of the book her father's passed away recently. But this plotline isn't really developed and at some points, it seems like Celia kinda forgot she used to have a dad? I don't know it was strange. And it never seemed that difficult for her to assimilate into the Rosary, she seemed to find a place in the group fairly easily but I didn't really understand why she wanted to belong to the group. You can also say that that's the main problem with the book. Nathan Kotecki has somehow managed to create the most pretentious/hipster book that I've ever read, with the Rosary being the most try-hard group in YA fiction that I've come across so far.

The only person that I did feel bad for was Mariette. But even then her characterization made her seem so kooky/strange that it was only until much later in the book that we finally understand her behaviour.

*The Suburban Strange* was just a really disappointing read on the whole. I will not be reading any of Kotecki's books in the future, if this book is any indication.

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## **usagi ?? says**

I guess I'm in the minority when I say that I thought this book was pretty awesome. Yes, the maturity of the Rosary was a bit over-the-top at some points in the book, but otherwise? I really enjoyed this read - surprisingly so. And I definitely want to read more. Anyone looking for the way out of a traditional paranormal or PNR read should definitely check out "The Suburban Strange".

What I think I liked the most about this book was the sheer originality of it - yet at the same time it was very familiar. It felt like a goth "Breakfast Club" updated for the current culture. The idea of having a group that actively liked to seek out old things in order to make them new again, in order to have inspiration, in order to better themselves was just a really nice breath of fresh air. I also liked that they purposely delineated themselves from the standard goth crowd, which was kind of a pleasant change from so many YA high school-centric novels.

I also liked that Celia allowed herself to be made over and kind of "baptized" into the Rosary counterculture that they built, and that she didn't seem to have limits when it came to that. She absorbed everything and kept what she liked. It seems like some reviewers have taken this to mean that she lets her friends use her as a doormat, but if this were the case, I don't think she would have been friends with Mariette, as she might have been afraid of retaliation from said friends. It feels like Celia was a lot stronger than many gave her credit for, and I felt a strange bond with her. True, I didn't have my own Rosary in high school, but I was constantly seeking out new things to immerse myself in to broaden myself.

The Kind/Unkind plot was interesting, but here's where I agree with other reviewers - the virginity clause in the curse (as in, if you stay a virgin, you'll die on your curse day) could have been explained and explored a bit better. Instead, it felt like one of those '80s horror movies where the virgins died because they were virgins, and nothing more. And while I feel like there was, happily enough, no slut-shaming in this book, I was still kind of uncomfortable the way the whole virgin/curse day relationship was approached. It could have been smoothed out in another edit. However, I will give Kotecki props for having a gay couple in the main cast - it feels like unless it's either couched in bullying, self-hatred, or depression, YA seems to be keeping its distance as a whole. There are exceptions, of course, but I'm glad that Kotecki brought this to the fore - as teenagers are always exploring themselves, all parts of themselves, all the time - including sexual identity. Good on him for this.

The sensory language and imagery could have been a bit sharper - again, I think another edit round could have been needed - but when he wanted to use it, Kotecki could really use it. Everything concerning Mariette's abilities and how flowers changed around her were gorgeous, as were the images of the uber-stylish Rosary going off to Diaboliques every Friday night.

Final verdict? If you're looking for something new and exciting within paranormal YA, definitely check out this book. "The Suburban Strange" is out now from HMH in North America, so be sure to give it a read - it definitely deserves it as it's made my best of 2012 so far.

(posted to goodreads, shelfari, and birthofanewwitch.wordpress.com)



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## **Brownie says**

Just as the back cover so adequately points out, Nathan Kotecki knows exactly what points to cover when illustrating the worries of a high-school sophomore. His character, Celia Baulastine, has just enrolled in Suburban High, and a girl once wishing to disappear into the background now has a group of mysterious friends who try their best to gain the curious eyes of their classmates. They carry a nonchalant and darkly cultured air about them but immediately embrace Celia as a sister.

With this new courage, Celia's "average" life is portrayed, worried about school, romance, clothing, and her image. Her beautiful gift as an artist takes center stage. Soon, however the strange occurrences happening in Suburban, where girls on the eve of their sixteenth birthday are being hurt, distract her from any of this. As she discovers supernatural powers in the people around her and maybe even in herself, Celia must learn what is happening to her classmates before her own birthday comes...

With imagery and metaphors, Nathan Kotecki's style of writing pleasantly sets up the dark mood needed for this story without suffocating readers. I appreciated Kotecki's last comment to his readers the most, writing that he would be more than overjoyed if we would look up the names of his chapters, stating that they were in fact the albums that played as Suburban Strange's soundtrack.

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## **Willa says**

I really enjoyed this book a lot. I always think it's interesting to read other people's reviews of books and see why they liked it or didn't like it. In the case of this book, several people had written that they didn't like it because there was too much description of clothing, music, etc., and that's precisely why I *\*did\** like it. It just proves that old saw that there is something for everyone.

This book reminded me a little of reading Francesca Lia Block. Celia is the new girl in school and she is adopted by a clique that call themselves The Rosary. They dress up every day, all in black, and drive to school in a funereal procession of black cars. They purposely set themselves up as different and apart from the regular school kids; there are both boys and girls in the group, including a gay male couple.

Starting on the first day of school, girls are having accidents -- broken bones, bee stings, chemistry lab explosions. It is eventually figured out that the accidents are happening on the day before each girl's sixteenth birthday, but only to girls who haven't had sex. There is a paranormal element to the story, but it's almost incidental to the plot, as it is something that must be kept secret.

I enjoyed the moody atmosphere. I noticed quite a few reviewers said that the teenagers in the book weren't like normal kids; it's been a long time since I was in high school, and while my friends and I didn't dress up every day like these kids did, they actually did remind me a lot of my circle of friends and the way we behaved.

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## Wendy Darling says

Pretentious, predictable, and overworked.

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## Anne says

Ask yourself this question:

*Do I really want to read a book about pretentious teenagers who act like pretentious 40 year olds?*

If your answer is *Yes*, then this is the book for you!

Shockingly, there's not much in the way of a plot. Unless you count the numerous references to music, art, books, and clothing.

It opens with Celia getting into a car with a girl, and then heading to her new high school. There were quite a few things I found confusing, because nothing these kids in this group do is remotely realistic.

1. They ride to school in what appears to be a funeral procession. For some reason, they feel the need to arrive at school at the same time. So, one car picks up Celia, then drives to the next person's house, where they get into their car and follow the original car to the next house...and so on.

*Evidently it helps them cultivate an air of mystery about the group.*

2. They have named their clique The Rosary.

Do I need to say anything more about that? Probably not...but I will. These *high school* kids refer to themselves as **The Rosary**. What?! And apparently everyone else at the *high school* is so awed by their mysterious persona, that they somehow avoid the ass-beating that would await anyone else in *high school* stupid enough to do this.

3. They all go to this weird club on Friday nights.

*Hey, kids at a club! At least that's normal, right?*

**Bzzzzt! Wrong!**

Not a normal club. Nope. You have to have discriminating taste to gain entrance to this place. In other words, if you listen to (God Forbid!) music on the radio, you just wouldn't understand how awesome this place is. Everyone and everything inside is amazing, eclectic, strange, and interesting!

4. The Leopard.

It's what Celia calls the boy she meets at the club. Yeah, he's got a name, but referring to the boy of your dreams mentally as The Leopard is *soooo* cool and sophisticated.

*WTF?!*

5. Insta-lurve between Celia and (*gag*) The Leopard. They stared at each other each Friday night for weeks, so I guess they really know each other, right? Then they met two more times (in real life!) before she realized that she was desperately and hopelessly in love with him.

*Hey, at least they took it slow...*

6. The Rosary doesn't drink, studies come before anything else, and they all *must* have a job.

*Where the hell did these kids come from?! Were they part of some kind of a secret Stepford cloning project?*

Unfortunately, the paranormal stuff had nothing to do with why Celia's friends were so freaking ~~creepy and weird~~ artsy-fartsy. In fact, it didn't have much to do with anything at all. It was boring. The whole book was filled with nonsense about how you can only be *unique* if you act a certain way, do certain things, listen to certain music. Mainstream friends, books, music, and clothes just don't cut it.

*Guess what? Now you're a **unique** asshole!*

In the end, I found Celia to be a wannabe loser who couldn't think for herself, and The Rosary to be a group of dysfunctional dorks who thought they were better than everyone else. The paranormal mystery could have been interesting, but it moved too slowly to salvage this book for me.

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## Giselle says

Mysterious accidents the day before girls turn 16, a peculiar group of socialites, a unique paranormal aspect - The Suburban Strange was very promising. It started very intriguing too, with a very sophisticated, high-on-life feel that I found quite refreshing, though my excitement for it came to a quick halt when this high school clique started sounding like 100 year old teenagers, and the cultural references in the book were more persistent than door to door salesmen. Among other things.

A group of worldly teens spending their time in an underground indie bar scene creates a very sophisticated, hipster vibe in this book that I initially found very refreshing. We get teenagers who like to dress to the nines and act like they're older, more cultured than the average. I liked the attitudes and personalities that it brought out in the book. However, after a while, I'm not sure if it got progressively worse, or if I simply got over my initial enchantment with it, but it became a little too unnatural for me to picture actual teenagers talking and acting like this. I'm certain there must be some in the world that share these personalities, but I was put off by it come half way through. I was also disappointed that their strange behaviour was not linked to the mysterious happenings in the plot which is what I initially assumed. I was expecting them to really be 300 year old demons or vampires - anything but extreme hipsters who are simply just... weird kids.

Have any of you read The Awakening by Kate Chopin? I hadn't heard of it until this book. It's apparently a classic, and if the meh reviews on Goodreads hadn't put me off it, hearing about it 8271362153 times in this book would make it certain that I never want to hear about it ever again. I don't mind cultural references in a novel, in fact I often find them very enjoyable, Gilmore Girls is one of my all time favourite TV shows *because* of the infinite cultural references--among other things--, but when a conversation unnaturally halts so the protagonist can fangirl for the 3rd time about a book she just read, it becomes grating. Especially when combined with the already considerable music and art references scattered throughout.

Instead of focusing on these grandpa teens with a marketing agenda, I decided to let myself enjoy the plot which I found fairly interesting and unique. I liked how the paranormal aspect was woven into the plot. While it didn't go into great lengths, the Kind and Unkind mythology is a creative concept of good vs evil. There is one aspect of it that I found a bit obscure as I'm not sure of its purpose or relation to the plot: the fact that only girls who are virgins become a victim of this pre-birthday curse. Is it supposed to add relatable teenage dilemmas in the plot? I'm not quite sure but it felt very backwards 80s horror movie with no real significance. Then when it came time to the final twist--the big reveal--I realized just how predictable it all was. Even my two year old son knew who did it. And he thinks B comes first.

I was expecting a fun mystery with creepy happenings and an eerie school setting, instead I got a very slow

paced read that was more an exposition on teenage social influences and common peer pressures than anything. I would only recommend this if you love books filled to the brim with very obscure indie music and art references, drab teenage "messages", and unusually sophisticated teenage characters.

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*An advance copy was provided by the publisher for review.*

For more of my reviews, visit my blog at [Xpresso Reads](#)

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## **Giselle says**

A finished copy was provided by the publisher for review.

Celia's starting the tenth grade at Suburban high school. The shy and quiet teenager befriends Regine during an art class and she finds herself being welcomed into their clique called The Rosary. Eccentric, sophisticated and unique, their group strives to be different and goes out of their way to help Celia navigate the icy waters of high school. On the first day of school she witnesses a girl go into shock due to her allergy with bees. Then more girls start to get hurt. Celia's caught in the middle and doesn't understand what's going on.

The urban fantasy setting was wonderful. The club they hung out at sounded fabulous and every detail that Nathan wrote about was clear-cut in my head. The pacing on the other hand left much to be desired. I felt it was incredibly too long. Some chapters could have been edited down or even taken away because it didn't help the story as much as it did. It wasn't needed. Another thing that completely bugged me was the instant love. Her thoughts were completely one dimensional and I really wanted to shake Celia. You barely know the guy and you're in love? (Boooo, girlie you need to slow down!)

The writing was beautifully done, and Nathan writes so well but I just needed something more. That extra push to fall in love with the characters. Plot development was lacking in several areas, and I found it to develop so very slowly that I wasn't even sure of I wanted to keep on going. Yet, I persevered and was immensely disappointed by the ending. I'm not going to rush out and find out what happens in the next book, because I felt this one could have been a stand-alone!

Pass on this one if you're not into magic or long winded chapters. Read it if you love Nathan's descriptive writing style.

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## **Kat Heckenbach says**

This is a book that **SHOULD** appeal to me. I was an overly tall, artistically talented girl who became part of the alternative subculture when I was a teen. All the references to 1980s alternative bands should have made me feel connected to the story (since that was my era, even though it is obviously not the era of this story), as should have the description of Celia's transformation.

Instead, it drove me nuts. The descriptions were emotionless info-dumps. The author did nothing to make me \*feel\* I was in Celia's head, but rather told, told, told me stuff. And all the culture references just got on my

nerves. The author is supposedly someone who was at least Goth as a teen--but I am wondering when that was. The book reads like a documentary on Goths rather than an actual portrayal. (Dude, I grew up listening to the bands you listed on every-freaking-other page, but you seem to have an affection for them that comes a generation later, like you're so culturally enlightened because you prefer oldies, and it was insulting.)

And the supposed \*story\*--a mystery revolving around bizarre accidents plaguing the girls at Celia's school--seems plunked in between long diatribes about how cool and intellectual and exotic and perfect the Rosary group is. The dialog was stiff and unnatural. I don't know any teens--Goth or otherwise--that talk like these kids. It reminded me a lot of Dark Companion by Marta Acosta (which I also rated 2 stars) because it's a complete disconnect from a true YA voice. Both this and Dark Companion feel like adults talking like children.

I read YA almost exclusively, and it seems to be a bandwagon right now. So let me please state, for the sake of the genre of my passion: If you could not relate to being a teen when you actually \*were\* a teen, it makes no sense to try to write a book that connects to teens now.

All that said, the cover is gorgeous.

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