

Killer T by Robert Muchamore

4 Stars

A coming-of-age story set against a dystopian future

In the near future, gene editing technology has advanced to the point where curing disease and tweaking your DNA to make yourself smarter, taller or better looking is more and more commonplace. Unfortunately, alongside this development comes the dark side of genetic modification - infectious viruses, mutated to be deadly, are manipulated by terrorists to be used as a weapon. Growing up amongst all this chaos are teenagers Harry and Charlie; him a lonely journalism-obsessed Brit in a Las Vegas school and her a feisty science geek who gets unfairly accused of mixing a batch of explosives and blowing up a school. As the pair are drawn together by the increasingly dangerous events around them, they find themselves fighting for their lives in a world that is falling apart.

Killer T was an extremely creative and unusual novel and not at all what I was expecting to encounter when I picked up the book. The plot is complex with plenty of unexpected twists and turns and includes a variety of genres such as action, science fiction, humour and romance. The story itself spans several years with time jumps in between the different parts, which was a clever way for the author to bypass the duller years of his characters' lives and also added a sense of progression to the plot. The world that Harry and Charlie inhabit is dark, gritty and harsh, and the story certainly doesn't shy away from addressing some pretty tough topics. Despite being fairly vast in scope, the conclusion ties together most of the loose ends and while not exactly a happy ending, paints a more optimistic picture of the future than had previously been set up by earlier, bleaker sections of the story.

While the idea of gene editing in the future is not a totally new concept (indeed, I reviewed a book with a very similar concept earlier in the year), it is certainly an interesting one that seems to be a popular background setting for many YA novels. It is both fascinating and frightening to imagine a world where, for a small amount of money, people could edit their brains and bodies to make themselves superior to other people, and also wonder how far you might go if this became the norm. It would have been interesting to learn a bit more of the science behind it, but again this was probably left at a simple level due to the YA nature of the book.

Unfortunately, I did have a few issues with some aspects of this book that hindered my enjoyment of it slightly. I found that the time jumps gave the plot a little bit of a disjointed feel and at times made me feel that a story with such a vast scope may have worked better as a series. Entire years passed between the different sections wherein the characters changed significantly in their personalities, meaning that I never felt very connected with them personally. As well as this, the characters all felt a little bit one dimensional and the writing lacked emotion at times, meaning that even when very dramatic or shocking things happened, I didn't feel all that much reading them. This is potentially due to the story being aimed at younger readers, but the lack of emotional punch did negatively impact on my enjoyment of the book. Finally, I felt that some of the

teenage interactions were written a bit simplistically and didn't feel as real to me as some other teenage characters I have read. Some readers might have issues with some of the young characters' more adult behaviours as well (drinking, sexual behaviours etc), although these parts were probably quite accurate to real life.

In conclusion, this was an entertaining read, and although it was aimed more at teenage readers, it still had a complex and engaging plot. I've read previous books by this author when I was younger, and I would certainly recommend this book to younger readers looking for an exciting and action-packed story with a difference.

Daenerys

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review