

★ Exile in Guyville

Amy Lee Lillard

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Within its compact length of six stories, Amy Lee Lillard's collection *Exile in Guyville* packs a major punch with its hard-hitting science fiction that centers women's perspectives. Sometimes darkly humorous and sometimes just plain dark, it troubles what-if scenarios in stylish, visceral, and often witty prose.

The stories center themes of agency and power, with women in dilemmas in which they lack both. In "Exile in Guyville," women from different eras are transported to 2074 and placed on exhibit for prospective husbands; the only viable alternative to marriage is becoming a curator and perpetuating the cycle of dehumanization. In "Typical Girls," a harried customer service agent implants a human operating system in her brain to improve her work and love prospects, but the system's AI provides more than just advice. In the bleak entry "Blackbird," women are raised in a postapocalyptic community to be hounded for sport, sexual assault, and mutilation when they come of age.

But even through grim turns, the collection is enthralling due to the humanity of its characters and its precise prose. Every dystopian scenario comes with an accompanying glimmer of hope, whether it's a mad dash to a place of sanctuary or the possibility of reclaiming power. The latter informs "Things You Say," which merges the myth of the Sirens from Homer's *Odyssey* with riot grrrl attitude, as women use their newfound powers to get payback for past wrongs. Sometimes conflict even leads to peculiar truces: in "Corporeal," a woman gets the opportunity to live out her life as an alternate version of herself, and both consciousnesses struggle toward rapprochement.

Confronting sinister implications and flirting with horror, the short stories in *Exile in Guyville* are intense and cathartic as their women struggle against the ever-present combination of technology and subjugation.

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