



## Fixer

### Sally Vedros

Proxy Press (Jun 1, 2020)

Softcover \$16.99 (334pp)

978-1-73458-490-5

*Fixer is an engrossing novel in which five young adults come of age, held together by the trappings of modernity.*

In Sally Vedros's unflinching novel *Fixer*, a group of friends construct their futures together, breathing new life into a radical technology.

Diego is fresh out of college and eager to set the Silicon Valley ablaze with his bold vision: a series of AI programs that observe and imitate users in order to automate their lives. He pulls some of his friends into the endeavor, including his college roommates Kari and Ravi, and Kari's girlfriend, Kira. He also includes his own girlfriend, Meghan. But the five friends discover that life has other plans for them, even as Diego's burgeoning company ties them together. In his pursuit to eliminate the messiness of modern life, Diego manages to construct an anchor point to which each can return to.

The intriguing premise of automating mundane tasks, like shopping, schedule planning, and managing a growing social circle, is less central to the story than the characters' lives are. The AI elements fade into the background as the story progresses, reemerging most often to drive the plot forward. In moments between those of technological focus, each of the five characters are constructed with depth, and all are ably differentiated from the rest of their group (though Kira and Kari tangle because of their names). Alternating chapters focus on each in turn; many such chapters have dramatic stopping points, helping the story to build upon itself in an engaging way, and with noticeable shifts in pace.

Characters' exchanges hold attention because of what each speaker omits or holds back; nothing is forced out through dialogue. This is exemplified by an early conversation between Diego and Meghan that is heavy on flattery and positivity, though inside, each holds back their doubts and conceals their relationship issues. Such dichotomies foreshadow troubles to come and reveal characters' traits well.

The narrative splits as Diego recovers from a trauma and as Meghan moves away from the group; in the course of these changes, Meghan comes to stand out from the rest of the cast. Her continual development is a compelling and emotional feature of the book; she grows from a hopeless romantic into a self-assured woman. Still, despite these breakaways, everything is made to connect back to the five characters who started the story, and to Diego's technology. The result is a thoughtful, human examination of how technology pervades all aspects of modern life, punctuated by prose that walks a fine line between casual language and high tech awareness. As the stories wind down, each characters' tale is resolved in an appropriate manner, and the book's epilogue addresses Diego's automated programs in a cheeky, unsettling way.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (October 9, 2020)

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