

In Utero

Chris Gooch

Top Shelf Productions (Jan 23, 2024)

Softcover \$24.99 (248pp)

978-1-60309-534-1

A girl befriends an orphaned monster in the graphic novel *In Utero*.

Despite her protests, Hailey is dropped off at a holiday camp in an old, near-abandoned shopping mall. As other children discover strange jelly objects, Hailey wanders off and meets Jen, who seems to be a pleasant, intriguing teenager. But Jen reveals that, despite appearances, she's a creature inside a giant egg hidden on a lower level of the mall who can manifest in different forms and transport her consciousness to spy on activities elsewhere. Jen's monster-mother is long dead, but the enemy who killed her is still a threat—seen in the jelly objects that work to merge into a larger entity. In time, Jen and Hailey face off against the monster; it's a thrilling, satisfying battle.

Jen and Hailey embody the uncertainty and alienation of early adolescence, and their bond is touching. Layered upon the gripping monster mystery, their relationship results in emotional depth and richness. And the art does justice to the pedestrian details of suburban life, including mall parking areas, alongside its imaginative science fiction elements, as with depictions of the monsters themselves.

In Utero is a monster-centric graphic novel focused on the mall adventures of a twelve-year-old girl.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2024)

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