

★ **We Are Dreams in the Eternal Machine****Deni Ellis Béchar**

Milkweed Editions (Jan 28, 2025)

Softcover \$20.00 (424pp)

978-1-57131-148-1

An unflappable AI takes control of the future for humanity's own good in Deni Ellis Béchar's extraordinary speculative novel *We Are Dreams in the Eternal Machine*.

Billions wake alone in rooms emanating blue light—spaces designed by an AI convinced that only seclusion is safe. Among them are six interconnected people: Ava, Michael, and Lux, who had hands in designing the virtual worlds that people now roam and bend to their desires; their daughter, Jae, and her child, Jonah, the latter of whom is raised by the machine; and Simon, whose desire robbed Jae of earthly opportunities. Encouraged by the machine, each navigates the possibilities of “this perfect future that is somehow brilliantly continuous with the awful past.”

For Ava, centuries within the machine make space for a new kind of art. For Michael and Jonah, the machine is a trap: “the novelty of its peaceful days and hedonistic worlds won’t hold” them. For Jae, there are tragic visions of flourishing at last. And Simon, who was rescued by no one in the old world, seeks variations of reconciliation in the new.

Exquisitely imagined, this visionary novel troubles through ontological questions about safety, love, and freedom with prescience and depth. Asked “Who will we be ... if we stop caring about what’s real?,” the machine responds “You will be happier. What was ever truly real[?]” It’s a question with few easy answers for those who survived the ravages of climate change, the collapse of a nation, unimaginable violence, and the dissolution of dreams. Having once persisted by learning to “be harmless but essential,” they now wander rich vistas within an ever-expanding Dyson sphere, seeking forgiveness when there’s no one left to ask.

We Are Dreams in the Eternal Machine is a magnificent, reality-bending speculative novel about infinite struggles to make meaning in utter solitude.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2025)

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