



“Book Review: *Rock Gods and Messy Monsters*”

Reviewed by Joshua Ryan Bligh



The best kind of absurdism; the kind that wears a veneer of the surreal while having the grisly guts of reality right underneath

Rock Gods & Messy Monsters by Diane Hatz is a bullet-hell critique of corporate and mass culture by way of Theodor Adorno filtered through the whimsy and humor of writers like Terry Pratchett and Kurt Vonnegut.

Hatz tackles, decks, and jabs at corporations like a pro boxer, satirizing the precariously imbalanced work-life balance that countless readers outside of the upper echelons of wealth can recognize immediately. If we boil it down, it sets out to prove that *work sucks*



with the aplomb and grit of a gladiator. And *oh hell* does the novel prove it, in more ways and with more reasons than you would expect.

The story follows Alex as she attempts with varying success to navigate employment (and *employment* being a term to actually mean, more or less, *enslavement*) at Acht, a music corporation run by literally explosive sociopaths and owned by aliens. Amid gruesome outbursts from bosses, deranged echo-chamber board meetings, alien-programmed rockstars, and requisite daily lobotomies, she struggles to keep a job to pay the bills, all while barely clinging to hope or a sense of living at all. Unsurprisingly, each new day at the company eats away at her humanity.

It is a story that far too many people, of all ages, will be able to relate to. The shape of events might have the flash of fantasy or the impossible, but the core of every situation is too close to reality for comfort, leaving you to chuckle at the wit and humor, but through teeth clenched with recognition of situations at once familiar and prevalent.

I am going to call *Rock Gods & Messy Monsters* a couple things real quick, but let's not jump to conclusions, as these all work in the novel's favor: gruesome, inelegant, nightmarish, and bleak. Each of these nasty little words is in praise of the novel, a list of the tools by which it fans itself into a bonfire of dark-humored satire increasingly relevant with each passing day. And in this whirlwind of surreal situations, each out-surreal-ing the previous, like an exquisite corpse game for the modern world, Hatz keeps up a whimsical sense of defiance.

The world and so many of the people in it are awful and make it awful for others, but that does not keep her down, and Hatz's writing shines through as a beacon for anyone who could feel trapped by dehumanizing work, corporate greed, and all the other wonderful trappings of late-stage capitalism. You might come out the other end a bit battered and beaten, but Hatz's writing also psyches you up and gets you ready to jump back into the ring.