

Farm for Mutes

Dimitri Anastasopoulos

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Through his clever and compelling prose, Anastasopoulos imbues a creepy air of mystery that permeates this unconventional read.

In Dimitri Anastasopoulos' unusual novel, we encounter the trappings of middle-class life—with an alien kicker. Is it possible that there is more than the misery of earthly existence destined for these characters? A lurking being on high seems to think so.

Welcome to *Farm for Mutes*. Luther and his wife, Sybil, have drifted apart. Sybil has devolved into a recluse and germophobe who wears protective gear just to go outside. One day, Luther, sound-restoration expert for a private collector, examines a mysterious, parasite-like recording device that attempts to take him over. Meanwhile, a young boy loses his parents—one to the Amazon jungles and another to a *Close Encounters*-type home visitation, sound effects and all. Along the way a frog is tortured for its voice, and a father gives his son an ancient whistle.

A conventional novel this is not.

“A screaming came across the sky. This is the way they begin a story. But unlike a screaming in a story, the scream came before the concussion that spawned it ... Speeding faster than light, it covered time and space so quickly that a young boy's mother disappeared before a young boy's mother disappeared.”

So begins chapter one, and it doesn't get any simpler. Charged with banal human experiences that can, under the author's clever handling, seem both genuine and uncanny, *Farm for Mutes* is a compelling if sometimes opaque read. This odd little novel provides an experience, if not a traditionally cohesive storyline.

Sections of the novel are prefaced with descriptions of little-known earthlings like hagfish or *Toxoplasma gondi*—one being a creature that feels “the most total music on earth” and the other a mind-altering parasite. Their relationship to the text is one of the clearer messages in the novel—that musical beings, organized super-organisms, and parasites do exist on earth, so why not elsewhere? Overall, they add to the air of mystery and creepiness with which Anastasopoulos imbues his prose.

Farm for Mutes is a refreshing read for readers who like their literary escapades with a touch of weird. If anything, the world will seem a little stranger to anyone having read it; many of us do not count that a bad thing. As to what it all means, well, we leave that for you to decide.

The author of *A Larger Sense of Harvey*, Anastasopoulos teaches fiction writing and contemporary literature at the University of Buffalo, SUNY.

LEIA MENLOVE (Fall 2013)

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