**Clarion Review**

Science Fiction

**grydscaen: utopia**
Natsuya Uesugi
Xlibris
978-1-4797-0017-2
Two Stars (out of Five)

With its manga-style illustration on the cover and its sexual content, Natsuya Uesugi's latest novel, *grydscaen: utopia*, seems set to appeal to a certain segment of adult fans of the popular Japanese graphic-novel genre. The volume is the prequel to Uesugi's previously published books in the *grydscaen* series—*grydscaen: retribution* and *grydscaen: beginnings*—and a fourth novel, *grydscaen: war*, is planned for future publication.

The book's protagonist is Lino Dejarre, son of the Viceroy of the Pacific Territories, a region at war with the Atlantea Federation. Lino is a bisexual graphic-design student with psychic powers who is recruited by a government-run military organization, the Psi Faction, and inducted into the elite psychic force, Psi:Ko. This grueling process imbues him with superhuman "kedek" energy.

But making the decision to join the Psi Faction requires Lino to leave behind his family, his friends, and the only life he has known. No more illicit liaisons with his mother or cousin Anis. No more hurried bathroom encounters with his homosexual lover, Berlin. No more drugging and drinking to excess with his friends—a bevy of artistic users, dealers, and thieves.

A five-page prologue describes the multifaceted world Uesugi invents. Set in the mid-2050s, there are warring factions and futuristic weapons, psychic soldiers, cyber terrorists, mutant albino-human killer forces, neural "jacks" connecting brains to computers, and a network called "grydscaen."

This interesting world piques the reader's interest, but few of these creative elements actually appear in Uesugi's prequel. Indeed, the first surreal event does not occur until page thirty-seven when Lino "sparked up his aegis and made a small ball of energy" float around the room. Instead, the focus generally is on relationships involving drinking, drugs, and sex. The book's sci-fi component clearly plays second fiddle to the dalliances and altered states of mind

of its characters.

While *grydscaen* is not intended to be literary, it should at least involve good storytelling. Yet it fails this test on several counts. The first chapter contains no hook: “It was late, Lino was in the computer room, he had been designing some goggles using a 3D animation program for his Design 303 class.” All too often, punctuation is omitted, and the author occasionally lapses into intrusive second-person narration. Frequently, too, he ignores one of the most important rules of storytelling: show; don’t tell. Uesugi instead provides superficial descriptions: “Charles Dejarre, the Viceroy, was a commanding man. He was very tall and had brown hair and harsh eyes and was austere and stern.”

More importantly, Uesugi’s protagonist, Lino, fails to mature during the course of this first novel in the series. He encounters situations that should make a person reflect on life choices, but Lino seems immune to introspection. The closest he comes to self-examination is in the final chapter, when he states, “I can’t believe that I fell in love with a heroin addict. I am not falling in love again, my ability to pick people must be really off or something.” Yet, on the next page, he admits that the “biggest crock of crap” he is in is that he can’t put his hands on a drink. Perhaps Lino’s character will mature in later episodes, but the prequel provides no foreshadowing of that outcome.

This book may appeal to readers drawn to manga or to those who enjoy stories that contain mildly salacious text and characters who suffer from identity angst. But aficionados of science fiction are not likely to be satisfied by *grydscaen*.

*Nancy Walker*