

The Agents

Grégoire Courtois

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Workers living regimented lives begin to question the truth of their existence in Grégoire Courtois's excellent science fiction novel *The Agents*.

In the far future, work is the only thing worth living for. People spend their entire lives bound inside of enormous office buildings, separated by metal partitions, and fearing the chaos and certain death that waits below.

These workers, known as agents, also live in fear of violence from the guilds—groups who seek to protect or expand their territories within the tower. But hints accumulate that perhaps not all is as the company claims. “In the beginning, humans were born on the ground,” one man tells them. “The carpet was green, not blue, and they called it grass.”

This is an engrossing and unpredictable tale, told through news bulletins, instant messages, and narration. It focuses on several intriguing members of a single guild who long for a purpose beyond enhancing their purchasing power. One copes with his bleak everyday existence by writing a novel; another clings to the meaning he finds in his mysterious, invisible calendar; a third conducts unnecessary surgeries as horrific art, altering flesh amid a rainbow of bruises and scars.

The novel is suspenseful and exciting, with occasional bursts of humor: as the sober history of the “old world” is shared, it's revealed that “being an agent, even in those times, involved occupying a cubicle and pretending to be working.” This helps to make *The Agents* a thoughtful and provocative speculative novel that casts a keen critical eye toward the contemporary world, addressing deep questions about the meanings of life, community, and work.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2022)

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