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Unknown Book

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Thirty-nine-year-old Jeremy Shepherd trades it all—the bright lights of London, the high-profile editor position at a glossy men's lifestyle magazine, the BMW, the designer clothes, the jet-set vacations, the personal trainer—to move back home with his parents in "deep suburbia, in a provincial town you've probably never heard of." After telling his friends and co-workers that he would be teaching English in rural Ghana for two years, he settles into a desk job as a civil servant. The mind-numbing daytime work leaves him energy and clarity for his alternate lifestyle as The Shep in the swinging, a.k.a. dogging, community.

In this detached first-person narration, Jeremy offers graphic descriptions of dogging contacts, rendezvouses, and etiquette, as well as his fellow regulars on the circuit: a former estate agent, a refugee, and an ex-boyband member clinging to popularity. Their biggest challenge is finding nooks and corners that the country's surveillance cameras miss, that is until they are met with racism and violence. Even that tension is no match for the startling, jaw-dropping conclusion that overtakes both the narrator and reader.

The Isle of Dogs is author Daniel Davies' debut novel. Before turning to fiction writing, he worked as a curator at the British Museum and as an editor for the *Lancet* and the *Evening Standard*. Davies also taught English abroad in Barcelona, Prague, and San Sebastian.

The novel is presented as a story within a story, in which Jeremy's autobiographical account is delivered to a publishing editor. This framework, along with Jeremy's cool, impassive voice, allows distance between the author and narrator. While his voyeuristic lifestyle may seem purely detached and lascivious, he delivers honest, sharp, and even humorous observations on suburbia, intolerance, and the surveillance society, often with references to literature, music, film, and psychology. Although he partakes in a highly charged atmosphere, Jeremy slowly reveals his loneliness and needs beyond physical attraction.

Readers who appreciate J.G. Ballard's cerebral, dystopian novels and Michel Houellebecq's themes on sexuality will find *The Isle of Dogs* story equally stirring. This short first novel that packs a punch makes Daniel Davies an author to watch.

ANGELA LEEPER (February 12, 2009)

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