

★ **Valid: Dystopian Autofiction****Chris Bergeron****Natalia Hero, Translator**

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An elderly, closeted trans woman makes a final stand against fascistic AI in Chris Bergeron's novel *Valid*.

When Earth was rocked by environmental decay and recurrent pandemics, David, an AI designed to be "humanity's best friend," took over. But David never relinquished control. Now, twenty years later, individuality is forbidden. Christelle, who once touted David's attributes to potential customers, has been a more-or-less willing prisoner of his for years, exchanging her freedoms of movement and expression for comfort. But then Christelle grows tired of pretending and fights back in the only way that she can: by telling David the truth.

Taking the form of Christelle's monologue with occasional input from David, *Valid* paints a grim, frightening picture of the near future. AI controls humanity, and Christelle had to choose between detransitioning or suffering the consequences. After spending so much of her life hiding, doing so again to appease David comes almost too naturally. It is only through an unexpected encounter with a link to her past that she discovers the path to a more rewarding future.

And so Christelle tells David her life story—a tale filled with domestic abuse, hiding her true self from loved ones, and facing down bigots. She mentions short-lived triumphs, like transitioning and finding love. In response, David vacillates between friendly concern and unemotional threats, but he remains determined to misgender Christelle and keep her in the box that he designed for her. Christelle, resilient to the last, soldiers on, driven by the knowledge that humans created David, and only humans can bring humanity back to the world.

Valid is a brutal dystopian novel about what can happen when prejudice, fear, and complacency take the place of compassion, acceptance, and action.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2023)

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