Praise

‘A terrific read...hip, thinky, disturbingly close to the bone.’ Simmone Howell

‘Subversive, cleverly written, challenging, and surprising.’ Cory Doctorow

Synopsis

Katey—or ‘Kid’, as she prefers to be known—is fifteen years old. She lives in a dystopian future where the education system has been taken over by corporations. School is now known as ‘The Game’, and takes place in a shopping mall converted into a school, where video cameras are in operation 24/7. To progress through school, students must play their way through video game levels, and they can achieve extra credit—and popularity—by being ‘branded’ by the corporate sponsors.

While most of the ‘players’ accept their strange existence, Kid has a vague sense of uneasiness about ‘The Game’. However, it is not until she witnesses a shocking anti-corporate prank that her unease turns into a greater sense of the wrongness of ‘The Game’. A group, calling themselves The Unidentified, stages a mock suicide to protest against the power structure of ‘The Game’. Kid is disturbed to find out that she is the only one who finds this stunt confronting—the rest of her game-mates seem desensitised. Kid decides to find out the identities of The Unidentified, and follows a chain of cyber-clues to infiltrate the group.

Kid soon finds herself intoxicated by the group and its enigmatic leader—even though she has now been ‘branded’ herself. Kid learns through The Unidentified that she doesn’t have the rights to her creations, her opinions, her privacy or her own identity. However, The Unidentified are not what they seem, and a series of shocking events involving Kid’s best friends lead Kid to make a decision that will change her life. She is going to do something about the situation she and her peers are in. Something that will change the rules of ‘The Game’ forever.

This funny, scary and confronting novel is the young adult debut of American author Rae Mariz. It is a story that will stick with the reader for quite some time, and have them questioning their own ideas about privacy, technology, corporations, freedom and identity.

About the Author

US writer Rae Mariz has lived in Stockholm for the past eight years where she has worked as an English translator for film companies. The Unidentified is her first novel.

Author Statement

From Rae’s website: http://raemariz.com

What inspired you to write The Unidentified?

Short answer: The Young Adult librarian I worked with at Seattle Public Library gave me Feed by MT Anderson to read and I was impressed with and inspired by the kinds of social topics and experiments with language that were being explored in YA. So, indirectly, The Unidentified was a result of me wanting to read ‘more books like that,’ but with more focus on the inherent creativity and defiance in youth cultures, I guess. Because what’s NOT inspiring about that time in your life when you’re discovering how the adult world really works and trying to figure out how to be a part of it, even if you’re not sure you want to be a part of it?

I was 25 when I started writing what would later become The Unidentified. I intended to describe an optimal
learning environment for functioning in a hyper-
contemporary world and it turned into what people
are calling a dystopia, so I hope no one hands me the
controls to their society. I obviously don’t know what I’m
doing. But building up a world with words was a really
fun way to work through ideas and share stuff I think
is interesting at least. I didn’t set out to write a novel
(because I didn’t know how). It was a long process of
learning the art of story-telling before the words I was
writing ever even got close to resembling a novel.
But I wrote it to see if I could. I was inspired by the
challenge.

Reading Journal

As you read this novel, keep a journal or blog, and
update this blog with your thoughts and feelings on
it. Which characters ring true? Do any of them seem
unbelievable? Does your opinion of the characters and
the corporations and sponsors change as you move
through the text? Are there any elements of the story
that are difficult to decipher or ambiguous. Why is this?
Keep a record as you read of your reactions to the
characters and the plot, of any questions you have,
and any predictions you would like to make about the
coming events.

Pre-reading Activities

1. Read the book’s blurb and look closely at its cover.
   What are your reactions to these? Do they give you
   an idea of what atmosphere the book will have? Do
   you find the design and blurb appealing? Why or
   why not?
2. The Unidentified is a book about advertising
   and corporations. What do you think of the way
   products are marketed to teenagers?
3. In The Unidentified, the school is full of cliques. Are
   there cliques at your school? If so, describe them.
4. In The Unidentified, cameras follow every
   movement the students make, like a reality TV
   program. Do you think it would be fun to have
   cameras recording your every move? Why or why
   not? Do you think your school would make an
   interesting setting for a reality TV program? Why or
   why not?
5. Make a list of your favourite products or brands.
   Why do these brands appeal to you?
6. Do you have a favourite television advertisement,
   or is there one that particularly stuck in your head?
   Why do you think this was?
7. The Unidentified is also a book about loss of
   privacy. Do you have a Twitter or Facebook
   account? How do you feel about their privacy
   controls? Do you worry about the things you say,
   and photographs of you, being broadcast online?
8. In The Unidentified, masks play a central role. What
   do you think masks can symbolise?
9. The idea of freedom is also central to The
   Unidentified. Write a short piece about the concept
   of freedom. What does it mean to you?
10. Think about corporate sponsorship of sports
    players and celebrities. In this book, any student
    can become ‘branded’. They are sponsored by that
    brand and must undertake sometimes demeaning
    activities to fulfi...
of these applications to your interests? Do you feel comfortable with corporations knowing your personal information? Write a discussion on the benefits and drawbacks of this.

10. On the same page, Kid says ‘Oh Google, she thought I was suicidal’. She seems to be using the word ‘Google’ as a replacement for ‘God’. What are your thoughts on this? Write a piece discussing whether technology will replace God or religion.

11. On page 28, Kid says, ‘Talent or skill wasn’t how you recognised a genius. A genius was a person giving the world the eff you salute while doing the impossible’. Write a journal entry about your idea of genius. Is there a high profile person who you think is a genius? Why?

12. On page 32, Kid describes Ari in the following way: ‘She could probably single-handedly play parts for an entire geek orchestra, but she would rather be in an Idol band winning votes and fame’. Do you think that, today, fame is more important than achievement? Are there any celebrities you think are famous just for being famous? Do you think this is a good goal to have? Write about a celebrity who you believe does not deserve fame.

13. The ‘Craftsters’ make flyers protesting the symbol of the handbag being appropriated by high fashion designers. Do you think that, today, teenagers have stopped protesting against things that are really important? Make a list of, or a flyer for, things that you think are important enough to stand up for or protest against.

14. On page 89, Kid says, ‘Forbidden knowledge had its allure’. In the age of the internet, where most ‘knowledge’ seems to be available for free, do you think the concept of forbidden knowledge still exists? Is there any forbidden knowledge that fascinates you?

15. On Page 92, Kid says, ‘She didn’t even look away when I caught her staring, which was the accepted social norm’. Make a list of five ‘social norms’ in today’s society and whether or not you think they should be followed.

16. Draw a picture of a Fashion Fascist and a Craftster. What do you think makes them different (or are they so different after all)?

17. On page 152, Kid says, ‘This was, like, my mom’s worst fear, me chatting with strangers on the internet’. Do you think your parents worry about what you do on the internet? Do you think it’s a legitimate concern?

18. On page 169, Kid sees a downside to fame when she realises everybody is watching her. What do you think about celebrities being on constant watch by paparazzi?

19. On page 196, Kid describes how Ari’s eyes are dull but her teeth are bright. Write about your reaction to this sentence.

20. Kid becomes worried, on page 212, about the ‘cynical backstory’ to the clothes she is given. Read about the concept of clothing ‘sweatshops’. Does it bother you to think about the history of your clothes, for example if they were made in sweatshops? Why or why not?

21. On page 235, Mrs Bond says that turning children into consumers is giving them power. Do you think this is real power? Make a list of ways children could actually be given power in a meaningful way.

22. The Game has a Wikipedia-like web encyclopaedia called ‘The Archive’. Make an Archive entry for one of the characters in The Unidentified.

23. On page 279, Cayenne says, ‘I don’t want to believe it’s impossible to do something real’. Write about your reaction to this sentence. Do you think it’s impossible to do anything real in today’s society?

24. Ari is presented as something of a villain in this story. Try and think about some positives to her character, or reasons why she behaves the way she does.

25. Write a journal entry about a time when you have been disappointed in a friend, or realised that a friendship was over.

26. How would you characterise Kid’s relationship with her mother? Do you think it’s realistic? Make a list of descriptive words that apply to their relationship.

27. Often, in life, it can take a shocking event to make you realise who you are, what you stand for, and what’s important to you. Is this true in your life? Write about the event that changed your perception of yourself and your beliefs.

28. Music is very important in Kid’s life. Make a list of contemporary songs that you think Kid would like, and list your reasons why.

29. The Unidentified presents an alternative view of the future. What are some other books you have read, or movies you have watched, that do something similar? Which movie or book do you think presents most believable representation?

30. Write about your reaction to the ending of the book. Do you think it tied up the events and storylines of the book in an effective manner? Was there any character or storyline you would have liked to be examined in more depth?

Creative Writing Activities

1. Rewrite a crucial scene in the book from the point of view of another major character, for example Mikey or Ari.

2. Create a ‘Game’ profile page for one of the characters in the book.

3. Write some lyrics to accompany one of Kid’s songs.

4. Write a letter from Ari to Kid explaining why she acted the way she did.
5. Write an alternative ending to the novel—one where either the corporations or The Unidentified triumph.

6. Each of the characters in the story has a passion. For Ari it is fashion, for Mikey it’s robots, and for Kid it’s music. Write a piece from the point of view of one of the characters talking about their passion.

7. The Unidentified presents a vision of the future—one where paper does not exist and most communication is carried out via technology. Elaborate on this view of the future. Write a list of things you think might have changed in the not-too-distant future.

8. In the book, the characters think The Unidentified are ‘selling’ suicide. Write a script for an advertisement selling something ‘unsellable’, like poverty, dog poo, used band aids or belly button fluff! Be creative.

9. Write an Instant Message conversation between two of the characters on the night that Mikey is attacked.

10. Write an event invitation to a protest against (or for) something you feel strongly about.

Research Questions

1. Research the history of a famous social networking site like Facebook or Twitter. Write a short synopsis on their creation and history

2. Research privacy settings on Facebook, Twitter or Myspace. Compare and contrast them.

3. Do some research about instances where people’s actions on the internet have got them into trouble.

4. Research corporate sponsorship of a particular sporting star, team, or league—for example the NRL or AFL.

5. Research celebrity endorsements. Pick one brand or celebrity to research in depth.

6. Using at least two forms of media, look at the way the media tackles cyber crime, cyber bullying, or ‘hacking’.

7. Research laws regarding advertising to young people and teenagers.

8. Research laws regarding video game violence in Australia.

9. Using at least two different forms of media, look at the ways in which the media represents video game violence.

10. Discuss the meaning of the word ‘theme’. What are some of the themes of The Unidentified? Research one of these themes in depth.

11. Do some research into famous endings of books or movies. Write about one famous ending that has been controversial.

Drama Activities

- Choose one character—apart from Kid—and write a monologue from their perspective. Be creative with the use of props and costume.
- Make an ad for one of the products in the book.
- Act out one of Kid’s songs, using different ambient noises to create music.
- Write and perform a duologue between Kid and Mikey, set after the book and discussing The Unidentified’s next move.
- Appoint someone as a journalist to interview any one of the main characters after Kid’s stunt.