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The Windup Girl



Synopsis

Anderson Lake is a company man, AgriGen's Calorie Man in Thailand. Undercover as a factory manager, Anderson combs Bangkok's street markets in search of foodstuffs thought to be extinct, hoping to reap the bounty of history's lost calories. There, he encounters Emiko. Emiko is the Windup Girl, a strange and beautiful creature. One of the New People, Emiko is not human; she is an engineered being, crèche-grown and programmed to satisfy the decadent whims of a Kyoto businessman, but now abandoned to the streets of Bangkok. Regarded as soulless beings by some, devils by others, New People are slaves, soldiers, and toys of the rich in a chilling near future in which calorie companies rule the world, the oil age has passed, and the side effects of bio-engineered plagues run rampant across the globe. What happens when calories become currency? What happens when bio-terrorism becomes a tool for corporate profits, when said bio-terrorism's genetic drift forces mankind to the cusp of post-human evolution? Award-winning author Paolo Bacigalupi delivers one of the most highly acclaimed science fiction novels of the twenty-first century. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Thai generip terror.It Bacigalupi ever writes anything that is sweetness and light, that right there would be likely proof of the Many Worlds Theory and the fact that you had slipped into an alternate universe.The setting is Bangkok, or, colloquially, Krung Thep. It is also a near future dystopia. The city now houses many displaced Chinese refugees from a Malaysia turned fundamentalist muslim

fanatics. (See his story Yellow Card Man for background) Bangkok itself is only kept from drowning by engineering and technology. This is a post-oil world, with very little petroleum technology available, remaining. No evidence of solar tech, either, really. Power is provided by human labor and genetically engineered highly efficient animals pouring kinetic energy into springs, which then can be used to power machines. Treadle computers, even. Countries have shrunk in upon themselves as a result, but are beginning to look outward again, with ships, and dirigibles. This makes this setting rather unlike the mass-media or AI ridden future India and Brasil etc. of Ian McDonald's devising. Particularly nasty are the 'calorie companies' - organisations that have the ability to manufacture crops in large supply: but their crops are sterile, so you always need to go back for more. That is if bugs and plagues 'weevils' and 'blister rust' do not get them. Much dirty, violent dealing in support of this activity (see his story The Calorie Man) and there are mentions of it going horribly wrong in other countries. One of the questions this raises is how they manage to stay around - why, with such hatred of them, are the calorie men and women not mercilessly hunted and slaughtered. The only intimations you get of this are economic power, based in the USA.

Paolo Bacigalupi was an unfamiliar name to me, but this novel received frothing praise and an unusually good cover, so I gifted it to my dad knowing I'd eventually get a crack at reading it (books are good like that). This is a debut novel, and a quick glance at Bacigalupi's previous work reveals a volume of short stories that includes titles like Pump Six, Yellow Card Man and The Calorie Man. He has been crafting this world for a while now, the culmination of which is The Windup Girl. It's a cynical but splendidly imagined projection of the near future: fossil fuels are rare and exorbitantly expensive; global warming has raised sea level and weather patterns are volatile; misadventures in bioengineering have ravaged the world with plagues of viruses, bacteria, fungus and insects; corporate interests gain power as regional governments succumb to revolt. This apocalyptic Thailand is plausible but miserable. You will not gasp at the majesty of steampunk invention here - you will likely gag. Windup's Bangkok is full of feral cats, religious and political fanatics, refugees and opportunistic businessmen. The resident crime boss is named the Dung Lord, and he vies for power along with Trade Minister Akkarat and General Pracha, the victor of a military junta at the narrative's outset. The cast of characters are all hard-bitten, all nursing personal grievances, all hopelessly driven to do what they end up doing. Anderson Lake (a great name for this anti-hero, but they're all good) is an American agribusinessman sent to Thailand with the objective of gaining access to the Kingdom's jealously-guarded seed stock. While pursuing this goal, he becomes entangled with Emiko, the genetically-engineered courtesan of the novel's title.

I was very excited to read this book and had heard wonderful things about it. It was a creative book but hard to get through. I listened to this on audio book which probably didn't help any; the audio book was very deliberately read making the story move even slower. I ended up stopping listening to this book about 2/3rds of the way through; it was just too tedious. The story goes between four main characters. The first is a genetic scientist, a calorie man, named Anderson who is scouring the city to find its mysterious Seed Bank; he is masquerading as a plant owner. The second is Tan Hock Seng an aging Chinese Yellow Card who is trying to make a life for himself and gain back his former glory. The third is a wind up girl named Emiko who has been forced to work in a brothel after being sold to it by her Japanese master. The fourth is Jaidee, an officer of the Environmental Ministry and a revolutionist, who is determined to take back Thailand from the foreigners. In this depressing version of Thailand, a land where calories are the greatest commodity, these four characters will eventually influence not only each other but the fate of the whole country. First I will say there are some good things about this book. The ideas present in the book are fabulous. The idea of calories being more important than anything after viruses have wiped out most vegetation is unique and compelling. The story is told with wonderful description; such that, as a reader, you can almost feel the heat and smell the smells of the city. Those were the things that kept me reading this book as long as I did. Now for the rest of the things.

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