



Dreadnought

April Daniels

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Danny Tozer has a problem: she just inherited the powers of Dreadnought, the world's greatest superhero.

Until Dreadnought fell out of the sky and died right in front of her, Danny was trying to keep people from finding out she's transgender. But before he expired, Dreadnought passed his mantle to her, and those secondhand superpowers transformed Danny's body into what she's always thought it should be. Now there's no hiding that she's a girl.

It should be the happiest time of her life, but Danny's first weeks finally living in a body that fits her are more difficult and complicated than she could have imagined. Between her father's dangerous obsession with "curing" her girlhood, her best friend suddenly acting like he's entitled to date her, and her fellow superheroes arguing over her place in their ranks, Danny feels like she's in over her head.

She doesn't have much time to adjust. Dreadnought's murderer—a cyborg named Utopia—still haunts the streets of New Port City, threatening destruction. If Danny can't sort through the confusion of coming out, master her powers, and stop Utopia in time, humanity faces extinction.

Dreadnought Details

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Author : April Daniels

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From Reader Review Dreadnought for online ebook

Sara► Ink Is My Sword says

I can't finish this book right now, I am not enjoying it. Not because is bad, but because I am not in a sci-fi/fantasy mood at all.

?Pre-reading thoughts:

Trans Superheroine... I AM IN.??

Lindsay says

A YA superhero story with a transgender heroine that has a lot of depth.

Danny Tozer is a transgender 15-year old who is living life as a boy because her family is anything but supportive of her. Then she suddenly inherits the mantle of Dreadnought which remakes her physical form into her ideal body, that of a girl. But she's still Danny, still has an abusive family and has to deal with the whole spectrum of reactions to transgender people. She also has to come to terms with having superpowers and whether she even wants to be a hero or not as well as whether she even considers herself worthy to be one.

This is fantastic. Danny is a compelling character who is very easy to root for, partly because she's such an underdog, but also because her motivations for being a hero are so great. Her friendship with Calamity, another great character, is good but also serves to contrast their motivations and methods.

Additionally the super-villain behind it all, although clearly insane, also has a very interesting motivation which I'm sure we'll see more of in upcoming books. I hope there's many more in the series.

Ashley says

Danny Tozer has always known she should have been born a girl, and we know this on the first page. The first scene of this book features her hiding in an alley, dressed otherwise like a male, and painting her toenails; this is the only outlet she has as a closeted trans fifteen year old in an emotionally abusive household (her dad is a colossal asshole). But everything changes when her toenail painting session is interrupted by a superhero/supervillain fight. Dreadnought, one of the most powerful superheroes, is shot and killed in front of her by the villainous Utopia, but before he dies, he passes his mantle to Danny. And along with an array of numerous cool superpowers (super strength, flight, nearly impervious skin, super healing, etc.), the mantle also comes with a nifty side bonus: it grants its bearer with their ideal form. And for Danny, that means it turns her biologically female. This comes, understandably, as a surprise, but not an unpleasant one. In fact, Danny is ecstatic. The problem is how everyone else is going to react. Not only does she now have to deal with the consequences of her transition, but also with her new burden as a powerful superhero.

This book worked for me, overall. The craft of it wasn't perfect (in fact, in places it was pretty awkward because: first book), the villains were also a *tad* too villainous, and Danny's sidekick (or rather, Danny is *her* sidekick) Calamity annoyed me while she was in her superhero persona. That may just be my personal hang-up, though. I loathe fake old western accents and verbiage. I much preferred her as Sarah, Danny's first friend after her transition. But for the most part, this book tackles the shades of grey and nuance of Danny's situation admirably. The Dreadnought concept is well thought out, as is the superhero worldbuilding of her universe (it's very detailed, and several things felt unique to this story). The book focuses as much on how becoming a biological female has affected her life as much as becoming a superhero, and how one informs the other. The superhero concept works as a nice metaphor on the heightened experiences real trans people go through.

I mentioned the villains, and I'm actually including her dad in that, although this could be a me-issue as well (this is an own voices novel, written by trans woman). He seemed a little too on the bad side, although I say this as someone who did not experience that kind of abuse growing up. I can only speak as to the way he was presented in the story, and to me, he seemed a tad over the top and inhuman. I also say that alongside the contradictory statement that I loved Danny's inner conflict in responding to him and the terrible environment she was raised in. I don't know, I guess I wish he was just a bit less inhuman acting. Maybe just a couple of small moments showing him as a person, to contrast with those moments when he loses it, or Danny remembering some sort of good moment with him in her past. Even something as small as that would have helped. It's not that I think those moments were necessarily unbelievable, just that they were all we saw, and thus he was more of one-dimensional character than anything.

Aside from Danny's father, I thought Daniels did a great job with the reactions of the other characters to Danny's transition (both gender and superhero), from her best friend turning out to be a Nice Guy Creep, to her classmates, her teachers, her mother (who waffles back and forth), and even some members of the superhero team she gets an invite to, having inherited Dreadnought's powers. Daniels really does a nice job contrasting Danny's inner and outer power with the reactions of those around her, who keep insisting on defining her for themselves. The heightened reality of Danny literally becoming female worked to highlight the underlying assumptions and social structures surrounding Danny that work against her and the identity she is trying to discover for herself.

There is a sequel to this book due out later this summer, and I will definitely be checking it out, although I'm a bit nervous. My least favorite bits of this were actually the superhero plot things, and the most was the newness of her transition, which will necessarily fade. So I'm not sure how interesting I will find the sequel, if the gender issues aren't equally present.

Read Harder Challenge 2017: A YA or middle grade novel by an author who identifies as LGBTQ+.

Elise (TheBookishActress) says

Dreadnought is a ton of fun. This book follows Danny, a trans girl who gets the body she's always wanted after famous superhero Dreadnought passes his powers on to her.

There's a good balance here between a fairly dark coming-of-age story and a fun, heartwarming superhero story. **This is a superhero novel for those who don't get to be a part of superhero novels.**

I seriously loved the characters here. Danny is just amazing. She's so angry that if written with less skill, she

would come off whiny, but here her abrupt anger is consistent, and comes off as a genuine character trait rather than a plot convenience. April Daniels develops Danny's motivations for becoming a superhero so well. **I love that she's not good just for the purpose of being good.**

Danny's dynamics with Doc Impossible and Calamity stand out as well. Calamity is fairly compelling all on her own. **The relationship building between her and Danny is great.** I'm rooting for them to get together officially in book two, and a scene towards the end of the book gave me some serious hope.

Possibly my least favorite parts of the book are Danny's conversations with villains. The villains of this book, Utopia and Graywyth, come off **fairly comical**. I get it; it's a superhero story and they're villains. But I wanted *more*. Utopia is actually given motivation, but her solution to the problem is still so unbelievable and she's too obviously meant to be the villain, not a morally ambiguous character. It's wasted potential. Graywyth... huh. I have fairly mixed opinions on her being in this book. She's clearly meant to be a serious demon for Danny, but while her opinions on trans people are sadly realistic, she's just so freaking comical. I honestly kind of wish she was left out. We already have Danny's father's transphobia, but his character feels far more realistic and villainous. Graywyth just seems like a plot device.

The plot in general hits on every trope of a typical superhero novel, but executes all of them very well. **While the twists are fairly easy to guess, the character dynamics and Danny's character make the story compelling anyway.** April Daniels also has a talent for compelling action scenes; out of around five, there was only one that even somewhat confused me, and it was entirely my fault for being overtired. The worldbuilding could've been fleshed out a bit more, but it was seriously cool.

This book is short enough that it never stops being fun, and I'm so happy to have read it.

div17: romance w trans mc (we all know Calamity and Danny are dating. c'mon)
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Pre-Read

4/19/17

Someone I work with got me a signed copy of this (after I'd already bought myself a copy!), and I honestly have never been happier. Thanks, April Daniels!

Rick Riordan says

April Daniels' superhero story really packs a wallop! Fifteen-year-old Danny Tozer has always known that she is a girl, even though she was designated male at birth. Then one day, by being in the wrong place at the right time, she inherits the powers of the world's greatest superhero: Dreadnought. At the same time, she gets her greatest wish: a female body that matches her identity. But which challenge will be tougher: taking on the job of superhero, or finding acceptance from her friends and family who are suddenly confronted with her true, female self?

In Danny's home of New Port (an alternate Seattle) metahumans are everywhere, dividing themselves into white capes, gray capes, and black capes, but that doesn't always mean you can tell the heroes from the villains. Does Danny step into the shoes of the great Dreadnought and become a white cape, or does her

destiny lie elsewhere?

As she tries to master her powers and explain to her friends and her parents how and why she has suddenly become the female she always knew she was inside, Danny gets pulled in many different directions by those who wish to influence her decisions. The white capes in their gleaming downtown tower offer unlimited resources and government support, but some seem reluctant to accept a transgender Dreadnought.

The gray cape Calamity tries to teach Danny that crime-solving isn't always a matter of black and white, but are her methods too violent and gray for Danny? And lurking in the background is the shadowy figure of a new super-villain, a black cape that somehow managed to kill the last Dreadnought, leading Danny to inherit his powers. Danny has to find this villain and discover how she managed to kill the supposedly invincible Dreadnought, so Danny won't be next on the hitlist.

This is a page-turning adventure that also explores identity and acceptance in a poignant, lovely way. Danny's struggles ring true on every level, and any teen will relate. Fortunately, Dreadnought is the first of a series. I'm dying to read the rest!

I found this book thanks to the website Queer Books for Teens: <http://queerbooksforteens.com/>

Romie says

It's definitely a really important book.

When you're a kid, who do you look up to ? A superhero. You need to find yourself in a superhero, you need to think 'That could be me.' Kids need a transgender superhero.

Danny is a transgender girl, she's fifteen, and one day she sees the Superhero Dreadnought being killed. Following this death, she receives the mantle, making her the new Dreadnought and giving her her ideal body. And her ideal body matches her real gender : she's not a boy, she's never been one, she's a girl. The first problem she has to deal with is her parents ... her dad is abusive, he makes her feel like she's worthless, like she'll never be good enough, he keeps calling her 'son', 'young man', 'freak', 'faggot', and saying she's a liar, that he's ashamed of her ... and that's the thing when you're dealing with an abusive paternal figure : your start believing what he's saying. So Danny believes she's pathetic, the worst person ever to walk this earth ... but she's not. Her mom, for one second, made her feel like maybe she was ready to accept the fact that she never really had a son, until she called Danny 'selfish' because she wanted to stay the way she is now. And that's fucked up. Transitioning is YOUR choice. It's always your choice.

Then she has to deal with the Legion, this superhero organization. They want her to be Dreadnought, they don't want her to go live a normal life, some even say that if she's not working with them, then she has to give the mantle back, which also means having back a man body, and that's not happening any time soon. Some of them welcome her, some want to use her, and some are transphobic homophobic assholes - I'm looking at you Graywythch you bitch.

That's when she meets Calamity - well technically she met her when she got the mantle, but I'm going to talk about the moment they started hanging out. Calamity is a greycap, she's not good, she's not bad, she just does what she believes is right without caring about the Law. And if there is one thing she wants, it's to capture Utopia, the super villain who killed the former Dreadnought. And she needs Dany's help. I loved

their friendship - and maybe more in the next book, please - because Calamity accepts Danny just the way she is, but she makes her see nothing is totally black or white.

I also really liked Doc Impossible, because she gave Danny great advices, like when Danny told her she didn't feel like a real woman because she would never be able to be pregnant, or because her chromosomes aren't XX. Things like that don't make a woman.

"You think it's a uterus that makes a woman? Bullshit. You feel like you're a girl, you live it, it's part of you? Then you're a girl. That's the end of it, no quibbling. You're as real a girl as anyone."

In this book Danny realizes that she has to rethink the way she sees the world : what makes a woman? why some men think they can do absolutely anything? what does it mean to be brave?

I'm really excited to read the next book, because I truly think Danny can impress me.

"I'm transgender, and a lesbian, and I'm not ashamed of that."

3.75

Justine says

So, so good! This book is, in one sense, wish fulfillment of the highest order - when Danny inherits Dreadnought's superpowers, it allows her to physically transition into the girl she has always kept hidden on the inside. But Danielle very quickly learns that transition, even when accompanied by superpowers, does not magically heal the damage to her self esteem resulting from the years of emotional and physical abuse she has suffered. And guess what? There is prejudice and misunderstanding even among the world of superheroes - it isn't just reserved for the obvious villains.

I loved Danielle's journey to come to terms with her identity both as a girl and as a superhero, and her discovery that true empowerment has to come from inside. This is a great series starter with so much potential, and I'm very much looking forward to the next part of Danielle's story.

UPDATE: After thinking about it for a few days, I updated my rating to a full 5 stars. I don't change my ratings very often, but this book was so good on so many levels:)

? jamieson ? says

"I see a world that is terrified of me. Terrified of someone who would reject manhood. Terrified of a girl who knows who she is and what she's capable of. They are small, and they are weak, and they will not hurt me ever again. My name is Danielle Tozer. I am a girl. No one is strong enough to take that from me anymore."

I **cannot** and **will not** shut up about how great this book is y'all!

trigger warnings for: transphobia, homophobia and trans/homophobic slurs

Dreadnought is a superhero story following Danielle Tozer, a transgirl who is given superpowers and her perfect body by the superhero Dreadnought. Danielle must discover her place among the cities existing superheroes, deal with the consequences of her transition - especially from her transphobic family and friends.

I soon as I heard about this ownvoices trans superhero story I wanted to read it. I was so interested in seeing a transwoman and lesbian girl as the protagonist, and to have a unique take on the superhero genre. This story has *heaps* of elements I can personally get behind. A diverse narrator, a heroes quest, a big supervillain, SUPERHEROES, f/f relationships and mad science.

For me, the highlight of Dreadnought was Danny as the main character. Her voice came through so strongly and she definitely had a massive presence in this book. I liked she was definitely a grey character, and that she had flaws and issues just like the rest of us to work through. Danny goes through all this incredible character development, accepting herself and her position in the world, as well as her new powers as Dreadnought and stands up for herself and for the world so strongly and I **admire the heck out of her**. Some people say she was *too angry* and I don't understand that for one second, she came from an incredibly tough place, and deals with a sickening amount of transphobia from all sides, and still she does the best thing she can in each situation.

The side characters were also well written. Calamity was a fun character, and also a black lesbian which I loved! Doc Impossible was a super interesting character who added a nice sympathetic touch to the cast, and I loved her relationship with Danny. I wish the other main superheroes had been more fleshed out, but I am hoping they have a greater presence in book 2.

This book does contain an incredible amount of homophobia and transphobia, and it can be very hard to get through at times. But I think the important thing is that Danny challenged each thing said against her as a transwoman, and also has support from other characters.

“You think it’s a uterus that makes a woman? Bullshit. You feel like you’re a girl, you live it, it’s part of you? Then you’re a girl. That’s the end of it, no quibbling. You’re as real a girl as anyone.”

My one issue with this book was writing based. I thought some of the worldbuilding was a little lacking and the book didn't seem quite as action-filled or suspenseful as it should have. Although it was only a short book, it took longer to get through than I thought. Some parts were brilliantly written and I enjoyed the scene as it played out, but some felt a little *.. off*, like the suspense that should have been there wasn't. However, this was completely balanced out by the great character interactions and character growth so the writing definitely did not write off the book as a whole.

Overall, Dreadnought is a fresh take on the superhero genre, featuring an incredible strong transwoman as the main character. The character growth Danny goes through is delightful, and the side characters really

fleshed out this world. I'm really hoping for more growth in the relationship between Danny and Calamity in the sequel, and for some of the other superheroes to be more fleshed out and present.

Emily May says

"Genetics aren't destiny."

In a world where the skies are filled with superheroes and supervillains, 15-year-old Danny's dreams come true when the famous Dreadnought perishes in her arms and passes his powers on to her - powers that include super-strength, flight, and an outer body that matches the girl Danny's always been inside.

And, well... I loved it! **Danny is going to steal the hearts of so many readers.** This is such a beautiful ownvoices work and it shows from the very first chapter when we meet Danny sneakily buying nail polish. She tells us:

*Painting my toes is the one way I can take control. The one way I can fight back. The one way I can give voice to this idea inside me that gets heavier every year:
I'm not supposed to be a boy.*

The author gets the balance absolutely perfect between light, quirky superhero novel, and a darker, thought-provoking, coming-of-age story. The flying, world-saving and GIRL POWER make this a **wonderful, heart-warming read.** The other members of the former Dreadnought's group - "Legion Pacifica" - think Danny is too young to take on the villains and save the world, but that just gets added to the long list of mistakes people make about her.

However, as noted above, there are some darker aspects of Dreadnought. The author doesn't shy away from portraying the reality of transphobia and how difficult it is to grow up with a father who wants to make you a "real man". Many trans slurs are thrown around, and Graywyth (another of the Legion Pacifica members) deliberately misgenders Danny.

Additionally, Danny must now deal with the lingering eyes of certain men and boys, other forms of sexism, and the assumption that she now wants to start dating the boys at her school - which is incorrect because Danny is, in fact, gay. It's fantastic to see, despite all of this, that Danny comes out on top again and again. She's allowed to be weak and scared and unsure, but in the end, she knows who she is and who she's always been. She calls out the boys on their sexism:

"I don't like boys, any boys. If I did like boys, I wouldn't like boys who talk to me like you just did."

Though a superhero story, Dreadnought is first and foremost about its characters. Its *women*, I should say. A diverse array of women drive the novel - from the white, gay and trans Danny, to the Latina Calamity, to Doc Impossible who is coded as non-white (*Her dark hair is pulled back in a braid*) to Utopia who is - wait

for it - a **cyborg** villain.

The character dynamics - particularly between Danny and Calamity - shine throughout. Reading this the weekend of the Women's March made me feel quite emotional. This message of female solidarity is so important; and add to it a much-needed, complex, trans superheroine and you have one hell of a powerful book. I can't wait for more.

They want me to cooperate in my own destruction. They want me to tell them it's not true. They want me to help them believe the lie.
Never again.

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Allison Hurd says

[Homophobic and transphobic comments. Casual racism. Body horror. Verbal abuse. (hide spoiler)]

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/01/23/...>

This year, if you're involved in one or more of the many diversity reading challenges out there or simply encouraging yourself to check out more diverse reads, I hope you'll consider Dreadnought. Books like this one have a relevant place in our world today for their role in celebrating LGBT voices and spreading awareness, and I think what excited me most was the depth of our protagonist and the way her story was told.

Fifteen Danny Tozer has always known in her mind and in her heart that she is a girl, even if her body says otherwise. The crushing anxiety of trying to keep people from finding out she's transgender has been building lately, which is why at the start of this book, she finds herself hiding behind the mall secretly painting her toenails—holding onto this one thing she can control. That's when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, the world's greatest superhero known as Dreadnought literally falls out of the sky and lands right in front of her. Gravely injured by a supervillain named Utopia, Dreadnought knows his time is near, so with his dying breath he passes his powers on to Danny.

In that moment, Danny is changed. Becoming the new Dreadnought has not only granted the amazing superpowers that come with the role, but it has also transformed her body into what she's always thought it should be, the girl she has always been inside. For Danny, this is the greatest thing that's ever happened to her, though that happiness is quickly dampened when faced with the hostile reactions of her overbearing father who refuses to accept her new identity. At school, her best friend David is also suddenly treating her differently, saying and doing these awful things. Furthermore, Danny has realized that the mantle of Dreadnought comes with certain responsibilities—like saving the world. Sure enough, it's not long before the superhero team Legion comes knocking at her door trying to recruit her, and the offer has Danny feeling torn. She knows she wants to help people, but she's just not sure she wants to be the kind of hero the Legion wants her to be.

At its heart, Dreadnought is a superhero novel—it's fun, fast-paced, and action-packed. But as you can see, there's also a lot more to the story, and the conflicts here are complex and multi-faceted. I liked how this book incorporated the superhero elements while at the same time using Danny's super-powered transformation and the accompanying acquisition of Dreadnought's abilities as an allegory for a person coming out as transgender. April Daniels has done a fantastic job exploring Danny's story, especially in detailing her internal struggles, her hopes and joys, fears and doubts. I can't even pretend to understand how it feels for teens in that situation, but reading about Danny was definitely an emotional journey. Her character is well-written, deeply developed and very real.

Plot-wise, Dreadnought is an entertaining read. Momentum took some time to build, but when Danny meets the Legion, I think that was when the story really hit its stride. I loved Doc Impossible, and the banter between her and Danny during their first major scene together quickly made her one of my favorite side characters. Another thing I loved about this book was the female friendship. While Danny considers Legion's offer to join up, she meets up with another "greycap" hero named Calamity (and I have a serious weakness for cowgirl-themed heroes) and the two of them take it upon themselves to help those who slip through the cracks of the Legion's watch. They have a great dynamic together, and the excitement ramps up as the duo decide they have what it takes to take down Utopia themselves.

But for all its strengths, the story also has its weaknesses. There were parts of it that felt a little too clichéd or unconvincing. For example, other than Danny and maybe a couple other characters, no one else was all that fleshed out, and they were treated more like props than real people. Take the Legion—we hear about all their great deeds and how they're the most powerful superhero team in the world, but of course at the moment of truth they are rendered useless so that our protagonist can conveniently step up to save the day. Portrayal of characters like David, Graywyth, or Danny's parents are also extreme to the point where they sometimes felt like caricatures of caricatures. While people like that certainly exist, the way they were written in this book felt scripted and done for the sake of pushing the story along. The author also did more telling than showing, with rocky prose in places and pages of info-dumping being a frequent issue early on in the novel. Finally, world-building felt sparse and glossed over, and throughout the book I couldn't help but experience this disconnect to the wider world beyond.

All told though, I enjoyed Dreadnought a lot. It's an eye-opening book featuring a wonderfully developed and genuine protagonist. This is the origin story about how she became the eponymous superhero, and it is an unforgettable journey of action and emotion. What a promising start, with much potential for the rest of the Nemesis series!

Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says

I loved so much about this story, so I'll try to be both brief and coherent. No promises, though. And just before we get started I want to emphasize that this is an ownvoices book - which is something that I think comes through in Danny's character. Just want to make sure as many people know that as possible. Ok, onto the review!

Danny is such a fresh and fantastic voice. Trans, lesbian, and a superhero, and I think every one of those identifiers is handled equally, while it is also clear that these are not her only attributes. She is powerful and weak, brave and utterly terrified. And I loved her for it all.

This book also did such an excellent job of balancing the types of people that Danny encounters after she

gets the body she wants - not to mention an incredible set of superpowers. She has people who are fiercely in her corner and are utterly accepting of her. These characters intentionally reach out in any way they can to help Danny to feel comfortable. They make sure she has the clothes she wants, or offer her support when she can't find it elsewhere. But Danny also has a fair amount of more terrible people to deal with. And when I say terrible people, I'm not talking about the full-on supervillain.

Danny is (sadly) not free from transphobia once she transitions. She has spent a lot of her life being hyper-masculinized by her emotionally abusive father, and I want to make sure I offer the warning that he throws a lot of slurs Danny's way throughout the book. Not only that, but she also has to deal with frequent misgendering by a trans-exclusionary feminist. To me, she came across as occasionally more villainous than the villain of the book does. She was vile. Feminism that doesn't include trans women is pointless and deeply horrifying, and the TERF character in this story disgusted me. Which is exactly what she was supposed to do.

And!!! The side characters are also super diverse. There are multiple side characters of color, one of whom is latinx and who I adore. There are also multiple side queer characters. I'm hoping for possibly more side queer characters going into the next book that have a more central role in Danny's life, but ultimately I loved the collection of characters we got in this book so I am still super pleased.

The worldbuilding was fantastic. I loved the chapters we get when characters talk about superhero tech, as that is one of my favorite elements of superhero stories. There was also (and this is such a small scene I feel silly for mentioning it except that it was hysterical) this fantastic section that was CLEARLY calling out Batman and his completely ridiculous eccentricities. This scene happens at the beginning of the book and I think it sets the tone for how a lot of the superhero stuff is handled. This story isn't silly, but it does embrace some of the ridiculousness that comes inherently with people who have super powers and wear costumes to fight crime.

Overall, I loved so much about this book. It was fast-paced, well-balanced, and Danny was a force of nature as a main character. I cannot wait to see how she develops moving forward into the next book in the series, and how the world around her shifts as well.

Remember when I said I would be brief? Oops.

Ok so tl;dr... this book was fantastic and I highly encourage you to pick it up. Plus keep a lookout for the sequel because it comes out in just six months and I will 100% be getting my hands on it as soon as I can.

Silvana [The Book Voyagers] says

Dreadnought is an #ownvoices superhero YA book. The MC is a lesbian trans girl and she suddenly gets powers when Dreadnought dies in front of her. She immerses into this superhero world where she finds allies and enemies. It reminded me of Boku no Hero Academia for obvious reasons though also the superhero names + One Punch Man with some type of heroes and how they looked.

I'm giving it 3 stars mainly because a character I just couldn't swallow + phrases + some things that happened at the end. But overall, this book was epic and fun to read (the ACTION SCENES ARE SO GOOD GUYS, please make this a movie) ~ plus girl friendship though I ship them 1000% I NEED A BOOK TWO I NEED MORE ADVENTURES please!!

Maggie Gordon says

Writing this review hurts me. I was extremely excited about *Dreadnought* as North American literature desperately needs more diversity and trans superhero narratives are quite rare. Unfortunately, it's just not a very good book. Do I think that people should buy and read *Dreadnought* anyways? There are so few books with trans protagonists that I can't in good faith say to avoid the book entirely. On the other hand, given the sheer number of positive reviews out there, I do think that it's important to address some of the problematic aspects of the story.

Dreadnought is the story of Danny, a young teen who doesn't feel like the boy everyone presumes she is. She buys nail polish and paints her toes in secret as a way trying to quiet these feelings, but is interrupted one day when Dreadnought, greatest hero of them all, is killed in front of him by the super villain Utopia. As he dies, Dreadnought passes on his powers on to Danny who finds herself suddenly transformed. Danny is finally herself, but also a superhero with some of the greatest powers that the world has ever seen. However, Danny's life is not made magically perfect. Her family is abusive, her friends abandon her, and she's trying to learn to deal with her powers mostly on her own with only the guidance of another teen hero named Calamity. As Utopia continues to work towards the fulfillment of her evil plans, Danny has to figure out her place in the world and whether she's ready to step up as the new Dreadnought!

The Good

Danny is a unique and needed protagonist. It's not often that trans people get to take center stage in literature, and it's wonderful to see such a positive, optimistic trans girl get to be a superhero. Sure, Danny has a lot of problems in her life. She's an abuse victim and that has real effects on her personality and self-esteem. The narrative doesn't shy away from the terrible things that trans people face in their daily lives, but Danny is a survivor and she never gives up. She is a super hero, through and through.

The Bad

Dreadnought feels very much like a first novel that didn't get a lot of attention from a professional editor. It's got heart, but there are storytelling basics that are terribly handled, resulting in a bit of a frustrating read.

For example, the characters are flat. So very very flat. Take Danny, our protagonist. We should know a lot about her, yet her life is a giant question mark other than she used to play football. For a character that we spend so much time with, watch deal with horrific abuse, we don't really get to see anything else. I want Danny to be more than tragedy and superpowers.

Problematically, none of the other characters are developed that much either. The Legion can be summed up with statements like "that man who is a plant and wants to remain financially solvent", "the guy who looks like that Fantastic Four dude", and "Lady Thor". We just don't know much about any of the superheroes save for Dr. Impossible, and she only starts to get interesting in the last 20 pages of the book! Calamity gets more development, but she is primarily a vigilante, angry at the world because of unfairness. She has fancy guns and a big motorcycle, and we don't know much about her aside from the end of book revelations about her family.

I could contend with flat characters if they were just boring, but a few don't make any sense. Danny has a long-term friend, David. On the first day that he sees his friend after her transformation, he is enamored with her breasts. He is not, as one might expect, freaked out by how his friend dramatically physically changed overnight. No, because she's hot, he spends a lot of time looking at her chest. On the second day, he asks her out with a rather horrid speech about how he is ready to settle and Danny is so hot that he can forget about the fact that she is actually a boy. When Danny rightfully rejects him, he storms off screaming slurs.

David isn't a character so much as he is a plot point. Daniels wanted to show readers the various ways in which trans people suffer, and David represents another type of betrayal. At one point, Danny questions her previous friendship with him, wondering how she didn't see how he was so terrible. Don't worry, Danny, it's just terrible character development confusing people. David was never your friend because he'd have to have been a person first. Could a character reasonably ever act like David? Sure! But it would take more than 48 hours.

The time scale of this book feels off. It's not that the terrible things that happen to Danny don't occur in real life, but they are so squished together to get the plot rolling that these important emotional moments feel contrived. All of these incidents start to feel throwaway rather than significant. They happen, we move on, and the lesson is that transphobia is terrible and pervasive. There is little time to unpack any of them so the barrage of abuse feels both pornographic and hyperbolic at the same time.

The plot is also pretty ho-hum which is unfortunate given the state of the characters. There are white capes who are not as good as they claim, and a super villain who is a narcissist that's trying to stop something terrible, but going about it in the wrong (evil) way. The powers that be don't see the trouble coming and the new whippersnapper has to take care of things on her own. It's a pretty standard superhero plot which isn't a bad thing. But if your characters are weak, your plot needs to carry the book. Even for teens, growing up in the age of superhero movies means that this book probably isn't offering anything new in terms of story other than Danny.

Relatedly, the science aspects of this book are lazy. In one scene, Danny has to stop a plane from crashing that should not have been crashing. She was flying in a cloud layer when a nearby jet sucks a goose into its engine causing it to explode. Right away we have some problems with altitudes and feasibility. It's not that a goose, clouds, and a jet could never be in the same air space, but it's not common for bird strikes to occur far beyond airports. Furthermore, while bird strikes often do cause engine failure, in *Dreadnought*, the large jet immediately begins to crash. *Shenanigans*. Jets are designed to cope with the loss of an engine, and jets are also designed to glide. One engine exploding would not have pitched the plane into a tail spin. It would have likely been fine even without Danny's help. I was immediately yanked out of the narrative by the fact that it didn't make sense. So fail on that scene.

Similarly, near the end of the book, Calamity and Dreadnought are sent to get some N2 or, as Calamity explains, non-Newtonian liquid. It's supposedly not easy to get so Calamity suggests that they steal some from a university. Or perhaps they could just go to a pharmacy as shampoo and toothpaste are both non-Newtonian liquids. So is custard. You can even mix cornstarch and water for the same effect. If you're going to have super amazing tech in your story, don't just throw in cool words because science vocabulary sounds awesome. Make sure it all actually works or is at least plausible. (Or write clearly because this also could have been solved by stating that N2 was a specific type of non-Newtonian fluid! That was not clear in the narrative. I teach writing and this is something I would hammer my students on. Say what you mean!)

The Ugly

Greywytych. Oh dear lord, Greywytych. Where do I even begin? Greywytych is a member of the Legion. The very first thing she does upon meeting Danielle is to emphasise that Danielle is Daniel. Shortly after, when Danny corrects the Legion on misgendering her, Greywytych states “You were raised to be a man. Your privilege blinds you, and makes you dangerous.” When Danny says that she’s just as much of a girl as Greywytych, the senior superhero responds, “Do you even know how to put in a tampon?”

All of these statements are extraordinarily transphobic. According to April Daniels, they are all based on various things that she’s seen people say/write. It shows because they feel exceptionally out of place in this conversation, and the character of Greywytych doesn’t feel like a character at all.

I don’t want to suggest that the Legion wouldn’t do/say transphobic things, but given the focus of the conversation, their concern seems to be that the most important hero with the best powers is now a 15 year old and they aren’t allowed to recruit kids anymore. Greywytych’s immediate nasty commentary to a teenager that the Legion knows has just undergone a massive shock starts to undermine my suspension of disbelief. Do I accept that someone could be that cruel? Sure, the internet exists. I see that level of horridness on a daily basis. Do I believe that such statements would be made so quickly upon meeting this young 15 year old teenager in the context of a business/recruitment meeting? Not really. A few of her colleagues suggest that Greywytych stop being such an asshole, but her EXTRAORDINARILY inappropriate comments are mostly tolerated. Once again, the time scale seems off. Were these characters to interact more, the insidious nature of transphobia could be highlighted. As it stands, the scene feels contrived and constructed to make a certain point. I want stories to be political, but I want stories to tell a good story as well. And the better you tell your story, the more effective your political point will be.

For example, Greywytych is never anything other than a transphobia mouthpiece. That is her entire role in the book. Be needlessly cruel to Danny based on the absolute worst examples of transphobic feminists that the author has dealt with. She never gets to be a character which means that her transphobia is less powerful. It is obvious that she represents a type of person that we’re supposed to despise. If Daniels instead chose to make us empathise with and see her as human? Suddenly the narrative becomes a lot more complex and nuanced. We have to deal with the fact that a person who does good things also does terrible things. What does that mean? How do we respond? Given the fact that Greywytych is nothing more than a political ideology, readers lose out on this important thought exploration.

Finally, my last issue with *Dreadnought*, and perhaps the one that bothers me the most, centers on what it says about “being a girl”. The way that Danny is denied the freedom to express herself in certain ways is heartbreaking. But the superhero aspect of this book ends up twisting this conversation into something that makes me uncomfortable. When Danny transforms at the start of the book, it is a magical (or at least hypertechnical) experience. Her body changes in ways that are generally unavailable in real life. This is pure wish fulfillment. On one hand, wish fulfillment is important and one of the many things that fiction can be good for! But in this case, the wish fulfillment ends up entrenching some extraordinarily problematic ideas of sex and gender for trans and cis women alike.

Danny’s transformation starts with an exploration of how she is small. More delicate. Her fingers taper. Her shoulders are narrower. Her shoes are boats. Oh, but her hips strain her jeans now. She has nice breasts. As the narrative tells us, she’s essentially a supermodel. There’s a moment where the book tries to be critical of this, but that’s quickly passed over to delight in this new experience of a “female” body. I am a cis gender lady. I have broad shoulders. I am tall. I am large. I have been harassed since I was a child for having a man’s body. Had I read this book when I was a teen, connecting girlhood to an idealised body would have hurt me deeply. I can only imagine that young trans readers would feel the same. There is no magic in the world that will change our bodies to our ideal form. Reading about Danny’s transformation gives you a

moment of beautiful imagination, then a horrible crash back to reality. It asks us to dwell on this amazing occurrence that we can never ever have.

Danny also mentions several times throughout the book that she's subject to more emotional highs and lows because of estrogen, and that her feelings have been unlocked now that she's a girl. This was the most offensive part of the book – the idea that being a woman means that you are more emotional. Women have been punished for this stereotype for centuries. We're hysterical, we're sensitive, and we're ruled by our feelings. I can totally understand Danny being affected by the sudden change in hormones because that really does cause bodily chaos for a bit. But women are not uniquely emotional beings, and men are not emotional robots in comparison. Ironically, radical feminists, the ones that Greywyth is meant to represent, have critiqued any gender theory that sees men and women on such a hurtful binary. Women aren't tiny creatures that hold ourselves in certain, dainty ways. Women aren't capable of feeling more than men. To suggest such things and not have the narrative provide a counter is something I can't tolerate from a book that aims to help those who feel marginalised. It teaches both trans and cis kids that there is one way to be a girl and that's unacceptable.

Conclusion

Am I being unfair to *Dreadnought* in that I expect it to be better simply because it offers a different perspective? I remain conflicted. I don't want to suggest that people banish the book off their shelves or protest libraries to get rid of it. I don't want to deprive trans youth of a rare book that speaks directly to them. But I also don't think that means that the book should escape worthy criticism. Without the trans narrative, it would not have been interesting enough for me to take notice of. It is not written particularly well, and it showcases some harmful perspectives that undermine the positivity that it could bring. For me, it was not that *Dreadnought* wasn't perfect, but that its flaws were quite deep, impacting and needed to be highlighted. After all, from a critical perspective, the conversations that we have when we fail are often the most valuable ones to have in order to grow. I will be reading the sequel, *Sovereign*, and I hope that the conversations in that book are more nuanced than they were in *Dreadnought*.

Inge says

You know when you're reading a book and you're trying to formulate some form of coherent thought so you can figure out what to write in your review? And you realise you've got ABSOLUTELY NOTHING?

Dreadnought is not that kind of book.

Dreadnought is the kind of book I would love to talk more about. It's by no means a perfect book, but it's an important one, especially in our time of day. The main character is transgender and queer, who just happens to stumble upon a crazy set of superpowers, and it's the coolest thing in the world. Except for when she turns into a physical girl, the girl she always wanted to be – the girl she's always *been* in her mind – and then *that* is the coolest thing in the world. I'm not quite sure which is cooler, but thankfully both things happened in the book so I don't have to choose.

Danny being transgender isn't the main part of the plot – the main plot is superheroes. But between all the Spandex and things that go boom, it still finds one of the most important transgender notions at heart: that genetics don't equal destiny. Here's Danny suddenly being able to deadlift trucks in her spare time, but she also has to deal with ignorant parents and losing her best friend. There were a lot of things that, I think, trans

girls could really relate to and find comfort in.

The superheroes are just icing on the cake, really. It's reminiscent of Marvel and *The Incredibles*.

Overall, I really enjoyed reading it. Danny was a really likeable main character (she's also very responsible – even when given superpowers, she still finds time to go to school); the writing was easy to read (even when my tired mind goes *droop* and doesn't register anything); and there was plenty of action. I mean, the story starts with the biggest superhero of all time dying right in front of Danny, so, you know, *that's* the kind of world we're living in.

The reason I'm not giving it a higher rating is because it felt lacking in other aspects. The thing about action-packed books is they tend to dull my mind after a while and leave me gasping for some more story. I also would have liked to see more of the other superheroes. They stayed kind of two-dimensional (with a few exceptions, like Calamity and Doctor Impossible) and didn't do anything for the story. Even in the final fight, Danny remained a one-man show, and I like to see protagonists needing help from friends and such. I like seeing that even all-powerful characters can't do everything alone.

Thank you NetGalley / Diversion Books for providing me with a copy
