



Level 2

Lenore Appelhans

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In this gripping exploration of a futuristic afterlife, a teen discovers that death is just the beginning.

Since her untimely death the day before her eighteenth birthday, Felicia Ward has been trapped in Level 2, a stark white afterlife located between our world and the next. Along with her fellow drones, Felicia passes the endless hours reliving memories of her time on Earth and mourning what she's lost—family, friends, and Neil, the boy she loved.

Then a girl in a neighboring chamber is found dead, and nobody but Felicia recalls that she existed in the first place. When Julian—a dangerously charming guy Felicia knew in life—comes to offer Felicia a way out, Felicia learns the truth: If she joins the rebellion to overthrow the Morati, the angel guardians of Level 2, she can be with Neil again.

Suspended between Heaven and Earth, Felicia finds herself at the center of an age-old struggle between good and evil. As memories from her life come back to haunt her, and as the Morati hunt her down, Felicia will discover it's not just her own redemption at stake... but the salvation of all mankind.

Level 2 Details

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Author : Lenore Appelhans

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From Reader Review Level 2 for online ebook

Christina (Ensconced in Lit) says

I've seen this book around the blogosphere quite a bit, and when I heard Lenore Appelhans was coming to visit my town, I knew I had to read it stat!

Level 2 by Lenore Appelhans is about a seemingly normal girl named Felicia, who has died recently, and lives in Level 2, which is a beehive like purgatory. In this Level, one can "plug" in and view old memories from life down on Earth. When she sees Julian again, a fling that she had back on Earth, in this Level, she knows there's more to this than she thought before. After Julian, she fell in love with a pure, handsome boy named Neil that she met at church. Her main goal? To find him again. Will Felicia be able to sort through her past and present to connect with the boy she loved and lost?

This book is a tough one to summarize and also a tough one to rate. The prose is beautifully written. The background of this story is fascinating. I loved the idea of "hives" and plugging in to a sort of "net" to review memories that happened back on earth. Felicia is a hard character to get to know, but I like that we can see both her present and her past via this method. I'm intrigued by some of the characters in her life-- not just Neil, but her father, and some of her friends. There is a wonderful twist at the end of the book, that raised my rating to a 4. Julian is probably the most interesting of the characters and is reminiscent of Cole from Brodi Ashton's Everneath.

That said, I had some issues with the book. The pacing is not perfect-- the middle of the book drags, and sometimes, I wonder the significance of the memories that we are shown. Felicia is not the most likeable of characters, and she keeps her secrets close to her chest until the end. I believe that secret revealing should be gradual, and if there is only one big secret, there should be others that sprinkle through the action. Neil seems like a nice guy, but I can't understand why he likes the prickly Felicia, except that we are told she is attractive and broken, and he likes to fix things. I wanted to care more about the characters, but we are given only glimpses of them through her memories. The other secrets that are revealed at the end are odd, and I still don't understand why Felicia is so important versus anyone else. However, this is the first book in a trilogy, so we have time to find out.

Overall, a fascinating depiction of Purgatory with beautiful prose and ideas, and I'm looking forward to the second installment to find out more about these characters.

Wendy Darling says

I like the concept behind this story so much, but I'm afraid I had more mixed reactions to the characters, which makes it difficult to get engaged with the book; I just didn't like either boy, and I didn't fall in love with Felicia either. I think this would have been a solid 4 star book for me if some elements of the book were more developed, especially in the structure and writing. The timeline was a bit confusing, and many scenes could have used more time/detail to make them feel more exciting/resonant/real.

Interesting plot twist at the end, though, and the way the hive is described (and the access to the memory files as well) is pretty cool. I'm curious where the story will go next, but I might wait to see what reviews are like and/or for the final volume to be released as well.

An advance copy was provided by the publisher for this review.

Keertana says

Rating: 3.5 Stars

For me, the biggest appeal of *Level 2* was the fact that it was written by a blogger. I was so enthralled that a blogger had been able to get her book published and, best of all, who else knew best the pitfalls that most authors stumbled across better than a blogger herself? Thus, *Level 2* seemed like a novel that could do no wrong. In many ways, it couldn't (although its synopsis seems to think it's going to get more readers by hinting at a love triangle when **there is no love triangle in this story at all**). Yet, despite the unique concept, excellent writing ability, and creative characterization, it is disappointing to note that *Level 2*, is, after all, missing something.

Appelhans's debut is one of those novels where revealing too much can ruin the story. Thus, I will keep my synopsis brief enough to merely say that it is an original spin on afterlife. As humans, we live on Level 1, or Earth, and are then transported to Level 2, an in-between place between Earth and Heaven, Level 3. On Level 2, everyone who has died now has access to their memories and the goal of this level is to ultimately come to terms with your death and move on. Felicia, the protagonist of our tale, is living in Level 2, blissfully unaware of a rebellion that is going on with the angels who guard Level 2. When Julian, her ex-best friend's boyfriend, shows up promising Felicia that she can be re-united with her boyfriend, Neil, she doesn't hesitate to join in the rebellion. Only, there is more to what is going on in Level 2 than what Julian initially has Felicia believe and even after all these years, Felicia isn't quite sure she can trust the boy she lost her best friend for...

What *Level 2* excels in is its characterization. From the very beginning, we are thrown into memories of Felicia's past and through her eyes, we re-live her romance with Neil, a budding and beautiful story, her fall out with her best friend, her days spent making out with Julian without telling her best friend, her strained relationship with her parents...we see it all. We witness Felicia's ups and downs and although it all comes together very slowly, the pieces of her traumatic past and her ultimate death seeming to take forever to unfold, it's worth the wait. I love that Felicia is a flawed and unlikeable protagonist; I love that it is her who is the bad guy, the one who messed up, the person who is wrong. Yet, what I love most is that we can see that it isn't all her fault and that, deep inside, just as her boyfriend Neil sees, is some good.

In this manner, Felicia is one of the most in-depth characters I've come across and her relationship with everyone, from her friends to teachers to parents to her own boyfriend, are all richly complex and a thrill to read. Even her unfolding romance, one that is endearingly sweet, only adds to the multi-faceted characterization of Appelhan's protagonist and really, it was this aspect of the story that truly made *Level 2* such a powerful novel – the part of it that resorted to becoming a contemporary tale. Unfortunately, however, *Level 2* is a science-fiction novel and it is in this genre placement that the novel falters. While the mystery of Felicia's past kept me flipping the pages in anticipation, forming bonds with the characters and barely containing my excitement to find out what *really* happened, the present action of the rebellion utterly lost my interest.

Felicia, with the help of Julian, essentially explores the place known as Level 2, breaking the bonds of the regulations set forth there and attempting to help her friends. I hate to say it, but this so-called "action" was extremely dull. Furthermore, with the exception of witnessing ones memories from the past, there were no

truly innovative gadgets or sci-fi elements to this novel, which was a huge disappointment. I could, perhaps, forgive all this for the plot twists were superb and much of the novel is focused on the past, not so much the present, but the ultimate ending was rushed. It had an engaging plot thread, concluding with a plot twist that had quite an element of surprise to it, but then the rest of the novel, to its rather astonishing ending, was a blur.

Thus, I have to say that *Level 2* is a novel that I'd more recommend for contemporary instead of science-fiction lovers. Perhaps if you are new to the sci-fi genre, *Level 2* will captivate you in a manner that this novel failed to captivate me in, but if you're more looking for hard-core sci-fi, I'd suggest look elsewhere. Nevertheless, I thoroughly enjoyed reading Appelhans's debut and with her strong characterization, unique thought-processes, and lush writing style, I am already eagerly anticipating her next novel. A slight change of expectations can render this novel a definite favorite among many and joining the ranks of authors to look out for is Lenore Appelhans – without a doubt.

I was given a copy of this book on behalf of DAC ARC Tours in exchange for an honest review. Thank You!

You can read this review and more on my blog, Ivy Book Bindings.

Melanie says

See more reviews at YA Midnight Reads

DNF Naturally, I don't review DNFed books, but there is something that needs to be said here.

"Don't! Just don't." How dare he? Does he think if he touches me, I'll give in? Tell him it's okay that he's a monster?

He puts his hands in a gesture of surrender and rocks back into his rigid pose. "Okay, clam down. I will not touch you unless you ask." His eyes going with mischief. "Unless you beg." page 69

gags I checked my friend reviews on this book, several were positive, ranting on about it's stunning premise and idea. I DO agree. However, I think it was poorly written and executed. Stopping at page 178, I am rather irritated. I was looking for this entrap urging world that seemed so unique and original at the time, instead I got a piece of horse manure. Multiple times, I wanted to close the book and give up completely, well, eventually I did (which I'm grateful for) but it was infuriating, the flaws were literally glaring at me on each page.

Level 2, a stark white afterlife limbo, where people spend their endless days replaying their memories. Felicia Ward is one of those people. She is dead. Her memories is her reality, her home, where she can see her family, friends, boyfriend and the one that broke her heart ---- the one that broke into Level 2 to take her away. Rebellion is brewing.

Felicia is an annoying protagonist, I couldn't relate to her in any way, shape or form, her characteristics seemed like they were created for a background character.

The story begins on a bad pitch. Info dumping. My favourite. In fact, this issue reoccurs several times during the read and it was frustrating. I am in Melbourne, on a bloody hot day and I'm trying to read this book that is confusing me with this information that also happens to have holes in it. Not literally, but it doesn't make any sense when I think about it now. *faints in overuse of brain power* The world Lenore created was

fascinating at a first glance, I mean, it sounds pretty darn ingenious riight?? Sadly, it takes a large turn into lame-old-poorly-executed-stories-that-could-have-been- so-much-better in-so-many-ways. *takes a quick breath*

Another element that worried and bored me was the plot line. There was no plot line, well not until 20 pages before I DNFed this thing. The first half was monotonous, uneventful and lacks description.

All in all, Level 2 was a large disappointment that saddens me each second I think of it. While there were flaws in Lenore's debut, her writing style and idea was well thought. Maybe more tweaking and it would be my favourite book. Recommended to people who enjoy Neal Shusterman's books.

Kevin says

3.5 stars

My thoughts were so jumbled after reading this. I liked it, but there were some things I just did not understand.

This book is told from the setting of an afterlife location called "Level 2." This area is basically the waiting room of a doctor's office. The whole situation is very touch and go. Many of the, which seems like MILLIONS of people at times, are trying to reach "Level 3," or what we like to call heaven.

The people living inside Level 2 are controlled by an outside source that is jealous they weren't invited to Level 3. The inhabitants are literally described as "drones," which if anyone has read my reviews before knows, I hate the idea of drones or people controlled like this. It's basically a classy version of being someone's slave/zombie.

That's just not cool, and I hate reading about these type of characters. However, in this situation they are controlled by a realistic thing (as realistic as you can be in the afterlife I suppose). I still will never really like the idea of a drone like character.

I LOVED the memories portion of this book, which was a lot of it. Basically in Level 2 residents have these chairs they can sit in to access memories from when they were alive, they can even trade and sell memories like Pokemon cards! What a deal. The memories are a big reason why I decided to give this 3.5 stars. I love Felicia's and Neil's relationship, and being allowed to revisit how they met, and began to fall in love really added a "contemporary" novel feel to it.

Because of it, I think of this book as a **contemporary novel meets science and futuristic stuff**. Felicia had a rough life, basically because of her own decisions, and I think she deserved to find someone like Neil. I'm interested to see what the next book will be like, when we have seen most of Felicia's most important memories already. I really hope the memory aspect continues, since it tended to be my favorite.

The world of Level 2 was efficiently created, but not entirely exciting. The escapes or rebels of the whole Level 2 system, could basically control anything they set their minds to. While it would be awesome to do that, I felt like it gave them an advantage sometimes. Yes, things did not always work out for the best, but I think I would enjoy an underdog or less expected hero from a landscape like this. I just need more

from the world in general, it doesn't seem like there is much to it at this point, but hey that can always change.

The secondary characters outside of the memories, were not very enticing or engaging. I often forgot their names or cared little when they got an opportunity for some dialogue. One character I was not disappointed by was Julian.

Julian was basically the only person outside of Felicia that had an impact in both the memories, and in Level 2. He is basically the mysterious, what side is he really on? character this story oh so very much needed. He is basically responsible for Felicia's life being how it was on earth (well...and her poor decisions) and for every twist and turn throughout the book. I have no idea what his character is all about, and he was in 3/4 of the book. He's another reason why I need to read more books in this series, however I do not want his creeptastic ways toward Felicia to continue.

I hope moving forward that the Level 2 world becomes more exciting, rather than running through areas of the same old same, and ducking into door less rooms here and there. I want to know more about it as a whole, not just the drones. I need Felicia to step up more, I feel like her as a heroine was not proven nor justified by her actions thus far. And finally, I need to know what the HELL happened at the end. I feel like the book ended WAYYYY to quickly. Everything started happening, I was completely engaged. Then blam-o. No more story. Sorry, come back next time.

Also, (view spoiler)

This ARC was provided via mail, by Simon and Schuster.

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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Can we take a moment for some cover snark? What is going on with that girl's makeup? She looks like she was trying to attempt the full face highlighter challenge and gave up halfway. I liked the original title/cover better, but I'm wondering if it was changed because having the number 2 in the title made too many people think it was a sequel to the book they didn't have. This new cover just doesn't make sense, but in a way, it fits the book perfectly because of that: this book doesn't make sense, either.

By the time I've gotten about 20 pages into a book, I usually have a pretty good idea what I'm going to rate it. THE MEMORY OF AFTER was the 1 time out of 100 that this doesn't happen. Why? Because it's a strange book. Not necessarily strange in a bad way, just...strange. It's like the author had several different story ideas and decided to utilize them all by smooshing them together.

Felicia (resist the urge to make the obvious "bye Felicia" joke) is dead. She "lives" out her days in a strange white room, replaying her memories over and over. The afterlife is basically like "YouTube": you can upload your memories, tag them, rate them, and when people watch them you can get credits, which you can then exchange to watch other people's memories instead.

Felicia's parents were both foreign diplomats, so her memories are quite popular because she has so many memories of traveling. Her favorite memories, however, are of the boy she was dating while alive: Neil, an active participant in a youth group and a member of the church choir. Felicia likes him so much that she ends up joining the church because of him, but as pleasant as these memories are, they are still hard for Felicia to watch because Neil is connected to her death.

Felicia's YouTube purgatory days are disrupted when the memory screens start malfunctioning and showing things that they shouldn't. Shortly after that, a strange boy appears named Julian, who looks oddly familiar. It turns out he's in her memories too, and part of a resistance group whose goal is to break key members out of YouPurgatory because it's being mismanaged purposely...for war.

This is why the book is so strange: 1/3 of it is a "dead girl trying to move on" storyline, 1/3 of it is doomed teenage romance with love quadrangle, and 1/3 of it is HUNGER GAMES-esque plot of resistance fighters trying to overthrow their dystopian overlords. It's like someone said to themselves, "Hey, the Matrix was a great story, but let's replace the robots with angels, and throw in BEFORE I FALL and THE HUNGER GAMES for laughs! It'll totally make sense!"

The religion angle was also odd. There's talk about commitment ceremonies, reenactments of passages for the bible, True Love Waits is name-dropped, and just all this other stuff. What really threw me for the loop was this blink-and-you'll-miss-it moment towards the end when Neil's cousin is getting married (I'm sorry, I mean commitment ceremonied) to someone - whose gender is never specified - and then Felicia refers to said cousin's "alternative lifestyle" that distanced her from the church community. I sat there for a moment, blinking in astonishment, because I could not believe it. Did I really just see the words "alternative lifestyle" being used - sincerely - to describe a gay couple?

In the end, I decided that this book was OK. The writing was good. The characters were tolerable. Neil has a mini-freakout when he thinks that Felicia might not be a virgin, but apart from that he's totally forgettable. I thought Autumn and Felicia were equal twits. Autumn is that stereotypical self-centered airhead, but I didn't think that excused Felicia from cheating with Autumn's boyfriend. At one point, they're actually making out in a taxi while Autumn is passed out beside them! And then they're shocked that they're caught!!! LOL! I can't with the stupidity. Felicia does feel bad about it, though, and I liked how you could see which of her actions were most troubling to her because they were the memories she replayed the least. I did actually like Julian, potential creep factor aside, probably because he reminded me of the Julian from L.J. Smith's *Forbidden Game* trilogy - and that ended up proving prophetic in some ways, which made me wonder if the

author was inspired by the books. I really do have to give the author credit for coming up with something so OTT. It's a pastiche of various genres that don't quite fit together, but don't quite clash, either.

2 to 2.5 stars

Tamara Stone says

I'm so honored that I got to read LEVEL 2 before the rest of the world gets its collective hands on this fantastic story. It's a smart, fast-paced read with inventive plot twists and a strong heroine—highly original and my kind of book. I can't wait for the next one!

Mitch says

It's interesting how the tagline for *Level 2* emphasizes the number two, two worlds, two lives, two loves, because I'm of two minds when it comes to this book. On one hand, I love Lenore Appelhans's approach to the afterlife - I have to confess I'm one of those readers who read to think rather than to feel, so to get something so deeply philosophical that I was thinking about almost everything is an absolute treat. On the other hand though, despite my overwhelmingly positive response to how uniquely high concept this was, my overall impression is that *Level 2*'s promise is derailed by some really sketchy execution.

So first, the good - the premise is an incredibly inspired take on a common enough theme, that place between life and whatever comes after life where people have to come to terms with the outstanding issues from their life before they can move on. I'm not just talking about Appelhans's setup with the hives, the drones, and the futuristic setting that has people spending all their time reliving their memories and browsing other people's memories either (with kind of a *Matrix* type vibe to the whole thing) - even before the first of the many, many references to *Our Town*, I could tell there was just something uniquely existentialist about this book. A lot of it is the way Appelhans develops Felicia's character almost entirely through flashbacks looking at her life through her memories; between what I eventually learn about Felicia over the course of her many flashbacks, the way memories are treated like videos you can go out and rent for entertainment, the way the memories are used as learning experiences, and the whole storyline revolving around Felicia's friend Beckah, I just got the feeling Appelhans's ulterior motive for writing this was as an exploration of how identity is forged by human experience. And that begs so many interesting questions, like, what's the point of accumulating all these memories after you're dead? Or, how do you know if your feelings are genuine if there's a chance your memories have been altered?

That said, Appelhans's treatment of the memories is also my biggest problem. I don't have a problem with nonlinear storytelling and using flashbacks to advance the plot, but I just didn't feel like every single flashback served a useful purpose in the grand scheme of things. A couple of them, for example Felicia talking about the magical properties of the Lethe in the present and then flashing back to her history class when they were talking about the rivers of the underworld in Greek mythology, are directly on point, others like the development of Julian's character via Felicia's memories and the whole thing with Felicia's friend Amber, work pretty well connecting the situation in Level 2 with Felicia's experiences while she was alive, but many others, particularly Felicia's memories of her boyfriend Neil, just weren't all that relevant to the

actual plot of *Level 2*, renegade angels using Level 2 as a staging ground for breaking into Level 3 aka Heaven. There was one memory in particular of Felicia playing some sort of religious themed game with Neil at their church that I really expected to play some sort of role in the plot, and the more I think about it, the more I have to conclude it was just a memory of Neil. And for a person who likes connecting the dots and figuring out how each piece of the puzzle relates to every other piece of the puzzle, the lack of clear connections, or any connection at all for that matter, between these seemingly important memories and Felicia's predicament is rather disappointing.

Actually, Neil's role in the story really didn't work for me at all, because, without any connections to the Level 2 stuff, Felicia's recollections of their time together bordered on the sickeningly sweet to the point of too good to be true. I mean, if this was a contemporary about how the perfect boyfriend helps the messed up girl deal with her tragic past, I'd be bored out of my mind. I get how Neil's Felicia's redemption after what happens with Amber, which is intentionally caused by Julian, who's obviously connected to Level 2, but after I've pieced everything together, my reaction was more like 'that's it?' because I really expected more. And perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the story completely falls off a cliff towards the end, right around the same time that Neil finally shows back up. Let's just say the climax involves much telling instead of showing, the villainous Morati being completely brushed aside as far as development goes, obvious twists being revealed but never given the opportunity to really sink in, and Neil's reappearance being more of the 'umm what?' variety than 'oh yeah this makes lots of sense given what has happened' - it's almost as if Appelhans ran out of creative steam once she said everything she wanted to say about the memories aspect and just decided to call it a day.

To be honest, I wasn't expecting *Level 2* to be quite this existentialist, although in retrospect maybe I should have. Either way, Lenore Appelhans certainly surprised me with her thoughtful treatment of memories, experiences, life, death, and moving on. But between the lack of connections between key aspects of the story and the rush job of an ending, I can't say my surprise was altogether pleasant.

Kimberly Sabatini says

Lenore Appelhans is a fellow Apocalysie, a Simon & Schuster sibling and also a kindred soul when it comes to exploring the afterlife. We've been dying to read each other's books and HA! I snagged a coveted ARC of *Level 2* at BEA!!!!

What immediately captured my attention was Appelhans strong writing. She's a pro. Period. The story creatively jumps between lots of different perspectives in the past and the present and I never once was lost. Her storytelling and transitions were seamless. I was also fascinated by how Appelhans explored many of the same concepts that I was fascinated with in *Touching the Surface*, but she did this in such a different and unique way. I've never seen the afterlife explored in a dystopian manner before and it was really fascinating. I particularly liked the stark white of the world and the use of the bee hive throughout the story.

I don't want to give out any spoilers, but I love a book that doesn't let me settle into a firm opinion too early. I adore rounding the corner and finding that what I thought I knew, might not be true. *Level 2* gave me the perfect amount of shake-up in anticipation for the next book BUT considering that *Level 2* won't hit the bookshelves until early 2013 I'm stomping my foot like a toddler. I can't believe how long I'm going to have to wait to see what happens. *groan*

And BTW...the cover is perfect and in case you're wondering...TEAM JULIAN!!!!

Jon says

Seen at Scott Reads It

Thank you to Simon & Schuster for providing me with an ARC via mail

I'll be honest I thought this book had something to do with video games and the afterlife when I picked it up. I saw the words "LEVEL 2" and that cover which instantly made me think of Street Fighter's Ryu. If you have ever played as Ryu you'll be familiar with that fire-ball move he has and that really reminded me of Level 2's cover.

Anyway I'm digressing because this is supposed to be a review of Level 2, not an analysis of Street Fighter. I'll try to explain Level 2 but I'll try to be vague to avoid posting spoilers. After Felicia dies she is transported to a place called Level 2 which is an after life. In Level 2 the dead live in pods where they can relive their memories until they reach Level 3 (a.k.a Heaven). Felicia can rent other people's memories if she has enough credits which she obtains when others rent her memories. The idea that memories could be rented or traded like something physical like a collectible was a superb idea. There are Angels called Morati who are using Level 2 as a means to rebel against Heaven and it's up to Felicia to stop them. Felicia joins up with an old acquaintance of hers to defeat the Moratis and move onto Heaven.

Level 2 is a compelling book that gives you an entirely new outlook on the afterlife and angels. Angels are no longer those sweet babies with those little halos or those mysterious love interests in a paranormal romance.

These angels are totally bad to the bone and they won't stop at anything to get what they want. Appelhan's view of the afterlife was really creatively done and developed. Unlike in most dystopias, I didn't really have any questions about how the society or it's leaders.

Part of Level 2 is Felicia's adventures in Level 2 while the other half is Felicia's life premortem. One of my favorite components of Level 2 is the memory system because it was flawless. The memory system is one of those ideas that sounds fantastic but would be difficult to execute. Luckily Appelhans really thought through and developed the memory system. The memories in Level 2 really provided a futuristic sci-fi tone that I loved. Felicia's memories before she died flowed well with the Morati plotline and were really interesting to read about. I'm sorry if my thoughts seem jumbled but it's so hard to explain everything about Level 2.

All of the characters in Level 2 are supposed to be drones like in most dystopian societies. Usually this leads to an inability to connect with the characters because they are cold and emotionless. Felicia is quite the contrary because I really connected with her and she isn't an emotionless robot. Felicia's perseverance to find her friend/ex-boyfriend Neil was really spectacular. I truly loved how dedicated and loyal Felicia was to her friends. Most characters in books would give up in a fight against Heaven but Felicia didn't even second guess her conscience. Felicia's romance with her boyfriend Neil (premortem) was a sweet love story and it really upset me that they couldn't be together. The inclusion of a contemporary romance in a Science Fiction novel worked really well to my surprise. The fact that I truly enjoyed a romance in a book is astounding because romance usually ruins a book for me. I applaud Appelhans for creating a sweet and lovely romantic angle to Level 2. I was ecstatic that there was no love triangle in Level 2 because honestly I would be so happy if I never read a love triangle again.

Level 2 is a compelling book that I didn't want to end. The plot of Level 2 was fast paced and I felt like I was

there in Level 2 with the characters. Level 2 felt so real that I am bit disappointed that I won't be able to trade any of my memories away (I could use some credits!). I loved the unique Sci-Fi feel of Level 2 because it was like nothing I have read. Level 2 brought me on an adventure that I know I won't ever forget! Lenore Appelhans is a literary genius for coming up with Level 2. I am definitely going to read the sequel and I hope it is just as fantastic as Level 2 was.

Rubi says

I'll start off by saying that *The Memory of After* is a lot more religious & fantasy than I originally thought it would be. The story is told from Felicia's point of view and takes place in what is referred to as Phase 2.

Phase 2 is the equivalent to a Catholic's Purgatory. It's a sort of "limbo" where souls go after they pass, and they remain here until they have come to terms with their deaths. The setup for this Phase 2 world is described as a beehive-like structure, and the copy I read from even had a map, but it just didn't match at all with the descriptions in the book which only made the world harder to visualize.

In this Phase 2, souls spend their time in pods where they play back memories from when they were alive. The whole memories concept works like YouTube. Basically, you can share your memories with others and collect credits every time someone watches your memories. You could tag your memories with key phrases that you think will attract an audience and the more your videos are played, the more credits you would earn. Since Felicia, our main character, did a lot of traveling when she was alive, she has racked up plenty of credits which she can then use to watch other's memories.

Another concept I really enjoyed was that of the Morati and how they came to be. They are the angels that watch over everyone in Phase 2. The idea of them holding a grudge against their creator and doing things to retaliate was brilliant! This book is like nothing I've read before. With that being said, I was disappointed that this idea wasn't fully thought out. A lot of the explanations made little to no sense to me and I felt confused more than once.

My biggest problem with *The Memory of After* was the character building. I just couldn't connect to any of the characters. Not one. I thought our main character, Felicia, was very immature and a horrible friend. Also, I couldn't understand her obsession with Neil who she knew/dated when she was still alive for a little more than 12 minutes. The whole thing just seemed odd to me. Julian's character was okay, but he could've been killed off and I wouldn't have been bothered.

Overall, I thought it was a super cool idea for a book and bonus points for being different from anything I've read before, but I couldn't connect with any of the characters & the world building was really poor. I checked out *Chasing Before* from my public library, so I might still read book 2 just to see this story's conclusion.

Kelly says

Felicia's life in Level 2 is comfortable. She's got everything she needs, and she's able to be so content because she can slip into her machine and relive her memories. Except she is unable to be happy because she can't put her finger on what happened to her. The problem is she keeps reliving a memory that breaks her heart: she keeps living through the time she lost her chance with Neil, the boy she'd fallen for. When she's

about to reach the truth, it slips away from her cruelly.

So when Julian shows up in Level 2 and promises he can reunite Felicia with Neil, she jumps at the chance to know the truth about her life, her death, and to reunite with Neil.

Appelhans's debut is a dystopian with a dash of the supernatural, written in compelling, action-paced prose. What seems like a fairly straightforward story of escaping from what looks like a utopian world -- Level 2 -- turns out to be something much more sinister. Felicia is caught between two worlds, and the success or failure of either and both depend upon her. The story is told both in the present and in the past, through Felicia's memories, which gives the reader not only a sense of who she is now, but a real feel for the whole girl who has lost so much in her life.

What made this book work for me was that it's never clear cut who is good and who is bad. It's easy to see Felicia as the good girl, but there are many times I wondered if she wasn't. If she was just as bad as people like Julian...or if Julian himself was even bad. He did offer Felicia a chance to meet Neil again, even if it meant giving away a part of herself. When it looks like he wants to do nothing more than use her as a tool, he flips the switch and gives readers (and Felicia) reason to wonder if he really DOES want the best for her. That he's not being selfish and greedy. Appelhans does a great job of never hand-holding the reader.

I'm not a romantic, but the moments between Felicia and Neil made my heart swell quite a bit, especially since it was so uncertain. But I can see readers thinking they're very wrong for each other. That Julian is the person to whom Felicia should give her heart. There's also the question of whether Felicia deserves to be with anyone, given her less-than-perfect history.

Level 2 is a complete story, though there are enough threads left open to warrant another installment.

(Full disclosure: I beta read this one, but trust me, it's a winner).

Jennifer says

Felicia Ward is currently located at Level 2. She lays in a device that allows her to search through and watch her favorite memories from earth. With credits she can also trade and buy more credits to view more memories. She can even organize the memories like YouTube videos with ratings and notes. Felicia has yet to watch the memory of her death but she loves to live through her memories of her true love Neil over and over. Felicia also hangs out in the hive visiting with her friends Veronica and Beckah. Then Beckah disappears and Julian, a guy from her past, shows and says he can break her out and explain everything, including where Neil is located.

I have read several books about an "inbetween" but this one was by far the most unique. I loved the idea of the hives and watching memories. The Mortai angels have gone bad and instead of the people in the hives confronting their bad memories and moving on, the Morati are keeping the people plugged in and using their energy Matrix style to be able to break out and go to Earth. I liked that this book takes place with Felicia already dead and in Level 2. I was worried it would be really sad and it is at times but not overly depressing. We learn about Felicia's life as she visits her most important and favorite memories. Neil is so sweet and understanding and was everything she needed after a short toxic relationship with Julian. At first Neil did come off as overly religious and pretentious. Then as I continued to see more of Felicia's memories I saw that Neil just wanted better for Felicia and saw the good in her. Felicia was holding some much guilt over her

past actions with Julian.

I think a lot of people will like Julian but I thought he was an evil, lying, douche the whole time. You know how I hate douchebags. He had his moments of humor and charm but he would never give Felicia the truth and it was driving me mad. Julian wants Felicia to join him and his team to rebel against the Morati. There was lots of action and neat world building all throughout the book but I was a little disappointed with the ending action scene. There is always such a huge build up to a big showdown ending but then we saw it from a distance. I can't explain it too much without spoiling it but I wanted more details about what was happening. I did read an early ARC (I read this in June) so things may have changed. But I did think the very end was perfect. Everything is actually wrapped up really sweet and nice. I got a little teary eyed it was so beautiful. This is the first in a series of The Memory Chronicles so I am curious where it will go next. Well based on the title I assume Level 3!

Ward, Felicia. Memory #32105

Tags: Ohio, Neil, Hiking, Youth group, Favorite

Number of views: 100,235

Owner Rating: 5 stars

User Rating: Not shared

"Its basic function is to allow you to access and rent out your memories as well to rent the memories of others. When you access your own memories, you can tag them with labels. This is so you can find what you are looking for more easily but also so you can advertise your wares to others on the net."

"You're not the only hacker in the universe, you know. You've been viewing lots of memories of Neil. And not so many memories of me." He clicks his tongue with disapproval. "Should I be jealous?"

"Ugh, why would I want to revisit the worst parts of my whole life?" I scowl at him. Jerk.

He grins wickedly. "If you say so..." He shimmers again and is left in nothing but a Speedo, smooth chest and washboard abs glistening with water droplets as if he's just stepped from a pool.

"Julian!" I gag. "Stop fooling around."

"Fine," he says, his tone now serious. He shimmers again and materializes back into his normal outfit. "I see you're still uptight."

"Think of this place as a waiting room. Earth, what we call Level One, is about creating and forming memories. And this waiting room, Level Two, is about processing those memories, sifting through them to find the meaning of your time on earth. To come to terms with it so you can move on."

"What? That's why they aren't helping us move on? Because they are harvesting our energy?" It sounds like something straight out of the Matrix.

"God cast out his dissenters and assigned his supporters the best jobs. The lukewarm ones? He sent them to be thankless caretakers of the afterlife's waiting room, to serve humanity as a penance for their indecision. He called this third group the Morati, those who delayed."

Julian speaks up. "And that's why the Morati hate humans enough to trap them and use them to get back at God."

"Thank you, Neil. Thank you for showing me what real love is."

I borrowed an ARC and this in no way affects my review

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Originally posted here.

Anyone who reads my blog regularly probably already knows how much I wanted this book. It was one of my WoW posts, and has been on my wishlist from the moment I found out Lenore Appelhans, the wonderful blogger behind Presenting Lenore, had a dystopian novel coming out. I was so all over that, especially since Lenore is the creator of Dystopian August, which means she really knows her stuff. Also, oh hey, it's Dystopian August! Woo! Make sure you check out her blog as well as mine for reviews, giveaways and bookish talk!

Since Lenore is one of my favorite bloggers, and definitely the one I've been following the longest, I went into this with ALL of the expectations. ALL OF THEM. From that perspective, Level 2 wasn't quite everything I was hoping for, though, if you aren't expecting instant new favorite book of all time, I suspect this won't be an issue. Lenore's book definitely is delightful and unique, though, so do not let the fact that it didn't rise to my insanely high expectations put you off at all.

The first awesome thing about Level 2 is the world building, which is multi-faceted and complex. She reveals new layers of epic awesome as you read through the book, and I have no doubt this will continue in the next book. The world building was definitely my favorite thing, and I loved how Lenore could completely surprise me or explain something that I was at first skeptical of. She makes this work like whoa.

At the beginning of Level 2, I was a bit confused, as, indeed, you're supposed to be. You join Felicia in this weird afterlife; that's about all I knew going into it, and Felicia doesn't know any more than you do. In Level 2's version of the afterlife, you hang out in a room full of pods, spending most of your time watching the afterlife equivalent of YouTube (YouDead? lol), only you're watching your memories, pulled from your mind in high definition and with better detail than you could have done on your own. I totally wrote short story like this in college, though clearly not so detailed, and I loved seeing the idea really fleshed out. Not only can they watch all of their own memories, but they can share them with others, earning currency to buy new memories when people purchase theirs.

Why would you want to watch someone else's memories? To stave off boredom, of course! One small theme running through Level 2 which I really appreciated was the Fahrenheit 451 aspect to the printed word. In the afterlife, books only exist if someone read them closely enough that every word appears in someone's memory. Otherwise, it's gone. That is just so powerful. You'll all be glad to know that I've got Level 2 tucked away in my brain, so we're good. Also, bloggers would have so much currency in the afterlife, since we read so many things!

Of course, there are also MORE things going on, like I promised. I'm not going to go into great detail about the rest of the world building, because I think it's something best left for you to find. I will just mention that there's some awesome stuff that one can do with mind power. Also, Lenore has a wholly new take on angels. I, for one, am always skeptical of angels, because RELIGION, but no worries my agnostic and atheist friends, there's no preaching, I promise.

Felicia, our main character, is not the most likable heroine you will ever meet. I suspect some readers will have difficulties connecting with her. Partly, this is caused by what spending so long constantly replaying just one's best memories will do to someone. She's definitely not a perfect person by any means. She has made serious mistakes with painful consequences, mostly involving an unfortunate attraction to the not-so-trustworthy Julian. She's also one of those people who, if you tell them to stay in the car, will never EVER stay in the car.

Though there were some things I didn't like about Felicia, she worked for me as a heroine. Felicia has spunk and sarcasm, and she's not overly trusting. She does complain, but as soon as she finishes doing that, she throws herself bodily into a task. I don't begrudge someone a 'man, this sucks,' so long as they then do what they can, and she always does. In fact, my one complaint about the pacing of the novel is that Felicia seems to come by her defensive skills too quickly and easily. In this case, I would have liked a training montage or some way to mark time passing.

In addition to Felicia, we have two other super important people I must talk about: Neil and Julian. Yes, there's a love triangle. I know, I know. It's okay, though. This love triangle is made more interesting by the fact that we have a juxtaposition between past and present, and the fact that only Julian is actually present. Though I initially hated Julian, who is definitely too cocky and bad boy-ish for my usual tastes, I'm currently in his team, because he's complex and interesting. I want to know more about him. Neil is too perfect, too high school love, too religious, to hold much appeal for me, BUT I have yet to meet him except in Felicia's favorite memories of him. At this juncture, it's in no way clear which competitor will win fair Felicia's heart, which always helps in a love triangle.

So far as the dystopian stuff goes, Level 2 is not the most dystopian novel ever, but there's obviously some creepy stuff happening because of...whoever's in charge. There will be more dystopian goodness (errr...badness) in the coming books, I am sure.

Lenore Appelhans' Level 2 is a thought provoking read that will put you into an entirely new world. The images will stick in your brain long after you finish. In fact, rewriting this review just before it's meant to publish (since I managed to accidentally delete the original, because I'm an idiot), I find myself wishing I had time to reread Level 2, so that I could catch plot threads that I missed on my first read. I will definitely need to reread before reading the next book. You definitely don't want to miss out on Level 2.

Whitley Birks says

This was two books in one, and neither of them were good. The main problem is there was a disconnect between what this book wanted to be, and what it sold itself as. It was pitched to the reader as a sci-fi fantasy about a Matrix-like afterlife and a battle for Earth between rebels and evil-angels. Awesome! What it ended up being was a dull, introspective, contemporary novel about a girl sulking about how much her life sucks and how her boyfriend fixed it all for her. Um...awesome? I mean, if you want to write that story, that's fine. But when your book is supposed to be about evil angels, then that other stuff becomes, by default, extraneous fluff.

Seriously, the evil-angels stuff was a *footnote* in this book. The majority of the novel was just the main character going into a machine that lets her relive memories, and that's how she told us the story of her life. That's it. This novel is like 75% *flashbacks*. Everything else? The plot about the afterlife and the angels and the world-taking-over? She doesn't figure any of that out. It just gets info-dumped to her in between her

memory sessions. We don't even see the 'bad guys' until the last few pages, and the 'climax' is summarized for us in a few paragraphs. Plus, the pacing of it is all over the place. No one sleeps, so it's hard to tell how much time has passed, but things happen in starts and fits. She gets 'training' that consists of...um, some unknown amount of sleepless time, and involves her basically just trying this one thing a few times and being perfect at it. They say that the place is controlled by hacking, all Matrix-style, but there's no hacking going on. She *imagines* things really hard, and said things appear. That's fucking magic.

Then there's the story that this book *wanted* to be, the story of Felicia's sad life and the horrible secret that plagued her. It's...really dull and boring. The basic gist? She was kind of a shitty friend, then in a moment of panic she did a really stupid thing, because...you know. Teenager. Freaked out. Bad decisions. And that's it. That's the whole story. She *angsts* endlessly about this one bad choice she made, talking about it like it's some horrible stain on her character, but it was just a moment of bad judgement when she was legitimately freaked out. Um...okay?

Furthermore, there's no point to that story. Felicia is a really selfish, shitty person throughout both stories. It could be argued that such selfishness makes her deep and flawed and relatable. And yes. If the book had decided to go that way, it could have made her a real character. But there's no character arc for Felicia. She's horrible and selfish and causes problems...and then that's it. She never has to face her past actions. She never has to change or grow or admit fault. She never has to evaluate her life and come to any form of acceptance over it. Basically, we're told about a series of events that happened and then...that's it. Boom. End. No growth or development at all.

And I'm just not on board with a selfish character if said selfish character carries right on being terrible and gets rewarded at the end with a boyfriend and heaven.

Also, sex and religion are really weird in this book. I mean, we're in the literal afterlife, here. Dealing with literal angels, set to this task by *the* Abrahamic God. No one bats an eye at this. No one doubts it. No one has a moment of "holy shit, so all that bible stuff was real?" It feels like the author just assumes all her readers believe the same thing she does. Then there's also a bizarre scene where Felicia, knowing that her boyfriend doesn't want to have sex before marriage, decides that she has to take all her clothes off and climb into bed with him. It's all well and good to have a sex-positive message in your book, but not if it comes at the expense of ignoring or devaluing other people's sexual decisions. If someone says they want to wait, that should be respected, too.
