

SUSANNE O'LEARY
& OLA ZALTIN



VIRTUAL STRANGERS

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Did you ever want to cast off, to sail into the sunset with someone you just met, a kindred spirit, a twin soul, leaving everything behind? It is possible in the virtual social world of the Internet, which can become a comfort zone you'll never want to leave. You might, one day, want to meet that person with whom you have become strangely intimate. But reality is never as lovely as the dream. Be careful what you wish for...

A man and a woman - Seabee and Annika - hook up on a wannabe authors' site where they flirt, banter and play around. Just like you and me and everyone else these days. Don't we all spend part of our day on the Internet? On a forum, a blog, Twitter or Face Book. It's all innocent fun, isn't it? But for Annika and Seabee it became a chilly reality. After having joked around openly about killing off their significant others, both their partners actually do die in what seems to be unrelated freak accidents – or are they? The dark realisation begins to dawn on the uneasy duo that their murderous joke fantasy has become all too dangerously real and that the deaths were no random accidents. Someone is watching them.

Seabee and Annika find out in a hurry that cyberspace makes strange bedfellows and, if it's not he or she who did it, then who has done the killings? The two team up to find out who has hijacked their fantasy and turned it into a frightening nightmare.

Join the endearingly mismatched would-be detective duo Annika and Seabee as they investigate the deadly mystery of how the seemingly innocent cybernetic world of two virtual strangers was hi-jacked and transformed by an unknown faceless killer into real-life hell, where "homicide" isn't just a word highlighted harmlessly on a computer screen.

With more than a passing nod at the classic 'Strangers on a Train', Virtual Strangers is a darkly humorous, romantically witty-edged adventure that will take you into the deep, dark and sometimes deadly uncharted wilderness which lurks beyond the fringes of the strange and unpredictable netherworld that we casually call...CYBERSPACE.

Don't read it if you don't want to be jolted out of your comfort zone. Keep the lights on, change your password, use a pseudonym and never, ever give out personal information on the Internet...

Contains strong language

Virtual Strangers Details

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From Reader Review Virtual Strangers for online ebook

R.Z. says

A modern take on Agatha Christie's Ten Little Indians. The killed and the killer all meet in the chat room of a website, finally get invited along with other guests to a large creepy mansion in the country, and are trapped inside by a blizzard. The friendly killer kills again and is finally found out. The author builds suspense well and it's a fast read, although she relies a bit too much on foul language. There's a bit of sex too, but it's not explicit and mostly consists of people's comments about it their experience or non-experience with it.

Grace says

I am currently reading this story. It has a brilliant concept, and the virtual strangers idea is excellent. However as I am reading it, I am thinking more could of been done with the plot... update to follow when finished!

Joyce says

Unfortunately I found this novel to be adolescent and predictable. A group of authors (presumably new authors) all join a web site for authors and begin to taunt each other and to flirt with each other on line. This leads to murders. Some of them meet during the course of the novel, and, of course, establish relationships with each other. Finally it culminates with a group meeting and the exposure of the murderer with a pair of the authors living 'happily' ever after.

Debbie says

Maybe it's my age...I just couldn't take the bad mouthing back and forth while on line. I understand strangers, having never met becoming friends/enemies only via on line meetings, but life is too short for me to read through pages and pages of back and forth bad mouthing.
Piqued my interest at first with the main character and her husband, but quickly lost interest and never got to the murder part. Did not finish.

Beckimoodie Moody says

I wanted to like this because I was really intrigued by the idea of an updated version of "Strangers on a Train". Unfortunately, I found the juvenile online flirting to be annoying and distracting, to the point that I quit reading. Maybe the ending was worth wading through the rest of the book, but I have too many other titles on my list to spend the time on this one. Sorry.

Ruby Barnes says

Virtual Strangers is a very interesting book from a number of perspectives.

As an author and a user of social networking platforms, I'm familiar with much of the subject matter in this book (except the murder!) I've indulged in 'Authorspot' (Authonomy) and all the associated carry-on, compulsive networking, disreputable behaviour, virtual relationships and flame wars.

The alternating narrator style works well throughout this book. It's a team effort and the differing style of the co-authors makes for two very convincing main characters. There's a love-hate relationship between Annika and Seabee that is real.

I felt the impact of each murder or attack (not sure if I was the victim or the perpetrator though). I laughed as the weekend invitees scurried to get onto their computers in a last ditch attempt to curry favour with the ever-elusive publishers (social networking meets Agatha Christie). I urged Seabee to curb his excesses and prayed that Annika wouldn't get in too deep with Archie. The mix of romance, chick lit, murder and thriller provided by O'Leary and Zaltin satisfied my broad tastes. No surprise there, considering their respective backgrounds of widely published author and Wallander TV scriptwriter. It shows how yin and yang make a perfect balance.

Christie says

Fun mystery

I enjoyed this mystery and found the premise original--I also like how the narrative had two points of view which kept the story moving. I found the mystery fairly easy to solve but was entertained all the same. Would recommend!

Paula says

I very much enjoyed the first part of the book and the similarities to "Strangers on a Train". It was suspenseful and serious but the second half seemed rather silly. When Seebee, a guest at the estate in the Cotswolds goes back to the car to get Annika's laptop and is hit from behind, then shows up hours later and no one is concerned was a stretch for me. There had been three murders up to this point and no one is concerned?? An ok read for me.

Alison says

Read as the only thing on my Kindle with an author beginning with Z. An interesting take on the "strangers in a train" murder story, set in the virtual world of Internet forums. I found the first part of the book intriguing but the ending, where all the main suspects come together, was a bit plodding and predictable.

Ray Riddle says

I just finished "Virtual Strangers" and I must say, I really liked it. It was very 21st century, with the two main characters meeting online, via a website for hopeful authors. People who have written books but haven't been published, using the site to try and get noticed, hoping that doing so will get them a publisher. Neither of the two is happy with their lives, mostly due to their significant others, and a joke about killing off each other's mates turns horribly real. At first each suspects the other of actually going through with it, but as things get worse, they begin to wonder who actually did it, and why. And where will it stop?

I love how it's written in first person, switching between the two main characters, and how it's all in present tense. I figured out who the real villain was about halfway through the book, but trying to see when either of the main characters would actually figure it out kept the book interesting. A really good read.

Patricia says

Took forever

I can promise you I hated this book. Really truly hated it. There is nothing I liked about it but seeing that I was 100% finished with it. Three things that come to mind.

1. Predictable
2. Unrealistic
3. Entirely too long.

Will I read the next book in this series? Hell no.

Lindsay says

I was lucky enough to receive a review copy of Virtual Strangers and the sequel Virtual Suspects; I am absolutely delighted that I took the time to read these consecutively.

Virtual Strangers is thoroughly enjoyable, humorous and delightfully well-written. Both authors have an exceptional way with dialogue, both write in such a similar way that the change of PoV flows beautifully yet remains distinguished and individual. There was nothing about Virtual Strangers that I didn't enjoy and was so glad that I could continue my journey with Seabee and Annika in Virtual Suspects.

Pete Morin says

If Susanne O'Leary and Ola Saltin wrote this as an experiment, I have to say it was a huge success. Their writing styles are as opposite as the characters they portray, and yet from the very outset, you can just feel

the sexual tension between them and know they'll end up together.

Giving a review that discusses the plot is bound to be a spoiler, but suffice to say that it all turns hilariously farsical in an ending that pokes fun at more than one genre, and especially at the venue that starts the adventure, Authonomy.

If you've spent any time there, you'll laugh at the inside jokes. If you haven't, you'll still see the dynamic of any social networking venue. If you're a writer, you'll appreciate just what the twisted alter egos of many of us would do to get a traditional publishing deal.

This was one of the most entertaining reads I've had in a long time.

Al says

“Seabee” from England and Annika, the knockout from France, are two strangers, both in difficult relationships. They meet online at a site for wannabe authors and engage in some witty banter, a little harmless flirtation – no big deal. It’s innocent fun until one joke that killing each other’s partner would solve all their problems. Reminiscent of the premise behind Alfred Hitchcock’s classic movie *Strangers on a Train*, *Virtual Strangers* goes its own way when both partners die in what seem to be freak accidents the same weekend. When evidence indicates both were murders Seabee and Annika each deny responsibility. But, if not them, who did it?

Virtual Strangers operates in two worlds, the real world and cyberspace. The real life murder-mystery portion of the book has plenty of unique twists; many of them work because of the uniqueness of the tie-in to cyberspace. The real world portion also has the stereotypical murder mystery device of strangers (okay, *Virtual Strangers*) stuck together in a big house trying to solve the murder. However, this has the variation that the murder(s) didn’t happen in the house, instead they’re together specifically to solve them.

However, what sets *Virtual Strangers* apart is how well O’Leary and Zaltin capture the dynamic of life in cyberspace and the potential for the two worlds to collide. Anyone who spends much time online should relate. How often have you seen someone on a forum behave in ways they never would face to face? Is a friend on Facebook who lives halfway across the world the same as your friend who lives next door and does it feel different? How much is real and how much is something else? When you think you’re anonymous, are you?

Lori Henrich says

A new take on a familiar tale. *Strangers on a Train* goes on the internet. Annika and other authors on a site where they promote their books meet and chat, not knowing that a crazy person is in their midst.

I like the premise, but the style of writing is hard to read at points. All in all not bad.
