



The Ghost Network

Catie Disabato

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Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* for adults, written with a penchant for old maps and undocumented 15th century explorers. For literary readers with a taste for suspense: two women hunt for a missing pop star and become ensnared in her secret society, following clues through the dark underbelly of Chicago.

A frightening, whip-smart adventure through Chicago that begins when a pop star, Molly Metropolis, disappears before a major performance. And two young women who set out to find her. At first, the mystery of her disappearance is a lighthearted scavenger hunt...until they both realize that they're in greater danger than they could have ever imagined.

The Ghost Network Details

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Author : Catie Disabato

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From Reader Review The Ghost Network for online ebook

Bailey says

I have complicated feelings about this. The premise is great, and the story, when focused on the characters and the mystery, is excellent. The story of Molly Metropolis is wonderful, and the created history is interesting.

However, the format of the book (Disabato filling in the manuscript for her deceased mentor, Cyrus K. Archer) allows her to extend tangents well beyond the point of interest (for me, at least). I feel confident that now I know which niche interests take up space in Disabato's mind.

For the first 100 or so pages of this, I wasn't sure if I was going to abandon it or not. The last 100 pages or so made me want to finish it. There are some extended philosophical explanations in the early half that I found incredibly boring, and could not tell you, after finishing the book, what the Situationists were about, since I ended up skimming most of those sections, waiting for plot. But when the plot arrived, I found it totally great and interesting (not top notch mystery, but Tana French spoils me).

This probably comes in at a 3.5 for me. I liked it, but I thought it could have been more interesting. I think the way it was described to me made it more of a bummer. I was expecting a fun, gritty mystery about a missing pop star and Chicago's train system, but this is a lot more winding and philosophical. I liked it, but I didn't love it.

Jenna Harrison says

You are either a fiction book or you are not. You either want to include the "information/cite" or yo don't. None of the cites added to the narrative. It went on tirades of information that did not move the plot or explain the motives. Why put websites in the footnotes if they don't exist. If you are going to take the extra step take it all the way, make the website/facebook post. It was a total disappointment I had to force myself to finish.

Blair says

Enormous fun - a faux-academic text/true crime account, replete with footnotes, about the disappearance of a fictional pop star, that takes numerous detours into various ideas, conspiracies, and subplots. It's ostensibly the story of Molly Metropolis (a very Lady Gaga-esque figure) going missing, closely followed by a fan who was looking for her, music journalist Caitlin Taer, but it spins off into an exploration of situationism, psychogeography, and Chicago's public transport system. Admittedly the examination of such concepts is all very surface-level, but it's still clear the book has aspirations towards something more complex than a conspiracy thriller. These diversions and the obvious riffs on real celebrities' images are themselves a demonstration of the oft-referenced situationist concept of *détournement*, while the titular ghost network is, unexpectedly, a map of every possible permutation of 'the L', Chicago's elevated railway - real, proposed, and imagined. *The Ghost Network* itself is supposed to be an existing book, written about the mysteries of

Metropolis and Taer by an English professor named Cyrus Archer, found and edited by a fictionalised version of Catie Disabato after *his* disappearance. It's all very meta - this-within-this-within-this. It's also completely absorbing, addictive, funny and wonderfully energetic.

I'm not really sure the book will reach its perfect audience while being described as 'Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* for adults' - that's pretty wide of the mark; while it frequently talks about Tumblr fan culture, etc, readers who loved *Fangirl* won't necessarily want to read a book that goes on about a) Guy Debord and b) trains for pages at a time. Amy hit the nail on the head much more accurately with her comment on my rating - 'a little bit Scarlett Thomas, a little bit Marisha Pessl'. Like Pessl's *Night Film*, this is a clue-driven, conspiracy-laden adventure that revolves around an invented pop-culture figure. Like Thomas's fiction, it touches on a lot of big ideas while remaining entirely accessible, light in tone and fun to read.

I'd been eagerly awaiting this since reading an extract - the epilogue and first chapter - in Penguin Random House's Spring 2015 Debut Fiction Sampler. That sample was so good that I ended up buying *The Ghost Network* on the day it came out and reading the entire thing that same day. The rest of it maybe didn't quite live up to the opening - but that's mainly because I wished it had been (and think it easily could have been) twice the length - and it's not as good as *Night Film*, which has a similar-ish premise. But it's still by far the best new book I have read this year.

Book Riot Community says

I have so many feels about this book. (Are we allowed to still say "feels" in 2015? Ah, who cares! I have them.) Any book that takes me this long to read because the fictional elements blend so seamlessly with the actual historical anecdotes that I end up lost on Wikipedia reading about the too-crazy-to-believe-it-was-real-life reality is going to be one of my lifetime favorites. Combine that with LGBTQIA main characters and a pop-culture laden plot and I am completely and totally 100% smitten.

I was hooked from page one with Disabato's writing which manages to make a story that includes subversive political revolutionaries, obscure secret societies, very contemporary pop culture, and a gripping mystery all blend together in a beautiful, mind-bending tale. There were times I could feel the influence of Hunter S. Thompson, other times Dan Brown, in her storytelling. Her writing is contemporary, and the book is not shy about carving out its very specific niche in time, but this book is destined to become a new classic. I can feel it in my bones. *The Ghost Network* has just the right balance of romance, mystery, and social commentary.
–Brandi Bailey

from The Best Books of 2015 So Far: <http://bookriot.com/2015/07/08/the-be...>

lp says

Sounded promising but ended up being a huge drag, very un-fun and annoying. Oh my god, holy shit was it bad.

Jessica says

I can not even begin to describe how awful this book was. First I will give the props it deserves. It was well written, lots of facts. The author really gives you exactly what she intends. She wants to give you a book that felt real, that made you want to look up on the internet to see if perhaps this work of fiction you were sure was fiction, might just not be so fictional after all. She does that. She achieves her goal....but that is all she does. I hated this book. It was less story and more just a bunch of facts that could be interesting if it was about something real but who wants to know all the intimate details of secrets organizations that do not exist. The book is suppose to be about a missing pop star and a girl who went missing while looking for her. It ends up being more about the reason the pop star disappears in the first place. I swear by the end of the book I wanted to throw it against the wall and don't even get me started on the epilogue. Thank goodness this book was so short. I don't think I would have made it though if it was any longer.

Trashy Dreams says

At first I was into it. The whole larger-than-life-pop-star-goes-missing thing was fun enough and kept me engaged for the first hundred pages or so.

Then I got a little lost trying to keep track of all the “Situationist” mythology and the consistently growing cast of characters with silly names. But I was still sort of enjoying it, so I kept reading.

Towards end, I felt like every paragraph read something like this:

“Nix and Taer thought Molly didn’t like Nix even though Ali said that Peaches thought Molly said Nix was cool. Berliner makes a pop culture reference, and Peaches looked at Molly who didn’t exactly trust Berliner, but Peaches and Taer have been really close to Molly ever since Nix first met her.”

It was like reading a transcript of some annoying girl who gossips too much about dumb shit. I couldn’t help thinking “shut up and just tell me what really happened.”

Props for the clever layout (footnotes, Youtube and news article links (even though none of them are real)) and for the whole world building thing. The Ghost Network has lots of neat ideas, and it wasn’t a bad execution, I just don’t think it was for me.

Jessica Woodbury says

There have been novels that mask themselves as nonfiction (kind of like mockumentary films) for a long time, but the genre has never really taken off. This book shows a lot of the pros and cons that come with this style.

The subject matter--a Lady-Gaga-esque pop star who disappears--doesn't require this kind of format, but it's not a bad choice when you have a character who's heavily invested in research. Especially if it's obscure art and philosophy and cartography, like you have here. When your plot is bound up in much that feels academic, it makes sense to use this kind of narrative device.

THE GHOST NETWORK has a strong start and a strong finish, though the middle can feel like it loses the narrative quite often. Catie Disabato, according to the book, is not the actual author but is picking up after the death of the original author, her mentor. This device, where Disabato will occasionally show up in a footnote to comment, works very well sometimes but could be used a lot more.

The academic elements of the novel never quite gel. It all seems rather nonsensical for much of the book, and it seems even stranger that the pop star, Molly Metropolis, and her entourage and a journalist and the author of the book and Disabato all get so entranced by this information.

On the other hand, amidst the philosophy and history, there's the story of Molly's disappearance and the people who decide to find her. This story often feels much more like a novel than a work of nonfiction, since so many of the romantic and sexual relationships are outlined in the kind of detail that doesn't have much to do with the main plot.

It's choppy and uneven, but I still found myself very happy with it at the end once I'd made it through the middle. It's certainly ambitious and unusual and for that alone it deserves a lot of attention.

Natalie says

Framed in the style of an academic treatise, this book tells the story of the disappearance of Molly Metropolis, world-famous pop star, and the people who get lost trying to find her.

The concept of this book is really interesting, and I love books that are told in an unconventional fashion but *The Ghost Network* just got caught up in dull tangents on, for example, the invented philosophy that fascinates Molly. I think this book would have been much more engaging if it had actually shown the documents that the fictional academic who "wrote" the book had pulled from, rather than using a rather reserved writing style that made me feel like there was a glass wall between the characters and the reader and significantly decreased the reader's investment in the characters' fate.

Ultimately, a bit of a disappointment.

Rachel says

My reading of this book could be charted as a sharp swing up and then a slow and sad decline. On the one hand, yes, this is ingenious, original, and full of exciting notions - a missing pop star, psychogeography, a true crime thriller hiding in a novel - but I think it collapsed under its own promise. I was waiting for the big reveal, the pay-off after all this meticulous research, fake or not. But the book sort of just ended. A good book, but not as good as I'd hoped.

Jessica says

I don't know whose bright idea it was to describe this as "*Fangirl* for adults," because that is absolutely one of the most misguided comparisons I can imagine. That's like watching *Inception* and describing it as *The Breakfast Club* for adults. They're not really the same thing at all, except that they're both stories told in the

same medium. Just wildly different stories, that's all.

So if you came to this book expecting an adult version of *Fangirl*, you are going to be incredibly disappointed. That's a breezy young adult novel about anxiety and romance; this is dense, slow-moving metafiction at its meta-iest. Marisha Pessl's fans are way, way more likely to enjoy this than Rainbow Rowell's (the basics of the plot are really quite similar to *Night Film*, only this version is a lot shorter and less sinister).

In early 2010, pop star Molly Metropolis disappeared without a trace while on tour in Chicago. A few months later, Caitlin Taer disappeared while she was with her girlfriend -- Molly's former personal assistant -- and a man who had been Molly's friend. Cyrus Archer began looking into the connection between these two disappearances and *The Ghost Network* is written as the long-form journalism piece that resulted from his investigation. The introduction explains how a fictionalized editor version of author Catie Disabato came into possession of Archer's work, and the book is peppered with her footnotes. Archer's main piece of evidence is Taer's journals, which revealed the young woman's love for Molly Metropolis and her desire to find the missing pop star.

So this is a fake nonfiction piece about a journalist looking for a young woman who was looking for another young woman.

Things get pretty dense pretty quickly, as Disabato/Archer explains how Taer became involved with Molly's assistant and friend, and how both missing women became fascinated with a (fictional) group that was trying to pay homage to a (real-life) philosophical movement called Situationism. There's a lot of info dumping here that tries to explain Situationism's history and beliefs, and I'm not sure I even begin to accurately explain the layers upon layers of investigation, philosophy, secrecy, and conspiracy theory that gets folded in. A lot of readers will be turned off by the info dumping, and that's totally fair. I occasionally found myself struggling to remember who knew what when amidst all the philosophical discussions, especially if I was coming back to the book after some time away. In that regard, it's not always the most rewarding read but the basic mystery of the book -- what happened to Molly and did the same thing happen to Taer -- is still engaging enough that I had to keep going, even if I didn't completely grasp the Situationism stuff. And I loved Disabato's use of the multilayered meta structure. The kind of weird, wannabe-Utopian ideas contained inside really scream out for that kind of storytelling and it's used to great effect here.

I highly recommend this book for readers interested in experimental fiction and underground societies doing their underground thing. If you're looking for an adult version of *Fangirl*, however, maybe try something a little more like *Where'd You Go Bernadette* ?

Joe says

This book is mostly ok but if you're going to write a book about popular music, get your facts straight. There was one glaring error a little over half way through that caused me to quit reading. Early David Bowie is the late 60s/early 70s not the early 80s and Ziggy Stardust is most definitely not "synth pop." Sorry, I couldn't keep reading, there are too many books out there.

Brenda Shields says

~review by j~

This wasn't my cup of tea. I got too lost in the extra facts the author threw in. And the ending. It. Was. Terrible. All of that adventure for THAT ending? I don't want to spoil anything, but the ending of the last chapter certainly had me wondering why I bothered to finish reading the epilogue, where you find the real ending. And I feel like the Sable Island thread wasn't wrapped up as neatly as the others. It was really well written, I just ended up losing myself in the fact dumps the author threw in and hating the ending. I mean, if you're up to learning all about stuff the seemingly doesn't apply to the story, then this is the book for you. If not, don't read this book.

~review by j~

Ashley says

I wanted to love this book - its description piqued my interest as a puzzling plot that would tap a Westing Game vein. Instead, The Ghost Network is an homage to the amount of research Disabato did on a seemingly obscure French philosophy. Why Disabato is interested in Situationist theory, I don't know, but the book reads very much as though it's her fascination we're following and not really Molly's.

The journalistic approach Disabato takes is uneven - her footnotes are sometimes presented academically and are sometimes personal commentary. And the "onion approach" of Diabato rereading Cyrus' preliminary manuscript that followed Nix and Taer and Berliner's story following Molly's story is overly complicated and anesthetic. Somehow the novel aims to make you passionate about a moldering French philosophy instead of the people (whose passion for said philosophy seems shoehorned into them rather than organically expressed).

The relationship between Taer and Nix is the closest you'll get to humanity; Berliner has a few moments, but operates in a rather cultish fervor like droid under the influence of the incarcerated Kraus.

I'm sure there are people who thought this book was smart and meta and intricate, but I just found it forced, overly proud of its own intellectual angle, full of dry-as-dirt research and characters that never quite authentically embraced that philosophy other than the way the author shellacked it on top of them.

Stacia says

I've read good reviews of this book but once I started reading it, I had a love/hate relationship with it. It's too gimmicky & I'm just plain tired of modern books that have too many product placement mentions in them. (I'm looking at you, Girl with the Dragon Tattoo series; Where'd You Go, Bernadette?; and even Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore.) Sure, sometimes the product mentions fit the story, but they were well-overused in the 75 pages I read in this particular book. The concept sounded neat, but I found the writing clunky & repetitive. Pynchon can pull weird, disparate, & modern things together for a rollicking read & this isn't that. Not by a long shot. Oh well. Not my style, though reviews seem to suggest that it would certainly be liked by many. Giving up w/out finishing & returning this one to the library.

