



We are Wormwood

Autumn Christian

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Ever since she was a child, Lily has been pursued by a demonic girl with wormwood eyes.

As Lily struggles with her schizophrenic mother's decline into insanity, the death of her somnambulist childhood love, and her own painful, disturbed adolescence, she must face the strange girl that haunts her.

Yet something is chasing her that is much more dangerous.

A darkly surreal, drug-coated romance, *We are Wormwood* tells an inhuman love story, and the transformation that results from affection among monsters.

We are Wormwood Details


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From Reader Review We are Wormwood for online ebook

maraluce addams says

After a long morning of various work it seemed like a good time to start with *We Are Wormwood*. I'd just read a chapter or two, I thought. Eventually everything else I had planned to do that day dropped out of my mind. I couldn't stop reading until I had finished. It sank its demonic claws into me and it was divine. I already knew it would be good of course, but goddamn. Autumn has outdone herself. At times it was so beautiful that I had to cry. Three days later and I'm still under its spell.

There are so many things I loved in this novel that I hardly know where to begin. I suppose the most obvious thing would be the relationship between Lily and the demon. It's dark and twisted, but also a great, passionate romance. It's interesting to see how love transforms Lily too. The way it ended was fantastic. Another thing I loved was how 'reality', dreams, and hallucinations blended into each other. A lot of times it isn't clear what is actually happening, but, like one of the characters says: "Reality has nothing to do with this. Focus on the real issue." I adore stories with this sort of unreliable narration, making you question everything. And speaking of the characters, they were all really interesting. They were one of the many things that kept me scrolling through the pages.

Then there's the writing itself. To put it simply: it's poetry in prose form. I probably shouldn't say that as a comparative literature student, but I can think of no better way to describe it. Autumn can write about the most seemingly horrific things in a way that makes them desirable. She makes the ugly beautiful. Some parts I highlighted:

"In the middle of the night we toss in our dirty bed. Someone's burned us bad, and we're sick with the stench of cheap drugs. I grasp your fingers, sweating.

Then we sink.

We hold each other as we sink through the floor and miles of strata, until we arrive at a grand hall. It's the land of the gods. When we rise we shake off those bad drugs and sweat. We realize why we struggle and shake, why we've become losers and deadbeats and grifters and junkies. That world above didn't belong to us. We were curious fools; we wanted clean air when we could've been breathing jewels.

But now we can go home.

My throne is waiting for me, and as I walk toward it, my blood turns into wet rubies."

"[...] I could be the first scientist to float to the edge of the cosmos, picking up planets in my gravity. Maybe beyond the trees I'd find Wormwood. I could chart a new course there and back. I would give its poison to every punk girl, loser, and child murderess, and its secrets could no longer harm us.

And when I opened my mouth, I could swallow the world, cover continents in my saliva. I'd breathe new colors onto the dirty, polluted waters."

The form was also surprisingly experimental at times. The play halfway through the novel, and the following letter from Lily to the demon, were really well done.

And the myths! I love ancient Greek and Nordic myths and I love how they were incorporated into the story. Adds more to its beauty and depth.

This novel cemented Autumn Christian's place as one of my favourite living writers.

What are you still doing reading this unprofessional review? Go read the novel already.

Alexander Crommich says

We are Wormwood doesn't deal in certainty or easy answers, and it doesn't offer the reader a clean, straightforward resolution. What it does do is take the reader on a journey through a surreal world where the prevalence of madness, drug abuse, and supernatural events makes it impossible to have a tidy perception of what reality actually is. Tying it all together is Lily, a troubled young woman fighting for self-realization. It's a dark story, but one that has a genuinely uplifting ending. More importantly, the writing is absolutely phenomenal. I mean it in the best way possible when I say this book knocked me on my ass.

There are only two problems with the book that bear mentioning. The first is its scope. Although it focuses on Lily, so much of questionable reality happens frequently enough that it's difficult, as a reader to properly orient yourself. This isn't necessarily a bad thing because it really helps put the reader in the same position as the characters and thus makes it much easier to empathize.

The downside is that you can never quite tell what the ultimate goal is. Lily is always aiming at a moving target, and for a good portion of the book she's driven more by the need to escape her past and deny what's happening to and around her than she is to take action. Again, I don't want to say this is a bad thing so much as it requires a reader to be comfortable with disorientation, and once Lily takes control and figures out what it is she's fighting for, her previous uncertainty makes it that much more satisfying.

Second, this book isn't for everyone. The writing is fantastic, but it doesn't yield its secrets easily. If you want a narrative that's neatly laid out and lets you gallop along on a straightforward adventure, this book just isn't for you. If, however, you want to read something that'll draw you in, play with your head, and leave your brooding every time you set it down, it's up your alley. Throughout the book, what's actually happening is always open to question. There's no correct answer, just the one that you supply which seems best to you.

Now, on to the good stuff. The writing itself is fantastic. Ms. Christian has a great deal of talent, and each scene, independent of the rest of the book, is a pleasure to read. In a way, reading through the book is like walking through an art gallery that's been well planned, each painting seamlessly setting the next one up. I enjoyed the story, and I loved the way I never quite had a firm grasp on what was happening, but had there been no plot the word candy alone would have been a pleasure to read.

Although I loved the writing, what really made the book was how well Ms. Christian presented her characters. They're all strange, intriguing people that could, in the hands of the wrong author, have been too bizarre for the reader to relate to. Fortunately, Ms. Christian presents them as people. Bafflingly strange people at times, but for the most part people the reader can empathize with.

Also, there's genuine warmth to the way she writes her characters. I wanted to see Lily succeed because I cared about her, not because I hated the villain or because I wanted to see how the story turned out. Honestly, it didn't matter to me how it ended, as long as Lily was happy. It's difficult to make a reader truly care about a character and what happens to them, but Ms. Christian repeatedly managed to make me do so.

The book also has an uplifting slant. It's a frantic, grim novel that earnestly deals with drug abuse, madness, abandonment, suicide, and things dreamed up in nightmares. Despite that, once Lily finds what it is she wants and needs, she does everything she can to keep it. Despite all that's happened to her, she still dares to

hope. There are a lot of books that try to be dark and end up grinding reader down, but this book is genuinely grim while at the same time maintaining enough hope to keep you going. It's a difficult balance to strike, but Ms. Christian manages it well.

The superb writing, the warmth the author writes her characters with, the way she plays around with the reader's perception of reality, and the fact that what's real and what isn't may not even matter at the end of the day, all work together to make for a fascinating novel. Lily is a genuinely enjoyable character, and the world Ms. Christian weaves is bizarre and intriguing.

To properly enjoy the book, don't read through it as if everything's a metaphor, and don't struggle to connect all of the pieces. Instead, treat it like a good surreal painting. There are themes, and there's a message, but there are also a lot of things there that are unexplainable. If you try to focus on each one, you'll miss the bigger picture. This is the sort of book that you read once, sleep on it, and let the pieces start falling into place in the back of your mind until you form your own interpretation of what happened. And be sure, you'll need to form your own. The author presents a world of intriguing possibilities and leaves it for the reader to work out what's what.

This book is going to take you down the rabbit hole deeper than you anticipate, and when it spits you out the other side you may not know what the devil just happened. But you will know you had a damned good time getting there.

Talisha Walton says

This was one of the most deeply disturbing book I've ever read and I'm simply fascinated by it to say the least. It left me wondering, wth did I just finish reading. I simply loved it...smh.

Rab Fulton says

We are Wormwood by American author Autumn Christian, is a beautifully crafted modern fairy tale journey through humanity's bleak machine. It is never resolved whether the demons and magical forces the narrator Lily struggles against are real or imaginary. But it soon becomes clear that the issue is not what is real to Lily, it is how she is treated by the world around her, whether it is her storytelling mother, school mates, mental health workers, paramedics and neighbours. As she negotiates her way through all this, as well as fighting and rescuing and fucking demons and monsters, the author pushes the tale onwards with incredible re-imaginings of Nordic and classical folk lore. For all that this story is set in the 21st century - with flashes of sci-fi, digital gaming and abrupt theatre pieces worthy of Poland's 'Teatr A Part' - it is first and foremost a beautiful, haunting, terrifying and timeless fairy tale.

Hollie DeFrancisco says

I've been waiting a long time to get a moment to read this book and when Miss Christian sent me a copy I found I could no longer put it off...

It isn't often that I actually take the time to write reviews for the books I read. Rarely do I ever find one that

merits my time or my words, but this book is brilliant. If you are looking for something that is truly haunting, eerie, and beautiful, this book is it. This book ripped my heart out, chucked it around and put it back upside down. Not only is the writing style gorgeous and interesting, but the story itself is incredible. Miss Christian tells us the story line at the start, and I don't know about anyone else, but it took me awhile to figure that out. Her story is so intricately woven that it folds in on itself and starts eating its' own tale. Ouroboros anyone? Miss Christian gave a story to the world that almost didn't feel like a story. There was no spoon feeding, no gentle hand holding, no guide to walk us through. She left us to trudge through her broken needles and discarded glass, to follow Lily through her own personal rabbit hole and back out again, only to throw us in once more. This story weaves in and out so much, it truly takes on a glorious dreamscape feel. It is my personal opinion that what Miss Christian has crafted is nothing short of art. Thank you for sharing it with the world. I certainly look forward to future works!

Zoeytron says

The intensity of this author's prose is staggering. Beautiful, yet hideous. Way past being dark, it is insanity on acid. I felt uncomfortable reading it.

Look for a nurse with a face that resembles a child's crayon smear, spider children, a birthday dress made entirely of insects, carnivorous plants gone wild, a demon girl, and a very disturbed artist. These images do not even scratch the surface of what is living in these pages.

Although I got a little more than I bargained for with this one, the author's talent cannot be denied.

Tracie McBride says

In "We Are Wormwood," Autumn Christian touches on some themes from her previous works, "A Gentle Hell" and "The Crooked God Machine". They include insanity and the criteria by which it is defined, and the inability of flawed parents to protect their offspring from a hostile world. It's a disturbing novel that relies on surreal imagery and a pervading sense of nihilism to provide the horror.

Lily's world is at once filled with dizzyingly imaginative vistas of madness, and relentlessly claustrophobic in its bleakness. At times I just wanted to claw my way out of the novel and breathe, which is, I imagine, much how Lily felt about her life. The parts that I found most compelling were told by outsiders looking in – the bonus short story at the end told from Phaedra's perspective, the all-too-brief view through an unnamed driver's eyes after picking up a hitchhiking Lily, and the beginning, which is told by the not-yet-corrupted child Lily and which felt the most reliable of all the facets of Lily's narration.

You'll read this phrase often in reviews of Autumn's work – "This is not for everyone." (but then, what is?) If you want a happy ending, fluffy bunnies (or fluffy anything) that do not suffer some gruesome fate, or a light, disposable and undemanding read, then step away from the e-reader now. If you want lush and beautifully crafted prose, a story that will challenge what you think you know or believe, a story that might even make you a little ill (but never in a gratuitous way), then you might just have found your new favourite author.

(A double disclosure: The author provided me with an electronic copy of the novel for review purposes. And Dark Continents Publishing, of which I am a director, published the author's short story collection "A Gentle Hell".)

Sara says

I am speechless.

I've sat at this computer for a half hour, my fingers posed to write a review, contemplating what to say and how to say it. I still don't know how to write how I feel. This book is incredible yet terrible. Terrifying yet comforting. I was (and still am) mesmerized by Autumn Christian's writing and her ability to weave intricate, descriptive worlds and characters and make them seem so real and so horrifying. I felt insane while reading this, and I suppose that is the point. Insanity is not glamorized here. It is realistic, terrifying, and uncomfortable to read. But in a way, it's beautiful. Lily's delusions are beautiful and dark, and the fact that she's an unreliable narrator makes you question reality and imagination.

This book is not for the faint of heart, but if you're looking for a story that will suck you in and leave you mesmerized, look no further.

Jeremy Maddux says

In a year where we saw Carlton Mellick achieve his most poignant and touching Bizarro offering to date in Quicksand House, the energetic resurgence of Garrett Cook with Murderland and Time Pimp, the emergence of Jordan Krall's cadre of rebel authors at Dynatox Ministries and Stephen King dropping in on Danny Torrance as an adult with Doctor Sleep, I still choose We Are Wormwood as my personal pick for Best Book of the Year!

Surreal Grotesque loyalists will no doubt remember the interview I conducted with the elegant enigma that is Autumn Christian in the June issue. There, she demonstrated a fierce intelligence and an eagerness to explore thematic topics both in her own work and the world at large. This long awaited (on my part) follow up to 2010's The Crooked God Machine finds her delving even deeper into the stark realm of human fragility, which is really a testament to her talent considering that on her first sojourn, she took us on a shuttle to Hell and into a soggy swampland abyss inhabited by the bones of dead children.

Yes, the only author I feel qualified to proclaim 'Stranger than Bizarro' is back with a haunting masterpiece which, at its heart, is about relationships, how much trust and faith we are willing to put into another being, and how seldom those gifts are reciprocated. It begins with young Lily living in a house filled with spiders, pillbugs and beetles. It is the Year of Poison. She lives with her mother, who carries a gazelle skull and votive candles around, weaving stories so wonderful that even Lily's school invites her as a guest speaker on occasion. But Lily's mother is not well. She sometimes shows her other face, The Exorcist, with eyes scratched like lightning. The Exorcist is necessary, as she tells Lily, to protect them from the Nightcatcher. So We Are Wormwood begins.

There is a haunting use of language, a verbosity that pulsates right off the page and into your imagination. Some examples:

"We will always kill dragons together."

`There'd been the gardener with the cracked-chasm lips, whispering "drugs" in my ear like a love story.'

"He held the back of my neck like a mother wolf as I bent and snorted cocaine from a piece of broken mirror."

"But it was not God like you would imagine him, some kindly bearded old man with big bare feet sitting on a white throne next to white Jesus. This was a god of Technicolor vomit, noise, hissing spit, and fluttering wings. And when I asked him the meaning of life, he could do nothing but screech."

And my personal favorite: "I used to talk to God," Cignus said. "I thought he could hear me."

Nowhere else will you find characters such as Saint Peter, Arachne and a demon painted so plausibly and endearingly. Autumn Christian's worlds come alive with lush and vibrant metaphors and a striking attention to language. She rarely uses the same word twice. Her characters are all tragic figures, forced to act out their parts on the stage of a nihilistic passion play, and the audience already knows how it ends. They remain to see how they get there. There is no one else who can do what Autumn does.

Matthew Vaughn says

There are a few books I've read that defy genre, ask me where they belong and I could not tell you. Books like *Ash Cinema* by Edward Rathke and *Feast of Oblivion* by John Myers remind me of *We are Wormwood* in that way and others (disclaimer: these books have nothing in common other than the way they made me feel while reading them.). Books like these make me want to put aside the 80's B movie influenced stories I write and really create something that can make an impact on someone. With some parts Bizarro, some fantasy and quite a bit horrific, this book is romantic as much as it is tragic.

The story centers around Lily, at first a child then a young adult. We get to see the life she thinks she has with her mother as it becomes the life she actually has with her mother. Autumn Christian does a great job showing that child like sense of hanging on a parents every word, the belief that what they say is the complete truth. But with her mother's mental illness it makes it that more tragic, and that much harder for Lily as she grows up. Once she's older, she sees the things her mother always said to her in a different light. As a young adult she leans more towards her mother's mental illness as the reason things were the way they were. The demon with the Wormwood eyes, Saga and the Exorcist, are they real, or figments of a broken mind? Lily can't help but worry that she, too, will suffer with schizophrenia just like her mother.

Between stories and dreams, drugs and hallucinations, it's difficult to tell what may be reality to Lily. Christian's voice is extremely effective at this. Along the way, we meet an eccentric cast of characters such as Cignus the artist, his sister Saint Peter, and Lily's friend Phaedra, who gets a little light shown on her background with a short story at the end of the book. As the drugs became more intense, Lily and some of these companions take a road trip to escape the Nightcatcher, but no one can run forever.

Christian has a poetic style that is almost beyond me. Her words straddle a fence to another language I wouldn't be able to comprehend were they to fall on the wrong side. It has cemented this book towards the top of my list for best books I've ever read. I look forward to jumping into something else she has written.

I don't believe I have read another author who writes quite like Autumn Christian, and that is not a bad thing

at all.

Donald Armfield says

“We Are Wormwood” is a hallucinogenic love story told in dream sequences that bend reality for the girl called Lily. Following her through her beaten lifestyle and corrupted paths you fall in love yourself with her grotesque body modifications and dirty skin.

Christian’s unique prose is darkly spruced and grown into its own genre.

“ It took seeing my heart torn out, pulsating on the stone dais in front of me, to realize this ritual embedded into my DNA.”

This book has become one of my all-time favorites and I can only imagine what Autumn Christian’s book “The Crooked God Machine” has in store for me.

“Maybe beyond the trees I’d find Wormwood”

Highly Recommend!

Bob Milne says

While I always regret shelving a title as DNF, I really feel bad about We are Wormwood. There's absolutely no doubt that Autumn Christian has a plethora of talent displayed upon the page here. In terms of narrative, she has a way with words that is fluid, lyrical, and absolutely dense with imagery. This is the kind of book where you can pour over each paragraph, pick it apart, and find something even darker and more magical in the construction.

The problem is, it's one of those books that (for me, at least) falls into the dreaded 'admire it, but didn't enjoy it' category. That's likely a bit unfair to Christian, and I really hope it doesn't sway anybody else's decision about giving this a read, but it does reflect where my head is at. I've got a lot of sorrow and more stress than you can imagine in my life right now, and I'm looking for entertainment . . . for excitement . . . for escapism.

As much as I appreciate the technical skill with which Christian has built her narrative, the struggle to connect with the plot was just too much to keep me fully engaged to the end. It's a shame, but even after a month of third, fourth, and fifth chances, it's just not something that's working for me right now. Honestly, I do suspect this is an exceptional book, and for those with the patience and curiosity to unravel its strands I wish you all the best.

Janie C. says

mythology woven in dream sigils, echolalia and euphoria encrypted upon black feathers. shadow mitosis and final, sweet synthesis. the hush place eclipses stark walls and finds you on your dais. enter the

membrane. kekeke.

Kristin says

Beautiful and bizarre and haunting and horrifying.

In *We Are Wormwood*, we find our protagonist, Lily, attempting to deal with her mother's schizophrenia in the only ways she knows how, while trying, and failing miserably, to keep herself from spiralling down in much the same way. The imagery throughout the book was dark, as one might expect from a novel of this nature - skull masks, cloaks of stars, a dress made of insects, spider children, and other singularly disturbing depictions. The story is told from Lily's viewpoint, so you feel as though you are travelling with her, in her head, and falling down the rabbit hole, as it were. Reality and hallucination become interchangeable and indistinguishable from one another for Lily, and, at times, the reader. Intense beyond almost anything I've read to this point. Well done.

Phillip III says

“And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood.” Revelations 8:10-11

I came across *We Are Wormwood* by Autumn Christian on Amazon. It had been free. It looked ... good. I downloaded it onto my Nook. I wasn't sure what to expect exactly. *wormwood*

The synopsis on the back of the book reads: Ever since she was a child, Lily has been pursued by a demonic girl with wormwood eyes. As Lily struggles with her schizophrenic mother's decline into insanity, the death of her somnambulist childhood love, and her own painful, disturbed adolescence, she must face the strange girl that haunts her. Yet something is chasing her that is much more dangerous. A darkly surreal, drug-coated romance, *We are Wormwood* tells an inhuman love story, and the transformation that results from affection among monsters.

Christian has a way of writing that kept me turning pages. To call this novel a fantasy, would be an injustice. To call it horror, would not be accurate. To say that the story is about mental illness, just doesn't fit. There is no pigeon-holing the work. It blurs lines, and crosses genres.

We follow Lily from the age of six, until she is in her teens. At first, the child lives with her mother. This would be the part of the book I might describe as a fantasy novel. The characters are everywhere. The Exorcist and Saga. Telling stories to children, and killing creatures, and running and hiding from beings. It's about bugs. Spiders. Insects.

Of course, Lily gets older. She sees things differently as a young teen. She has friends. Her friends are a mess. Phaedra is in love with plants that eat things. Venus Fly Traps. And there is Charlie, who feels never good enough and beats himself with whips. The things kids do, the things said, the emptiness felt and shared. Guilt becomes a character at this point, and it festers. It thrives. It racks Lily, and shakes her, and threatens to kill her, but it also is buried, although always there, and always constant.

Drugs become vital. Lily gets lost in them. Her fears are real. She does not want to wind up like her mother, but fears the curse has been passed down and that there is no escape. An unhealthy relationship with Cignus, the artist, leads her to Saint Peter --Cignus' sister, and eventually The Witch. And always, the drugs are there. Real. Itching, demanding attention.

It is the Demon that Lily sees, and follows, and leads. It is about confronting The Nightcatcher. It's out there. It wants her. It has always wanted her. Threatened her. Destroying Lily since, perhaps, the day she was born. Lily must find the answers, get away from herself and discover who she is.

This is the horror aspect of it. Every page Christian writes is scary. Descriptive and off-the-wall. Where none of it makes any sense, but it all makes sense. Nightmares and realities blend. They live, and breathe and chase you.

I have no words to describe the novel I just read, other than breathtaking. Beautiful and sad. It was compelling and startling. It was about pain and anguish. And guilt. I read it in two sittings. Hated setting the Nook down, hated being taken away from the story even for a moment. I didn't want to know what happened next. I needed to know what happened next. I felt like I was part of Lily's journey, a witness to her pain and suffering . . . and for an author to put me in that seat --the seat of a witness, a caring and silent character in such a complex and four-dimensional story, screams talent. Screams it.

We Are Wormwood was memorizing. I'd never heard of Christian Autumn, but I can tell you this --I will never forget her. How her work . . . hit me. Hit a nerve with me. She is someone to watch. I know I'll be keeping a finger on the pulse of her career. I don't want to miss a word she writes!

Phillip Tomasso
Author of The Vaccination Trilogy
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