



Strungballs

Mike Russell

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Strungballs is an extraordinary novella from Strange Books author Mike Russell. What are Strungballs? Ten-year-old Sydney is about to find out... but first he must have a cube of his flesh removed. Sydney will transgress everything he was taught to believe in when he embarks upon a journey that will reveal the astonishing secrets hidden by the red balls on white strings known only as... Strungballs. Inspiring, liberating, otherworldly, magical, surreal, bizarre, funny, disturbing, unique... all of these words have been used to describe the stories of Mike Russell. Remember: Once a Strungball is inserted it must never be removed.

Strungballs Details

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Author : Mike Russell

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From Reader Review Strungballs for online ebook

Jason says

One thing I can say about this book is that it has helped me to understand this song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2R0oE...>

I have no understanding of what I've just read, it is one wild journey that is totally bananas. It starts off as potentially being a very interesting dystopian, then Mike Russell starts messing with infinity and there are giants and breast feeding and that was me lost.

It is a brilliant novel from a mind full of madness, go give it a read.

Catherine says

Thank you to the author for providing me a copy in exchange for an honest review :)

Goosebumps meets Adam and Eve is the best way I can think of to describe this. This author lives up to his theme of strangeness in every book. It has a dystopian feel to it, where the main character, Sydney, is living in this city that revolves around Strungballs—a little ball on a string that attaches to your body after a piece of flesh is taken from you and placed on the ‘Sphere of Flesh’. Are you grossed out yet, because I was.

These Strungballs have value in the society—the more you have, the more you are working for the greater good and therefore have higher status. The story starts off with 10 year old Sydney getting his first Strungball, and he is living in ignorant bliss. As the story progresses, he begins to wonder what the purpose is and if he can survive without them and he goes on the pursuit to find out. There was also this really weird element of procreation near the end which is where the Adam and Eve relation comes in. Honestly one of the strangest things I have ever read, but I would recommend it for anyone who likes dystopian novels, sci-fi, or quick and odd reads!

Julia says

Well what can I say? That was one of the most surreal stories I've ever read, but that made it all the more enjoyable. I don't know if it was supposed to be symbolic or metaphorical or just plain weird. Either way, this is a good short read. I look forward to reading more of Mike Russell's work.

I received this book as part of the Goodreads giveaway

stefansbooks says

3.25/5??s

I still have to make my mind up for this one. I don't know what to say about it yet....

Ruty B says

What are strungballs? is what we all want to know once we start to read this book. As all Mike's books, Strungballs is a mind-blowing experience. It's an experience that leaves you feeling uncomfortable or just awkward in your own body.

It all starts with Sydney who lives in this almost too perfect, where everything is has an exact measure and it has an order. The people in this world only do "what is good" and their only goal is to have strungballs and work for a system they believe is perfect. Of course, Sydney meets someone who makes him ask himself "why?".

The moment Sydney stars to question why strungballs are necessary or what is their true purpose and he decides that follow blindly is not ok, normal doesn't have to be the rule... well, the world crumbles and the story gets crazier.

The story is really short (only 60-something pages) but it's powerful and well written. I love Mike's writing and his work is full of fiction and crazy ideas but if you look deep down maybe things are not as crazy as they seem.

I really enjoyed it, if you like sci-fi, crazy stories or just short readings you should try this one.

*** I received a complimentary copy in exchange for an honest review. ***

Whispering Stories says

Sydney lives in a white sterile world, from the room, to the walls and even the curtains, everything is white.

The book opens with Sydney lying in a 4m x 4m x 4m room, awaiting to have a piece of flesh removed from his chest. When the procedure was done, he exited the room and was presented with a 'Strungball' by his parents. This was placed in the hole that was cut into his chest, with the cord that was attached dangling down the front of his gown. He is warned 'Once a Strungball is inserted it must never be removed'.

The world that the family live in is made up of people always wanting to do good, where numbers and time are very important, and that the more Strungballs you have, the more important you are deemed to be.

At first Sydney loves his Strungball, but then he learns about the 'Others', people who can live without them. He then meets an elderly man, Albert, with lots of Strungballs. Albert puts thoughts into his head, and makes Sydney question his life, so much so, that he removes the 'Strungball', but what will happen to Sydney now?

I found this book very strange, but then that was what the author was hoping for. The story is an interesting one, where people believe that some type of ball inserted into their bodies makes them more superior than those without. It's as if the whole city/world has been brainwashed.

All the residents of the city live in one building, where all the doors are numbered 1-999. The apartments all overlook a life force that is looking after them, and protecting them. This life force is made up of peoples flesh (this is where the pieces of flesh are taken when removed from the residents).

The first half of the book was interesting as we got to know the world, the people and what Strungballs were. The second half got a whole lot weirder as Sydney sets out on a quest to discover the truth about his world. In this half we have inside out giants, trees of veins, giant sex, to name but a few strange things.

The book is interesting, and most positively weird. If you like sci-fi/dystopian novels, then this will appeal to you, and with it only being 66 pages long, you should be able to get through it in one sitting.

Reviewed by Stacey on www.whisperingstories.com

Yesha says

(Note: I received a review copy of this book from the author, in exchange for an honest review. I am glad I got a chance to read this book.)

* 2.5 Stars *

This is very strange and weird book. Honestly, I couldn't get the main concept of the book, Strungballs. It just raised lot of questions after I finished the book.

Characters: Well, only Syndney and Albert were little likable characters in the book because of their uniqueness and ability to think out of box and they made little sense. Everyone else were weird and stereotypical and made no sense, sounded like all were under hypnosis.

What I liked? Beginning of the book was interesting. I was hooked to book till first half of the book. I loved the way author built the world in the book. It gave a good dystopian science-fiction look. All the numerical in the book, the rooms and the time was interesting. I liked the infinity concept in the book it made book very interesting. Second thing I liked was the rebellious nature of Sydney, his ability to oppose what was taught, I mean fighting stereotypical thoughts and rules, and his ability of thinking out of sphere and Strungballs. It taught to think about the greater good and the not the good that was told and accepted by everyone. Even the Anatomy part of the book was fine, it was strange but was okay. I could understand little. What I understood from the whole Anatomy part was- I could guess that this whole city and people were kind of living in cell or something or was like two identical pairs of DNA. But I'm not totally sure. I like author's strange imagination, I haven't come across this kind of strange books.

All stars for these points and author's imagination and writing.

Why 2.5? Mostly I cut stars because I couldn't grasp this following points, it all confused me a lot. May be my imagination is working properly for this book. I don't know!

So, what I didn't understand was- the second half of the book. That white sand part outside the sphere, exactly what place it was! I could understand two person, or whatever it was, produced the new person. But that baby part and baby eating Strungballs! I was lost at this point, and the end of the book, doesn't make any sense. And at the end of everything, it all takes me back to the question I had at the starting of the book, what

the Strungballs was and why people had that at the first place and what just happened at the end! I was thinking and thinking after I finished the book but I couldn't get anything. Book started with very much potential but these things just gave me brain attack. I guess if there was more clarity of all these I could have enjoyed the book.

Overall, it was strange read, unique imagination, but unfortunately not for me.

Read reviews on my blog- Books Teacup and Reviews

Caitlin Guerin says

I don't even know where to start.

Okay – the facts. Strungballs was written by Mike Russell and published by StrangeBooks. This is important information to have. It's important because Strungballs is the strangest book I have ever had the pleasure of reading

Strungballs follows the life of Sydney, a 10 year boy who lives in a weird dystopian future. Past? Alternate Reality? Who Knows! Although Sydney is 10, this short novella is most definitely not for children.

Read the rest of my review of this wacky book here: <http://wp.me/p58pGG-8X>

This was an honest review given in exchange for a book

Stephanie Jane (Literary Flits) says

See more of my book reviews on my blog, Literary Flits

Strungballs is the first of Mike Russell's stories that I have read, but I am pretty sure it won't be the last! On one hand I was genuinely baffled by much of this surreal futuristic tale, however I thoroughly enjoyed discovering the bizarre world he created. Despite an obvious lack of detailed descriptions of place and character that I usually prefer - this is a short novella after all - I could easily envisage the clinical city and Sydney's spartan home as well as understanding and empathising with his parents' actions. After this early point, I guess the key to reading Strungballs is just to go with the flow!

I felt Russell made a strong statement about society's slavish devotion to ingrained ideas. We tend to follow the herd regardless of whether we truly understand what we are doing, why we do so, or the personal price involved. The flesh sphere reminded me of Anais Mitchell's Hadestown wall. Further than this though I can't say, partly for not wanting to prematurely reveal Russell's inventiveness to potential readers and partly because I just really don't know! I could think myself round in circles for hours with this story!

James Lafayette Tivendale says

I received a copy of Strungballs in exchange for an honest review. I would like to thank the author and also, Jay the Strangebooks secretary for this opportunity. This review will contain minor spoilers.

This is a short novella, numbering only 66 pages and when it commences, we are introduced to a young gentleman called Sydney who is in a 4m x 4m x 4m room awaiting an operation. The medical procedure is to have a cube of his flesh removed, this cities initiation into adulthood for the youngsters. He is then gifted a Strungball by Mother and Father for his bravery. This is simply a cube with a red ball on a white string, and the device is inserted into the place where his cube of flesh used to be, leaving the Stungball dangling in front of Sydney's white gown. He has the latest, coolest design and it beaming with pride. He promises to adhere to the Strungball-Rule:

"Once a Strungball is inserted it must never be removed."

The action takes place in an uncomplicated, utopian, science fiction type city full of Strungball advertising posters, where the inhabitants must always "do what is good". The city is a torus corridor containing 999 identical rooms. After room 999, room 1 comes next. Numbers, sizes, and measurements seem important to the cities tenants as well as in the way Russell writes this tale. Everything seems equal and perfect. Their existences seem very routine, such as residents going to work or school daily and like clockwork, and in addition; the aspirations most children have is to either work in the highly respected industries of Strungball sales or a Strungball advertising. This must be this world's equivalent of an actor or footballer. The curtains to Sydney's room are always closed. The city is protected by a barrier that keeps the monsters away so that the citizens can continue living their tranquil existence. All is good - until Sydney meets a gentleman called Albert who makes him question "Why?"

The characters all seem robotic and stereotypical in this city. Like they have been brainwashed. It is no coincidence that the book cover looks like it does. All except Albert, who is the only individual who has doubts and questions this good society and the need to dangle Strungball from their gowns. What does the city need the cubes of flesh for anyway?

The first half of the narrative flows at a steady pace. After this stage through, Sydney starts questioning things and then embarks on a bizarre journey where he encounters a hollow inside out giant, travels through a forest of veins, all whilst contemplating the difference between what is finite and what is infinite. He may also meet one of these fabled monsters on his travels.

Strangebooks is an apt name for this Brighton based indie press, who released this as well as Russell's short story collection *Nothing is Strange*. This was a highly unique, weird and perhaps even mind-altering reading experience which I enjoyed. The second half of the story does descend to another level of peculiar chaos that was sometimes confusing. I had to work hard to follow what was going on when reading towards the conclusion. I would normally rate this 3.5/5 yet, I am rounding it up to 4/5 because it is like nothing I have ever read before.

James
www.youandibooks.wordpress.com

Susan Hampson says

Having already experienced Mike Russell's stories, I began this one with an open mind and smile. I knew before I started reading that it would be like nothing I have read before, even his first book and yep after 66 pages, the entirety of this book, I can say it is unique.

It is only a small world Sydney lives in, it has identical rooms numbered from 1 – 999 which then brings it

back to 1. The rooms are square and the one where I met 10-year-old Sydney very clinical. It had to be he had proudly just had his first cube of flesh removed from his chest. It was for the good of the community. His parents presented him with his first Strungball, which fitted into the hole in his chest, with a string to dangle down so that he and others could see how many cubes of flesh he had given. Everything is fine until Sydney learns of the 'others' and meets the man who has more Strungballs than anyone else.

I don't try to dissect Mike Russell's stories they are just simply what they are the day I read them, tomorrow I will see something else in them. The point is I just like how I go along with them because I have nothing to compare them to. I always think of Alice in Wonderland when I think of Mike Russell and one of the sayings in it. 'I'm not crazy, my reality is just different than yours.' Just perfect. What an imagination this man has, so glad he shares it.

Nandini Bharadwaj says

Thanks to the publisher for sending me a free e-copy of the book in exchange for an honest review.

I'm going to abandon my usual style of reviewing for this one because this is an unusual book, to say the very least. I'm not sure if it's meant to be some sort of metaphor or it's strange because that's the way it should be. For the entire time I was reading it, my brain was stuck on just one thought - "Wait, what?" So if the point was just to tell a strange and kind of disturbing tale, this gets an A+. But I didn't enjoy it. I was so busy trying to look for some kind of meaning that I just didn't care. It was like *Alice in Wonderland*, but bleached white. (And for adults. And also very disturbing.) The only part I did like was the whole concept of infinity, which was pretty cool. Also, the writing was good in the sense that the strange, creepy feeling was maintained throughout very well. The setting was white, precise and super-weird. The characters were unrelatable, at least for me. I liked that Sydney sort of broke away from the mould, was curious and reckless, but that's all. To sum up, it deviated so far from normal that I didn't like it.

Gemma McGee says

I was lucky enough to be given this book in exchange for a fair and honest review, thank you Jay Strange Books Secretary for contacting me. I would of missed reading this book other wise.

Strungballs is the third book from Mike Russell and his first Novella, with only 66 pages it a nice quick read if you have a couple of hours free.

The book follows Sydney as he has his first skin removed for his first Strungball to be inserted, his skin is used to help patch up a skin barrier that protects the city from the "Others". Sydney with a little help start questioning his reality which changes his whole world.

In it's strange storyline it brought up many topics that I found thought provoking;

Is are greatest fear ourselves?

Do we follow the party line or are we strong enough to question it?

What are we willing to do to be normal?

I found the story really interesting and it will keep me thinking about the story long after finishing it.

Briar's Reviews says

Strungballs by Mike Russell

This book by Mike Russell is another short story. It's a great read for those who want a short, exciting read (and for those like me who didn't want to commit to another Games of Thrones book right away...).

This book is weird, if I put it lightly. The thought of a strungball was not something I have ever dreamed up in my life, but Mike Russell somehow thought this up and created a story about it! It's unique and enticing to me when someone can create such interesting thoughts, which is why I enjoyed this book.

Getting to see this unique and different world through out main character's eyes was great! It's kind of sci-fi/dystopian-esque, which would be great for readers who are interested in those topics! It's such a utopia that it's a dystopia...those books are always interesting!

The book is so precise, and so fantastical, it's hard to explain it in my own wording without ruining it. This utopia, perfect world that is so perfect that it's not is probably the best way I can word it. I love how Mike made this world so perfect, because it makes you feel uneasy and thrilled by each turn this short story takes.

Our main character seems to be the only person questioning or going against the true perfection in this novel. While this has been done a hundred times over, it's very fitting in this novel. Normally I would be annoyed and disgusted by seeing this trend over and over, but I liked it here. Mike makes it fit just well enough that I'm not questioning it.

Like Mike's other books, you will begin questioning reality and life itself. It raises so many thought provoking questions in such little space, but that's why I found it to intriguing. I have to say this is definitely my favourite book by him and I want to come back to it at a later date to see if my feelings change on this novel or not.

Overall, this maddening book will drive you over the edge with peculiarity! It's a great read!

Five out of five!

Chloeemagic says

To put it simply, this novella is probably the weirdest thing I have ever read! (And I read some weird stuff) But the weirdness and unfamiliar-ness of this novella is what makes it so great.

The story is revolved around Sydney, a boy living within another dimension...or a dystopian planet...but all he knows is the corridors within his city, and the regimented robotic lifestyles he and his parents live.

This civilisation has its own way of protection, and this is where Sydney's adventure begins. In a plain white room, getting a small cube of flesh removed, he doesn't know why, it is just what is done in this city.

After his disturbing operation, His proud parents then present him with his first strungball! Which is placed within the empty space where his flesh used to be.

Through the first half of this novella Sydney seems to be happy, and proud that he has become a part of this tradition...but then through a bizarre turn of events, he thinks for the first time:

'Why?'

And this tiny little question brings on chaos! It brings down the regimented and controlled lifestyle lived through this city.

And Sydney takes the idea of 'finding yourself' to a whole other level.

Within 66 pages, Mike Russel managed to take my brain and turn it into scrambled egg!!

I really enjoyed it though, it was a complete detachment to real life, I imagine it's the kind of story David Lynch would turn into an amazing and mind bending film!

You should definitely read this novella if you're into the weird and stomach flipping strangeness of a different world. The absence of sense and understanding, just reading and enjoying a truly weird story!

If it's not your kind of reading preference I would still recommend this novella, as for me, it is something I wouldn't have thought to read. But I honestly really enjoyed it!