



XVI

Julia Karr

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Every girl gets one.

An XVI tattoo on the wrist--sixteen.

Some girls can't wait to be sixteen, to be legal. Nina is not one of them. Even though she has no choice in the matter, she knows that so long as her life continues as normal, everything will be okay.

Then, with one brutal strike, Nina's normal is shattered; and she discovers that nothing that she believed about her life is true. But there's one boy who can help--and he just may hold the key to her past.

But with the line between attraction and danger as thin as a whisper, one thing is for sure...

For Nina, turning sixteen promises to be anything but sweet

XVI Details

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Author : Julia Karr

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From Reader Review XVI for online ebook

Margo Berendsen says

This book gave me goosebumps at times, because it is just so frighteningly plausible. It's our same culture, just more extreme, with the media more powerful, a 1984-esque world masquerading as fake fun, fashion, flirtation.

There were some cool science fiction features, such as the Infinity Machine. And some very powerful writing:

I sat at the window and drew the shapes of the buildings outside. Rectangles and squares stacked side by side and up to the sky. Neat, orderly, controllable. The complete opposite of my life.

These next two quotes kind of summarize the overall "feel" of this book for me, which addresses some tough teenage issues, pertaining to sex and self-identity/self-worth, and handling the hard stuff that life throws at you.

"Gran says that there's only one way to the happy memories. You have to cry out the sad ones."

"I never tried to change myself to impress anyone again." I couldn't imagine Gran being any way except how she'd always been. She'd confirmed what I'd suspected all along. When two people liked each other, it wasn't about clothes or makeup or hairdos.

Curious to find out more about Sal, Rita, Wei and her parents. Loved the scene where Wei shows Nina her mother's varnished box.

Patrícia says

RATING: 2.5 stars.

I really, really didn't want to write this review, because I feel like I have been posting a lot of reviews highlighting negative points; I'm not sure if the books are all that bad or if it's just me that can't read a book, like it and write an 100% gushing, glowing review. Maybe I am just one of those grumpy people who likes to find flaws in everything, but I haven't read a book that was 100% perfect... yet.

That said, I liked "XVI". Overall it wasn't "that bad". But I did find a lot of flaws, from the glaring grammatical errors to world and character building.

I had high expectations for "XVI". I read all the praise I saw it mentioned on numerous blogs and it seemed like everyone was talking about it. So I decided to buy a copy; I mean, if so many people like it, it must be good... right?

The problem with high expectations is that most of the time you end up disappointed. I was. I had a hard

time reading this book and maybe a small part of it was because I wasn't in the mood for dystopian fiction; but most of the disappointment came from the book itself because, as I said before I found a lot of rough edges that I thought needed polishing.

"XVI" is one of those books that has a good concept but a flawed execution. I liked the idea of a futuristic totalitarian society (sort of like "The Hunger Games", but global) where the Media controls every aspect of your life (how to dress, what to eat, how to think) and is closely linked to the "Governing Council". I was astonished at the way women were viewed and treated (completely objectified and viewed as inferior). I was impressed at how the author used "consumerism" and the Media as means of control. In some ways, it was very like our current society, but taken to the extreme... commercials all the time, extreme attention to trends and fashion and a culture that encourages women to think of themselves as sex objects. Some are very rich (high-tiers) while most are poor (lower tiers), and people are shunned or admired by the volume of their wealth. This society is so stratified there is almost no chance for a poor person to get a good job and 'get out' of their "tier".

Then I wanted to know why the society evolved that way (or went backwards). And I simply couldn't find an answer. There is no explanation as to why this 22nd century society is how it is; a war of great proportions is mentioned but that's all. Also, the author plunged right into the story, introducing new concepts without explaining or even describing them properly. "Trannies" and "PAVs" were mentioned but the reader can never get a clear picture of what those are or how they work. Basically the world building needed some work.

The characters also bothered me a bit (I didn't like the names, but that's a matter of personal taste). Nina most of all. She was supposed to be a strong, stoic character (I think) but came off as expressionless. Her trusting attitude also seemed a bit unbelievable because, well, she does live in a non-democratic society. Another thing I found odd was the lack of physical descriptions. If there were any, they weren't very detailed. I'm not saying I like to read pages and pages of hair and eye color, body types and the color and pattern of their shirts but I do like to be able to imagine the characters in my head and with this book... I couldn't since there were only generic descriptions.

The story was all over the place. The romantic part was rushed and unrealistic, the pacing was off and some elements of the plot were pretty unbelievable (Sal and Nina's encounter; Joan's appearance and many others).

Overall, this book had a good concept for a distopian novel, but unfortunately the author didn't develop it in a way that made it interesting. Also the story was very uneven and not enthralling enough to keep me reading. I managed a few chapters a day and this book has little more than 300 pages. Karr could have done so much more with this book and it's characters (who lacked charisma, most of all). Maybe the sequel will be better.

Reviewed for: <http://pinkgum.blogspot.com/>

Rain Misoa says

I am going to start off by saying I couldn't even finish this book. I just couldn't. I normally try to finish every book I start, but I've gotten to the point where if I am not enjoying a book, I shouldn't force myself through it. I am just making myself miserable and ruining my reading experience. This book was the last straw. It pushed me over the edge and I just had to stop.

There is not a single thing I liked about this book. The writing is mediocre. I never once felt like I was being pulled in to this world through the writing. It felt very bland. Also, this is supposed to be a finished copy and there were so many typos! I counted more than five! If it was just one or two, I could let that slide. But more than five? Come on now! Also, this world is just so unbelievable. There is no way people, in a society that's constantly under surveillance, can have sex under a bush. Also, **SEX UNDER A BUSH WOULD BE THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE THING EVER!** How can you have sex with branches prodding your butt? No. Just no.

The characters were just... boring. Nothing about any of them made me love them. They were so flat with only sex on the brain. I am not a prude. I don't mind sex in my books. But I want a little more to my characters than just sex. The parts where Nina, the main character, should have been worried about her family because of her father being wrapped up in something against the government, she was more worried about her love interest, Sal, not wanting to be with her or kiss her. No one in their right mind would do that. People will put everything aside to help their family. Not think about getting it on with some guy they only knew for a few days! I got more than half-way through the book and there were no signs of character development whatsoever. Nothing was happening except her wanting Sal and, for me, that's not a story about a dystopian world.

If this sounds like something you want to read, then go ahead. I believe every book deserves to be read. I could not get into this book. I do not like this book. But that is just my opinion. You may love this book. If you do, then great! If not, then stop reading it and find something you do love. Me? I am going to find something else because this book just... wasn't for me.

Hannah says

I hate giving a book with such a great idea only one star, but honestly, aside from the idea, there wasn't a single aspect of the book I liked – it was executed very badly, and the plot was overdramatic and clichéd.

For one thing, there just weren't enough explanations for the reader to really understand the world Nina lived in – we never find out how it was possible for society to change so drastically. The reader got plenty of information and explanations about minor things like how they don't eat meat anymore in the future, but nothing about how it's possible that society moved backwards so much that people are classified in "tiers" and women have basically no rights.

I was also annoyed by the characters and their relationships. Nina was not a relatable character whatsoever – her emotions switched from sad about her mom's death to happy to worried to in love with Sal to sad because of Sal way too quickly without any sort of explanation.

Sandy seemed too superficial and selfish – when Nina's mom died and Nina had to move in with her

grandparents, she only thought about herself and how she won't have a friend living close by anymore. I didn't understand why Nina would be friends with her, they were just too different. The only explanation about their friendship is that they became friends because they both like animals, which, honestly, is ridiculous.

Nina's relationship with her mom seemed to perfect – she told her mom everything, which I don't think is realistic. I didn't like Dee or her relationship with Nina, either – she was 11 but usually acted like she was 5. The relationship between Nina's grandparents was supposed to be funny, but it was trying to hard and just got annoying.

The dialogue seemed fake; they switched topics way too often, which made it all kind of random, and all the characters, in my opinion, were too open and always said whatever they were thinking. That would be fine if it were used as characterization for one or two characters, but each of her friends spoke like that.

The different storylines were all over the place. Nina's obsession with Ed and Dee was overdone (I thought that if I had to hear "Cinderella girl" one more time, I'd have to scream), while the plot of finding her father, which I thought would have been much more interesting, wasn't elaborated on until the very end.

I don't know whether there will be a sequel for this book, and if there will, I can't criticize this, but I had the feeling the plot didn't really pick up until the end. I thought the book would be more about Nina turning sixteen and having to deal with what that entailed in her society, but she didn't turn sixteen until the last chapter. The ending didn't offer any solutions, but (again), if there will be a sequel, I can't really criticize that.

This novel had great potential but was executed very badly. I did not like the writing and never cared about the characters, and most aspects of the story were lacking. I would not recommend this book, but since it has gotten mainly good reviews, maybe it just didn't connect with me personally.

Reviewed at <http://www.paperbacktreasures.blogspot.com>

Miranda says

Oh boy. Where do I even begin with this?

This book was honestly a chore to get through. The writing was nothing special and at times even clunky. At first the world was explained by having characters explain certain parts of their world to each other, otherwise known as the "As you know..." method. It was never introduced naturally; it was all the characters talking about it as if they had just arrived in a new country, instead of having lived in this environment their entire lives. I probably could have put up with this as it does stop after the first thirty or so pages, but there was a whole lotta other stuff in the book that quite frankly pissed me off.

If you're going to do a novel about sexuality and specifically the media's influence on female sexuality, you should maybe try to avoid slut shaming while you do so. The main character, Nina, has a best friend, Sandy. Sandy is constantly derided and looked down on by Nina, because she's a "walking sex-teen advert" because she dresses in "revealing clothing," and seems to think about nothing but sex and flirting and guys. At one point Nina's grandmother even says with the way she dresses, Sandy doesn't even look like a virgin. When Sandy rightfully objects to this bullshit, Nina's grandmother says, "It's just that dressing that way makes the

boys think you don't want to be [a virgin.]”

Excuse me while I scream with rage.

It wouldn't be bad if it were just Nina's grandmother who thinks this, but Nina herself does, too. Sandy is at times vilified and pitied because she's become “brainwashed” by the media to act a certain way. Which would have been fine if *at any point* we were shown that Sandy doesn't really like dressing in that particular way, or really flirting with boys, but she does it because she feels it's expected of her in the society she lives in. But no, every scene Sandy is in, this is never addressed. For all intents and purposes, she's happy with who she is at the moment and she's ready to go make something else of her life.

Oh, and then she gets raped and murdered by Nina's Mother's boyfriend. Because what YA really needs is more reinforcement of the “in control of her sexuality and proud of it and then she dies” trope.

I probably should have realized how the rest of the novel would go once I saw how the text supported characters slut shaming Sandy and vilified her at the same time. But I stuck with it because I thought, well hey, maybe Karr is setting this up to deconstruct the hell out of it, or subvert the stereotypes and ideas surrounding female sexuality.

I should know better by now.

In contrast to Sandy, Nina is actively fearful of sex and turning sixteen, when it means she becomes fair game. The reasons for her fear of sex are because at some point her mother's boyfriend forced her to watch some pornographic videos of sixteen year old girls, and though it's never described, the acts done in the video are horrible enough to give her an intense fear of sex. This might have been more interesting if Nina were, say, asexual in a society that constantly tells her she should be overtly sexual (gee, just like the one we're living in now!) but nope. And as soon as Sal, Nina's love interest, arrives on the scene, she starts getting those tingly feelings all over. Then she decides that, yes, she would like sex some day, but not just now!

So remember ladies, if you're uninterested in sex, just wait for that Magical Cock to show up and you'll change your mind. I'm sure it was meant to be an empowering, defining moment for Nina--accepting that one day she'll have sex, and it's okay, but she's not ready just yet--but instead I just threw the book across the room. Nina is virginal and pure, she gets to live. Sandy was a whore and got raped and killed.

These are just some of the offensive stereotypes and harmful ideas that XVI reinforces and supports. There was also a casual throwaway line that supported the idea that rapes only happen in dark alleys at night with strangers, but that was never really expanded on. For which I'm grateful, to be frank.

Oh, and Sal, the love interest, was a stalker. In the beginning he just kept turning up coincidentally in the exact same places Nina was, and then after not even knowing her for a day, gets her phone number from her friends and is shown where Nina lives. Because that's totally a-okay and a good idea. Honestly I felt nothing when it came to Sal and Nina's relationship; they had very little time together before they began snogging, and I wondered what they saw in each other. We weren't really shown any reason why these two are attracted to each other, or how they'd be good for each other. If there really is going to be another book in this series, I wish Karr had taken longer to develop their relationship.

Nina herself was too stupid to live. Even though she knows Ed, her mother's boyfriend, is following her and she gets kidnapped several times, she constantly turns down offers of protection from her friends and walks

out on her own. At one point she even leaves Dee, her little sister, who Ed is after, alone in the house while she goes out to spend some quality time with Sal. Because leaving your little sister alone in the house that's been easily broken into before while her father is actively looking to kidnap her is such a good idea. And then when Nina thinks Dee's been kidnapped because she's no longer in the house, she blames herself--or, more specifically, her sexuality. She thinks "if only I hadn't been a typical sex-teen and gone out with Sal, this never would have happened!" Because we totally need more reinforcement of the idea that a young woman being sexual leads to bad things, don't we? Dee wasn't actually kidnapped but Nina continues to blame her sexuality, and we're given no indication that we should think otherwise.

The world building was shoddy at times, and this may be a little thing to get upset over, but calling cars "trannies/trans"? Really? Does anyone really think it's a good idea to use modern day slurs against a marginalized group of people as slang for vehicles in the future? I never felt like it was a dystopia-- everything regarding sexuality, especially rape, are the views that are being held up in today's time. In Nina's world, if a girl gets raped, no one in the Government cares, and they actively say it's her own fault. Yeah, this is something called "rape culture", and we're living in it right now. Because of this it felt more contemporary than it did future dystopia.

I didn't really care about any of the characters, though the one I liked the most was probably Wei. I sort of wish she could have been the main character instead of Nina; she was far less of an asshole and actually a much more noble person than Nina. But if any of the characters had died I probably wouldn't have bat an eye. The villain was laughable and one dimensional, and I never felt threatened by him, mostly because Nina herself never seemed to take his threats seriously either.

I was not a fan of *XVI*, as one can probably tell. For a novel that focuses so much on sexuality and, specifically, the media's influence on female sexuality, it reinforced and upheld far too many offensive ideas for me to have enjoyed. I honestly wouldn't recommend it to anyone unless they're looking to get infuriated for a day or two.

Stella Chen says

Weak. This could be something I can write up and man, I cannot write.

The obsession with dystopian novels at the moment is causing "authors" to come up with works that they will regret.

Some of my favourite dystopias are The GONE series by Michael Grant and The Chaos Walking Series by Patrick Ness.

Jonathan says

To put this plain and simple, Julia Karr's *XVI* did not meet up to my expectations.

There were many issues in this book, from the boring thoughts coming from Nina Oberon's head to the hidden lecture we get from Julia Karr herself. I'm not an avid reader, but it doesn't take one to recognize that there was something wrong with this novel.

First off, the story starts for about half the book, just listening to Nina's messed up life from her own perspective. Her father, her mother, Ginny, a mysterious character named Ed, and her sister, Dee are introduced indirectly but we hardly get to meet them. How do we know how bad Ed beats Ginny if we never see it happen? How are we supposed to be connected to any other character other than Nina without being able to interact with them in the book? I was very tired of Nina droning on and on about 50 pages into the novel.

At about halfway through, the tone takes a completely different flip and now these unrealistic action scenes are being thrown at us every which way we turn. Ed, the evil Choser bent on finding information about Nina's father, was practically everywhere. There were about six scenes where either Ed miraculously showed up or there was a false alarm. There has to be a better choice of storyline than having everyone freak out every ten pages about whether Ed was listening or if Ed was here to kidnap Nina.

One of the things that may not be mutual but it didn't really make sense to me was the idea of XVI. The title is Sixteen, the descriptions point to sixteen, the book even talks about sixteen, but what does anything have to do with sixteen? We know from reading the novel that when you turn sixteen, you are completely vulnerable to sex and rape. The entire book I was waiting for a turn of events to happen about Nina turning sixteen and figuring out what will happen. I predicted that she was going to be put in a position of rape, since she strongly opposes sex, and would have to deal with it after and maybe get revenge. But no, there is nothing that has anything to do with sex and anyone having it. If you are a teen, and you pick up a book thinking it's going to be about sex, wouldn't you be disappointed when the plot line is about finding your long-lost father and the sex idea is only there as a warning?

This leads me to my next problem. Why did Julia Karr include the idea of sex-teens when the story has nothing to do with it? It's because she has a clear and specific opinion just like everyone else. Julia Karr does not believe in teen sex. Period. Julia Karr is Nina Oberon. She uses her character to let people know about her beliefs and views on this type of issue. Nina is a calm, quiet girl who does not want to have sex in any way or sort. Sandy, her best friend, however, is a wild, party girl who flirts with guys, dresses like a slut, and can't wait until she's sixteen so she can legally have sex. How do we know that Julia Karr doesn't like this? Sandy dies. In her mind, girls should never have sex before they're ready because it leads to bad things. I can't say I completely disagree with her, but don't write an entire novel trashing this behavior and then killing off the slutty girl just to prove a point on how girls should present themselves.

I did not like this novel. I had some major issues with the plot and theme of XVI. If I had this idea and wrote a book about it, the entire idea of Nina's father would be trashed, the horrible thoughts inside Nina's mind would turn to dialogue and actually meeting characters like Ginny, and most importantly, the book would be about women rising up and becoming more than just sex tools. As most reviews will tell you, the idea had potential to take off but it never made it off the ground.

Riona says

I was hoping for an explicitly feminist young adult dystopia here, maybe an updated The Handmaid's Tale for the younger crowd. Something empowering, that assured teen girls that yes, sexuality is sometimes complicated, and exploring it is okay if you want to, and waiting is just fine too. Instead, what I got was some wishy-washy future-lite with a trite love story thrown in. Ugh.

Can I just say? **I am so fucking sick of love triangles.** Or complex polygons, as might be more appropriate here. Maybe I'm getting too old for silly high school drama. I did appreciate the absence of a "love at first sight" storyline. It does, however, feature the "love interest is a creepy stalker (but his dedication is endearing!)" trope.

So anyway, in Julia Karr's dystopian vision, all girls are tattooed with the Roman numerals "XVI" on their wrists upon reaching the age of sixteen. This lets any leering men nearby know they're fair game for sex and violence and whatever other recreational perverseness they can imagine. The government and media advertise this as a rite-of-passage all girls should aspire to, and lots of girls embrace being "sex-teens". But not our protagonist, Nina, because she is an innocent, virginal girl we should all emulate! Excuse me while I gag on all the self-righteousness.

Of course, since this is a dystopia, the government and media are responsible for lots of other vaguely sinister things, but I honestly feel like "dystopia" should be in scare quotes because the world-building is so lazy. Cliches abound. Surveillance everywhere? Check. Hovercars? Check. Future-slang and unnecessary acronyms? Check, check. High-tech communication gadgets that sound exactly like cell phones? Check. (Seriously, this was written last year -- you can't even extrapolate from modern technology?) Other than a few such futuristic accoutrements, we're given no information on how society has changed in the intervening decades between the present day and the 2170s, when this novel is supposed to be set. One could almost guess this was a contemporary novel. The rape culture represented here is certainly very similar to what women today live with.

Which brings me to my biggest issue with this book. For what is apparently supposed to be a feminist novel, there is a ridiculous amount of slut-shaming here. Every interaction Nina has with her best friend, Sandy, is a classic example of the virgin-whore dichotomy at work. What's more, the author seems completely oblivious to this. I'll spoiler-alert this, but it should come as no surprise to people who are familiar with how sexual female characters are portrayed in mainstream entertainment: (view spoiler)

I wish these awful stereotypes and terrible messages to send to teenage girls could have been at least partially offset by good writing, but that is sadly not the case. The first third of the book largely consists of clunky infodumps in the form of "As you know..." dialogue, the foreshadowing is over-the-top obvious, and all the twists can be seen coming from a mile away. The characters are all pretty one-dimensional and I'm shocked the villain didn't have a mustache to twirl, because he was a walking cliche in every other way. The whole thing was just extremely heavy-handed stylistically.

You know what? This started off as a two-star review, because I really liked the concept and it was a quick, easy read, but now I'm pissed. One star. Goddamnit.

usagi ?? says

I was born in the 80s, I grew up in the 90s, when the media market image of girls became the most sexualized it's ever been. Flashbacks of CNN debates about the oversexing of the "desired" female image in the west came to mind when I started reading this book – not that that's a bad thing. This book paints a picture of what our future may be if we keep going the way we're going.

I have to say – for a debut, I was floored by the sheer balls that Karr has for even bringing up this issue, much less couching it in a future that seems all too plausible as clothing sizes get smaller, more and more

skin is bared on primetime television, and kids start having sex at younger and younger ages (not to mention starting puberty at record early ages as well).

I like to think of myself as a sex-positive girl. I believe that as long as everyone has informed consent with their sex, I have no right to intervene or complain. The keywords here are “informed consent” – not just consent, which can be taken advantage of by sex predators in terms of ignorance on the part of the victim, but informed consent – knowing your risks, knowing where you’re safe and where you’re not. This book really hit home with me as I’ve never really felt comfortable about expressing my sexuality (well, that and I have severe intimacy issues, but we won’t get into that now) and the idea of being fair game as soon as you turn sixteen, whether you like it or not, scared the hell out of me.

Which, I think, was one of the points of the book – rethink the current policies and images as projected to us by modern culture in order to keep ourselves safe.

I believe that this book should probably be made mandatory reading by parents to their daughters before they get taken advantage of. Knowledge is power, and we as girls need all the power we can get in order to protect ourselves.

Thank you, Ms. Karr, for writing this book, for urging us not to be complacent and to remind us of the dangers out there that if we leave unchecked, could very well be our future.

Bettina Restrepo says

The book is described as "Nina is 15. And like all girls she'll receive a Governing Council ordered tattoo on her 16th birthday. XVI. Those three letters will be branded on her wrist, announcing to all the world - even the most predatory of men that she is ready for sex. Considered easy prey by some, portrayed by the Media as sluts who ask for attacks, becoming a "sex-teen" is Nina's worst fear. That is, until right before her birthday, when Nina's mom is brutally attacked. With her dying breaths, she reveals to Nina a shocking truth about her past - one that destroys everything Nina thought she knew. Now, alone but for her sister, Nina must try to discover who she really is, all the while staying one step ahead of her mother's killer."

This dystopian book really caught my attention. Shocking, gritty, and oh-so-close to what could be a real future - I was hanging by a thread. I was initially drawn in by the cover. So different than what we see in YA today.

The language in this book really captured my attention - artfully done. While the author doesn't claim to be a feminist - there are themes that promote girl power that will ring true to any reader. I'm a believer of strong female characters - you will have full doses in this book.

The release date in Jan 6, 2011 in paperback from the publisher, Speak.

Word on the street is that PW gave it a good review also!

Ruth Day says

The premise was interesting and characters and plot had potential, but the potential was never reached because the writing was just BAD. About fifty pages in, something awful happened in Nina's life and I should have felt her pain, but I didn't. A lot of it had to do with the way the author worded things. Sometimes I would think, "If only she had worded this sentence this way, then it would have been so much more impactful." Also, she did something that I've been tirelessly teaching myself not to do: She used had or a contraction thereof WAY too much. She seemed especially fond of the contraction: she'd, I'd, Ginnie'd, it was getting extremely annoying.

Also, Nina seemed to over-react to a lot of things. I didn't understand why she and Sal had that fight. It seemed like it was her just being paranoid and unreasonable. I didn't see any sign that he wanted to be with her only so he could learn more about her father. And I never understood why Nina decided to tell half the world a secret her mother had been keeping for years. It was obvious she only wanted Nina to know.

Ah well, I did finish it. The last fifty or so pages were better than the first two hundred, which is why I gave this book two stars instead of one, but that hardly made up for the clumsy prose and the main character that I couldn't understand half the time. At least, the plot was somewhat unique. I didn't know how it would end so curiosity drove me to keep reading.

For more reviews, check out my blog: irissel.blogspot.com

Kiki says

This book was absurdly bad. It really was. Everything about it just *bit*. Oh, and don't be fooled, gentle readers; this is not a deconstruction of the sexualization of women in media. No, this is a virginity indoctrinating, weirdly preachy meandering mess. Of the hot variety.

I won't say much about it, only this: according to this book, you're a whore. You're all whores. Unless you're chaste like Nina, that is. Then you're not a godforsaken terrible whore. Then you're clean. But if you're like Sandy and you wear short clothes, then it's your fault if men harass and objectify you, and oops! Watch out, don't get raped and killed! Oh - oh. It happened. Well, it was your fault anyway, because you wore all those small clothes. You whore!

I just...no.

Just no.

Sesana says

XVI has been billed as a feminist book, a deconstruction of rape culture. Sadly, Karr doesn't deconstruct, critique, or even give a hard look at rape culture. She simply observes it.

Let's back up to the basic premise here. On their sixteenth birthdays, all girls (and only girls) are given a XVI tattoo on their wrist, to advertise their sexual availability. Paired with the sexualization of media aimed at teens, this has (somehow) lead to a world where female consent is a given. Girls and women who are raped are asking for it, based on the way they act and dress- the same way the mass media tells them to act and dress, of course.

Sound familiar? It should. This is only a slightly exaggerated version of the culture we live in right now. (Sadly, not nearly as exaggerated as I would like.) I don't think I need to put in examples, because it's plainly, painfully evident. This is part of what I mean when I say that Karr is just observing rape culture. She stretches reality just slightly and blandly reports the results.

That's the best case scenario, I'm afraid. I found myself getting increasingly uncomfortable with the dichotomy the author set up between those who buy the propaganda (like the main character's best friend, Sandy) and those who reject it (like Nina). It's the old virgin/whore thing, all over again. Girls like Nina, the main character, are pure, completely reject the idea of sex, and try to minimize male attention. These are the good girls, the ones who get to live and, maybe, get some respect from the men and boys in their lives, maybe. But girls like the main character's best friend, Sandy (and, apparently, the majority of teenage girls in this society) buy into the prevailing culture, are interested in sex, and like to make themselves attractive to the boys around them. And they get raped, mutilated, enslaved, even murdered. The message is repeated so many times, so intently, that there's only one thing to take away from it: they're asking for it. And it's never, ever contradicted.

I'm thinking of an incident very early in the book, when Nina takes Sandy to her grandparents' house. And her grandmother tells Sandy, flatly and without contradiction, on any level, from anyone, at any point, that the way she's dressing is an invitation, that anybody looking at her would think that she wasn't a virgin, or didn't want to be. The implicit threat isn't elaborated on, and doesn't have to be. And at no time in this book does anyone seem to feel like that's wrong. That it's wrong to treat women and girls as if they're universally sexually available, that their consent is unnecessary, and that you can make a complete value judgement of a woman by how she's dressed. No, the book seems to, at every level, endorse all of this.

This is all aside from a cardboard villain, a thin plot that needs long, long discussion breaks between incidents to fill in a book, and a dystopia that just isn't adequately explained. (How did all this come about? Why is it so widely accepted? I don't know, and I don't think Karr does either.) I might be more willing to cut a new author some slack, especially since this is the first book in the series. But I just can't get by the casual acceptance of rape culture and the rampant slut shaming to go any further.

Kelly says

I really don't know how to feel about this book. I think that the premise is excellent, but there was far too little in terms of explanation, and way too much foreshadowing.

Nina is on the verge of turning sixteen, which means she will be tattooed with an XVI to show that she is legal and available for sex with any male who wants her. Nina is understandably apprehensive, but she tries to hide it because all girls in the future are supposed to LOVE being sluts - the constant media advertising being blared everywhere tells them so. How society got to believing that women are sex-bots and silence is illegal - Never explained.

Nina is also apparently "Low Tier" - aka "poor" - and one of the few ways out of a low tier is to be Chosen for the FeLS program. Nina's best friend Sandy is desperate to be chosen. What, exactly FeLS is, is not explained until nearly halfway through the book. By that time, we are certain that FeLS is not a good thing to join, but somehow Nina never actually gets around to telling her "best friend" this. Nor does she ever mention that her mother's government boyfriend is an abusive jerk, which is odd because her best friend BEGS Nina to put in a good word with him every time they see each other. Also, Nina's mother buys out her FeLS contract, but Nina is still worried about "someone stealing it." FORESHADOWING, anyone? Actually, since they mention SEVERAL TIMES that FeLS girls have to be VIRGINS, Nina could have just lost her V-card to her boyfriend and been done with it, but that would have been too easy, right?

Another small FeLS note that irritates me - There was ONE LINE that mentions that instead of fossil fuels, people now use some stuff mined from Mars as fuel. That's all. But apparently, FeLS girls are sent to Mars to be used by the miners there (after the government officials deflower them, of course) and many of them end up getting a virus that the miners have that keeps them from being able to return to earth. WTF? Where did the miners and the virus come from?!? What happens when you get the virus? NO EXPLANATION.

Three-quarters of the way through the book, I was still confused by all the acronyms, the verts, trannies, and everything else that SHOULD have been explained, but wasn't.

The rest of the book is basically Nina running from a green car and acting like an idiot at every possible opportunity. (Oh, Wei's parents offer you a place to keep the super-important item safe? Nahhhh....)

If this turns into a series, I would really like to suggest a prequel. I found the stories about Nina's parents to be MUCH more interesting than anything Nina did.

Overall, the premise was interesting but the book was a difficult read. If you can look past the confusion of the acronyms (and the fact that NOTHING is explained) XVI is definitely a solid addition to the ever-growing teen dystopian genre.

Angie says

It's a little bit strange, but I feel as though I've grown particularly choosy when it comes to the dystopian novels I pick up lately. I'm not sure if this is a result of the seemingly increased number of YA ones, in particular, being released. Or if it's merely that my taste is evolving somewhat over time. I did read several for the SciFi/Fantasy panel I served on for the Cybils this year. Some were good, some not so good, as is to be expected. But so often the substance fails to live up to the premise for me. And those are sad days, where I wonder what went wrong and if it was the book, the execution, or me. In any event, I was looking forward to the release of Julia Karr's debut novel--XVI--with a fair amount of anticipation and curiosity, hoping it would stand out among its fellows and earn a permanent spot on my shelves. I read it in the space of a single evening and have been examining my thoughts on it for a little while now.

Nina Oberon is about to turn sixteen. And in her world, this monumental occasion is about more than just a driver's license and more freedom on the dating field. So much more. At the ripe old age of sixteen, or "sixteen" as her world calls it, girls are essentially fair game for any and every boy/man/pervert that comes strolling by. Girls turn sixteen and get the infamous XVI tattoo on their wrist proclaiming their newly available status and Nina, for one, is scared. Most girls, like her hyper best friend Sandy, can't wait to achieve their new status in the world. Drunk on the wealth of male attention that will come their way and the promise of a whole new host of opportunities that will come their way, they anxiously look forward to the day they get their tattoo. Not so for Nina. Raised by her pragmatic, if romantically hapless single mother Ginnie, along with her younger sister Dee, Nina has grown up dreading what will happen when she reaches her sixteenth birthday. Her mother has trained her not to believe the rosy, inane images the media blithely shoves down young girls' throats and Nina is cautious to the point that when her longtime friend Derek begins to see her in a different light it triggers outright panic in Nina. Then her mother is brutally murdered in a back alley and, on her death bed, she reveals to Nina that her father isn't actually dead and that she must find him and keep her sister Dee safe.

Okay. Lots of potential, right? I liked the setup and I definitely liked Nina. She was strong from the start and it was a relief to read about a main character who doesn't spend the entire novel in the dark, floating around believing the garbage her society has set up as reality. However. Those were the only strong points in the book. The rest of the cast of characters felt disturbingly two-dimensional. They were good cut-outs (particularly Wei and Derek) and they could easily have developed into fully-fledged characters who I really admired and followed. But they stayed in the background, flat and chirpy, never fully inhabiting a spot on my radar. Even Nina's growing relationship with a mysterious, possibly homeless, boy named Sal never got its feet off the ground. I didn't buy Nina's too-sudden weak knees, given how adamant and self-possessed she was to begin with. And I really didn't buy Sal's too convenient interest in her, given what we learn about their interlocked past and his involvement with many things underground. There were no real reasons behind their association and I found myself fairly ambivalent toward them both. The treatment of underlying themes soon began to bother me as well. What could have been a compelling exploration of adolescent life in a terrifyingly misogynistic society quickly devolved into an oddly simplistic tale with very little to recommend it. Things moved too slowly and not far enough to provide a satisfying conclusion in which I could feel as though progress was made and character arcs developed. Rather the conclusion was anticlimactic and verging on the trite--so not in keeping with its edgy, loaded premise.
