( )TRANSMISSION

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Hari Kunzru

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Publisher Comments:

When Hari Kunzru's eagerly awaited first novel, The Impressionist, was published, it was lauded and celebrated worldwide. In that rich, wry debut, Kunzru probed the realms of culture and identity through a savvy boy's attempts to reconcile the roles of his British father and his passionate Indian mother. Now, in Transmission, Kunzru takes an ultra-contemporary turn while introducing another tragicomic protagonist: an Indian computer programmer whose luxurious fantasies about life in America are shaken when he accepts a California job offer.

Lonely and naive, Arjun bides his time as an assistant virus tester, pining for a free-loving looker named Christine and building digital creatures in a feeble attempt to enhance his job security. But, like so many of his Silicon Valley peers, Arjun gets fired. In an act of innocent desperation to keep his job and the woman he loves, he releases a mischievous and destructive virus around the globe. World order unravels, as does Arjun's sanity, in a rollicking cataclysm that even manages to involve Bollywood — and, not so coincidentally, the glamorous star of Arjun's favorite Indian movie.

As stylish, perceptive, and wicked as the writings of his ranking contemporaries Zadie Smith and Jonathan Safran Foer, Transmission brilliantly proves that Hari Kunzru is an author with limitless imaginative skill and boundless storytelling talent.

Review:

"With this taut and entertaining novel, London native Kunzru paints a satirized but unsettlingly familiar tableau, in which his alienated characters communicate via e-mail jokes and emote through pop culture, all the while dreaming of frothy lattes and designer labels. Arjun Mehta is an Indian computer programmer and Bollywood buff who comes to the U.S. with big dreams, but finds neither the dashing romance nor the heroic ending of his favorite movies — just a series of crushing disappointments. When he is told he will lose his job at the global security software company and thus may have to return to India, Arjun develops and secretly releases a nasty computer virus, hoping that he can impress his boss into hiring him back when he 'finds' the cure. Arjun's desperate measures are, of course, far reaching, eventually affecting the lives of Guy Swift, an English new money entrepreneur; his girlfriend, Gabriella; and the young Indian movie star Leela Zahir. Kunzru weaves their narratives adroitly, finding humor and pathos in his misguided characters, all the while nipping savagely at consumer culture and the executives who believe in 'the emotional magma that wells from the core of planet brand.' While Guy Swift creates a marketing campaign for border police that imagines Europe as an 'upscale, exclusive continent,' Arjun Mehta is fighting to keep his scrap of the American dream. Kunzru's first novel, The Impressionist, was received enthusiastically (it was shortlisted for numerous awards, and won quite a few others, including the Somerset Maugham Award), and this follow-up will not disappoint fans of his stirring social commentary. Agent, Emma Parry. (June) Forecast: This second novel may not receive the barrage of coverage and buzz the first did (that would be nearly impossible), but sales should hold steady as readers discover that Kunzru is no one-hit wonder."

                                                                              ----Publishers Weekly

From School Library Journal

Adult/High School– Arjun Mehta, computer programmer and extreme Bollywood fan, dreams of a different life than his native India offers him. It seems like magic when a placement service in the U.S. offers to fly him to the states and help him find a job. After several weeks in limbo, he takes a position with a software developer specializing in virus protection. He befriends Chris, a heavily tattooed, bisexual rock-and-roll chick who takes pity on him. She exposes clueless Arjun to pieces of U.S. culture that challenge him in ways that are both humorous and

thought-provoking. After a sexual interlude that ends his friendship with her, Arjun finds himself on a list of employees to be laid off. In desperation, he creates a computer virus around the image of a popular Bollywood star and unleashes it on the Internet. He plans to present a solution for it, making money for his company, saving his job, and turning himself into a hero. But, of course, things go awry as the virus takes on a life of its own. Kunzru's details of the technology are thrilling and accessible, bringing to mind William Gibson's classic cyberpunk novel Neuromancer (Ace, 1984). The point of view switches to other characters to show the effects of the virus on a more personal level. Ultimately, this is a mainstream-style novel with strong characters and situations that has just enough science-fiction elements to satisfy readers of both genres.

– Matthew L. Moffett, Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale

Book Dimension
Height (mm) 244   Width (mm) 161

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