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Tackling crucial current social issues in Young Adult Dystopian fiction
Review of *The Farm* by Emily McKay
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ISBN: 978-0425257807

Margie Longoria

Some days, you let the bad guys win. My mom, the pro bono lawyer, used to say that to me sometimes, back in the Before. Life was different in the Before: before the vampires began devouring humans in as swarm across America; before the surviving young people were rounded up and quarantined. These days, we know what those quarantines are -- holding pens where human blood is turned into more food for the undead monsters, known as Ticks. Surrounded by electrical fences, most kids try to survive the Farms by turning on each other...

A story told in first person POV is often thought to give the reader a limited view of the story. In *The Farm* by Emily McKay, told by three alternating characters, this is not the case. McKay gives a fast-paced, clearly thought-out world that is not only believable, but scary and real. The reader is able to form a connection with the characters that is immediate and intense. Set in a rural futuristic Texas, twin sisters Lily and Mel are trying to break out of a society for teens they are living on called The Farm. They are controlled by the Dean and his enforcers the Collabs. They are brought to the farm to feed the Ticks, a gruesome creation, zombie-like monsters who prefer the blood of teenagers. They have a plan to escape before their doomsday, which is their eighteenth birthday. But when childhood friend Carter shows up with knowledge and

offers his help, he fails to mention his own agenda, and the plot begins to thicken.

Lily and Mel are complete opposites of each other. Lily is the strong sister, the caretaker; she takes the role of guardian over her sister Mel after being sent to the farm. Mel is special. She has autism, and it forces them to hide by blending into society, which they do not do very well. Lily cannot let anyone know how special she is. Mel is smart, perceptive and can feel what is going on around them. She sees things others cannot. She is able to guide them.

This story is an eye-opener: the monsters in the story, the Ticks, are created by science for a purpose, which makes this story realistic, bringing up the specter of something like this happening today or in the near future if genetic experiments go wrong. The Ticks are fast efficient killing machines who have no thought process other than to FEED.

This story shines light on genetic experimentation and mental illness in our country. These topics are very much in the forefront of our news. McKay has created a story that is both speculative and frighteningly realistic that will pull readers in as they devour the pages.