

hoopla digital: How did the idea for this book originate? Did the pandemic have an influence?

Andrew DeYoung: I actually started writing this book way back in 2017, long before the pandemic! At the time, I was thinking a lot about being in my twenties and struggling to find meaningful work after college—a time in my life that happened to coincide with a lot of catastrophic events like 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Great Recession of 2008. With this book, I wanted to capture something about that time of life, which was characterized for me by a lot of depressing office jobs, and also a general fear that the world was ending around me. So it felt natural to me to throw these two ideas together: young workers struggling in temporary office jobs, and an apocalypse.

Of course, sometime between writing the book and getting it published, the COVID-19 pandemic happened, and had a major impact on people's relationship with work and the office. So now the book is resonating in a new way, even with me.

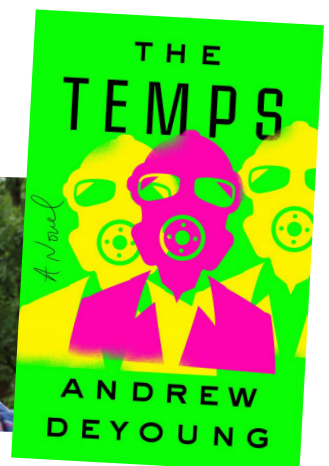
hd: Dystopian worlds are seeing a popular resurgence in literature, TV, and film. We've gone from the classics of *1984* and *Brave New World* to *Squid Game* and book-to-TV adaptations of *The Handmaid's Tale*, among many others. As we enter year 3 of the pandemic, how has the concept of what we consider a 'dystopia' changed (or not changed) in your opinion?

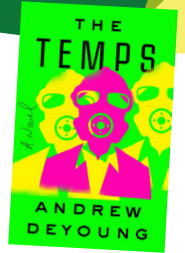
AD: The secret about dystopian storytelling is that while these books, movies, and TV shows seem to be about the future, they're actually about what writers see happening around them, right now. So a book like *1984*, for instance, reflected George Orwell's concern about the rise of totalitarian governments in the 20th century, and their manipulation of information and propaganda. Today, I'm seeing dystopian narratives that are as diverse as the interests and concerns of their creators. The popular TV adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* probably reflects a fear of patriarchy and the oppression of women, which you can also see in recent books like Jessamyn Chan's *The School for Good Mothers*. With *Squid Game*, you see a focus on class warfare and the growing gap between rich and poor across the globe. To the extent that *The Temps* is dystopian, it's probably what you'd call a "corporate dystopia"—that is, it wrestles with the increasing power of large corporations over our day-to-day lives, especially tech companies like Facebook, Apple, Amazon, and others.

hd: Can you talk about your journey to publication?

AD: It was a bumpy road! As I said, I wrote *The Temps* back in 2017. I had a literary agent at the time—but when I shared the book with him, he didn't like it. As we talked about it more, it was clear that he just didn't share my vision for the book. I knew it was one of the best things I'd ever written, but he didn't want to sell it and wouldn't have been a good advocate for it. So we parted company. That was a hard, scary decision for me. Agents are crucial to getting published, and they're hard to get. I wasn't sure if I'd ever get another agent or get published again. It could've been a big mistake. For a while, I thought it was a big mistake. But somewhere along the line, I submitted *The Temps* to Keylight Books. Some time later, long enough that I completely forgot I submitted it, they contacted me out of the blue and said they wanted to publish it. I was shocked! But so happy.

Now, a lot of great reviews, a movie/TV deal, and the hoopla Book Club later, I'm really glad I had the courage to stand up for this book and for my vision as a writer.





hd: *The Temps* is composed of chapters that alternate between narrative perspectives. Why did you decide to structure the novel this way?

AD: This is a book where it isn't always clear what's true. What does Delphi Enterprises—the megacorporation in the book—do? What's their business? Are they good, or evil? Why did the apocalypse happen? What is the best way for them to survive? Having multiple narrative perspectives in this book allowed me to live in those questions, and not commit to any particular viewpoint. One character is more paranoid, spinning conspiracy theories, while another is more trusting, and still doesn't care and just wants to be left alone. And so on.

Having multiple characters also allowed me to have people working in different parts of the company, or going to different parts of the building, and gathering different pieces of the mysteries that propel the book. The company, and the book's mysteries, are big and complex. Having multiple characters who worked in different departments and had different experiences at Delphi allowed me to drop little clues throughout the book, and challenge the reader to begin piecing things together.

hd: Which character did you identify most with, and why?

AD: There are different pieces of me in each character! Like Lauren, I have a bit of a mystical streak. Like Swati, I like yoga and mindfulness and think a lot about how I can just chill out and be when things get stressful. Like Dominic, I can be pretty ambitious at work and can indulge in some business jargon with the best of them. But ultimately, I'm the most like Jacob—or I was, when I was in my 20s. Like Jacob, I was an English major who struggled to find work after I graduated from college. I was disillusioned, depressed, probably a little entitled, and even a little paranoid about the way the world worked. With Jacob, I'm poking some fun at the way I was when I was an angry twentysomething—though I have a lot of affection for Jacob, too. In fact, there's an Easter egg for folks who know me right in the first page of the book. The senior thesis that Jacob writes, about Victorian-era detective fiction? That's pretty close to the exact topic of my master's thesis in English literature.

hd: Did the story change at all as you wrote or did you map it all out ahead of time?

AD: I went in with the premise, and a pretty good sense of where the story would end—but not much of an idea of how I would get from here to there. In other words, I had the beginning and the end, but not the middle. I first wrote a few chapters without any kind of a map, just to explore and get a sense of whether the characters and the world were working. Then I made a rough outline of what I thought should happen to get me all the way to the end.

Even after the outline, though, the story changed a bit as I wrote it. My characters' motivations would change, or things would work on the page a little different than what I'd mapped out. So I had a map. But I was still discovering things as I went. Sort of a mix of planning it all out and making it up as I went along.

hd: Of all the apocalyptic triggers at your disposal, why toxic gas?

AD: Interesting question! For my premise to work—temp workers trapped at the office—I needed something that would keep them inside. And I didn't want to do something that had been done too many times before. I guess there was something about a toxic gas that must've seemed extra-scary to me, the idea of the actual air being an imminent threat. I can think of nothing worse than being attacked by the air you breathe. Also, the first line had come to me pretty quickly—"The sky on the day of Jacob Elliot's first day at Delphi Enterprises was clear and bright, untroubled by any portent of the catastrophe that was to come." So right from the jump I had the idea that the threat came from the sky, from the air. Everything followed from that.



hd: The effects of the gas are horrifying. Is there anything you pull inspiration from when writing these scenes of violence and body horror?

AD: I think my sense of how to write violence probably comes most from the movies—because that’s where I’ve seen the most of it. For the toxic gas scene, the violence and horror are widespread, but it’s all filtered through the perception of a single character—Jacob. So for that scene, it made sense to me that Jacob couldn’t take it all in at once, but would see what was happening in flashes. Almost like fast cuts in a movie. So you could think of a zombie movie like *Dawn of the Dead* or a war movie like *Saving Private Ryan*, where you’re just getting flashes of horror, and it’s hard to perceive the whole. There’s a later scene of violence that’s more like a contained fight scene. There, I wanted to make sure everything was understandable, that the suspense came from the reader understanding what each combatant was doing, in every moment.

hd: Was Brandt inspired by anyone in particular? How do you feel about our current cultural obsession with billionaires?

AD: Brandt is a composite of a few different CEOs—Steve Jobs and Elon Musk are mentioned right in the text, and I also thought a bit about Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon. There’s a long tradition of mysterious and powerful billionaires in fiction, too: Adrian Veidt from Alan Moore’s *Watchmen*, S.R. Hadden in the movie adaptation of *Contact*, and even Bruce Wayne from all the various *Batman* iterations. I think these examples, both fictional and real, demonstrate that we’ve long been obsessed with the idea of people who are so rich and powerful that they can somehow change the course of human civilization in spite of never having been democratically elected by anyone to lead. Billionaires today seem to be trying to live up to their fictional counterparts by getting involved in space exploration, virtual realities, and neural implants. It’s all scary stuff, because it has tremendous implications for us and for the future of the world—but do they have our best interests at heart? Or are they just in it for themselves? Is the future they’re creating for us a utopia? A dystopia? Maybe even an apocalypse?

hd: How do you approach writing characters who don’t share your identity or perspective?

AD: Obviously it’s really important to deeply engage the perspectives of readers who can guide you and point out your blind spots. Reading diversely is hugely important as well. Finally, I think it’s wise to tread lightly and be humble when writing a character of another identity—fiction should reflect a diverse world, of course, since that’s the world we live in. But you’re never going to “write the book,” so to speak, on someone else’s experience, and you shouldn’t even try.

hd: Why did you write the ending the way you did? What do you hope readers take away from it?

AD: Without spoiling too much, I’ll say that at the end of *The Temps*, there’s an opportunity for some justice or accountability for the bad things that have happened in the book—and then it just doesn’t happen. There’s no justice, no accountability. Only ambiguity.

I’ll be honest, I struggled with the ending! I really wanted the “right” thing to happen. But every time I imagined the happy ending, it felt like a cop-out. In our world, the people who are most responsible for terrible things happening are often the very people who are rarely held accountable for what they’ve done. I also wanted to suggest something about the ambiguity of growing up and being coopted into the “system.” When we’re young, it’s easier to have big dreams about changing things. But as life goes on, the world—work, capitalism, whatever you want to call it—gets its hooks in you. As you gain more power and influence, it becomes harder and harder to change things. How do we get power without letting it change us? That was the question I wanted to pose at the end.