

Aisle Nine

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Secondary
(Violence, Language)



SYNOPSIS

Ever since the world filled with portals to hell and bloodthirsty demons started popping out regularly, Jasper's life has gotten worse and worse. A teenage nobody with no friends or a family, he is plagued by the life he can't remember and the person he's sure he's supposed to be.

Jasper spends his days working as a checkout clerk at the Here for You discount mart, where a hell portal in aisle nine means danger every shift. But at least here he can be near the girl he's crushing on—Kyle Kuan, a junior member of the monster-fighting Vanguard—who seems to hate Jasper for reasons he can't remember or understand.

But when Jasper and Kyle learn they both share a frightening vision of the impending apocalypse, they're forced to team up and uncover the uncomfortable truth about the hell portals and the demons that haunt the world. Because the true monsters are not always what they seem, the past is not always what we wish, and like it or not, on Black Friday, all hell will break loose, starting in aisle nine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ian X. Cho lives on Australia's sunny Gold Coast. He writes fiction for young adults and works as a freelance graphic designer. In his free time, he enjoys creating 2D pixel animations.

STUDY NOTES

- The title, along with the shopping trolley, would suggest some kind of store as a setting. Have students suggest stores that would make an 'apt' setting for a dystopian/horror story.
- Create an anchor chart with relevant literary terms and their definitions, plus examples. Include:
 - Dystopia
 - Trope
 - Black humour
 - Figurative language: metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, idioms.
- Using descriptions from the narrative, have students create a floor plan of the store. Include the locations of Aisle #9, the back room, the loading dock, the front desk and any other important points.
- The author has chosen a first-person narrative to tell Jasper's story. Answer the questions below about the chosen POV:
 - What reason do students suggest for this approach?

- How does this impact or create mood/tone/purpose?
- How does it help propel the narrative or complete a backstory?
- Throughout the narrative, the author frequently uses black humour. What purpose does this serve in the story (eg. reducing/softening the impact of high-intensity moments)?
 - How does this add to characterisation and the development of plot?
 - How is figurative language used in this technique?
 - What examples can students find?
- The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse are referenced in the Bible, in the Book of Revelation. They are also referenced in pop culture/literature eg. *A Pale Horse* by Agatha Christie, *Good Omens* (book and series) by Neil Gaiman, *Supernatural* TV series, and even *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* Adventures comics Issues #38–39. Research at least one of the above examples, then discuss the following:
 - When literature, or pop culture, reference the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, what are they trying to say?
 - Why and how has Ian X. Cho used this reference in *Aisle Nine*?
- ‘I feel that I’m being gaslit by everyone. For weeks I’ve quested to find a single burning dumpster, but here and now, this whole city is a dumpster fire kingdom.’ p 56. Ask students to explain, in their own words, what Jasper means here.
- In small groups, have students brainstorm and develop a 2–4 minute ‘pitch’ for a new reality TV show based on the text, which could be modelled after an existing program. Each group can then pitch their idea to the rest of the class.