

Booklist

THE RESISTERS

★Starred Review

by Gish Jen | Knopf | Pub Date: February 4th, 2020

January 1st, 2020

Gish Jen's stealthy wit lures us into contemplation of our worst failings and our saving graces. Here she imagines a dystopian AutoAmerica, where the Netted live productive if severely surveilled lives and the Surplus have lost jobs to automation or because they're designated Unretrainable, like Grant, a former professor and the novel's piquant narrator. Most Surplus in this flooded world are forced into Flotsam Towns, but Grant and his family—wife, Eleanor, a courageous attorney and survivor of government incarceration and torture, and teen daughter, Gwen—have a bossy AutoHouse and an actual garden. Like other resisters, they call the AI-ruled state Aunt Nettie in a wry play on Big Brother. And their strategic opposition to Aunt Nettie intensifies as Gwen grows into her preternatural gift: she has a powerful throwing arm. Baseball has been outlawed for the Surplus, so Grant and Eleanor launch the Underground Baseball League. But nothing goes undetected and soon star pitcher Gwen is being courted by Net U and lured to the other side. In this astutely realized and unnervingly possible depiction of a near-future world, Jen masterfully entwines shrewd mischief, knowing compassion, and profound social critique in a suspenseful tale encompassing baseball ardor, family love, newly insidious forms of racism and tyranny, and a wily and righteous resistance movement that declares "RIGHT MAKES MIGHT."

— Donna Seaman