

not believe in letting his reader speed-read the thoughts he has so obviously and painstakingly scribed. For starters this book is 511 pages long - and those pages are on thin paper with small font and mini-margins: this is a major undertaking. But Lethem grabs us so tightly with his eloquent prose and picturesque/picaresque atmosphere that once past the first few pages we are his captives. The story is one of childhood alienation, young lads groping for identity in Brooklyn in the period from 1970 through the 1990s. Dean Street is an African American and Puerto Rican ghetto into which is dropped the nearly solitary white kid Dylan Ebdus. Parented by a strange couple (who in so many ways represent the history of American art in that period), Dylan gradually finds his soul mate Mingus Rude, an African American offspring of drug abusing musicians. The hidden loveliness of Lethem's epic includes the closeness of these two, working out their confrontation with the world by using comic book superhero magic via a ring from Aeroman (in reality a street person they think can fly) which places this adventure metaphorically with other epics like The Ring of the Niebelungen and the Tolkien Ring stories. These boys are lovers for all intents and purposes (even Mingus' father walks in on them during a sexual encounter and treats it with respect). But here all is not fantasy but is instead more grit. The three decades see Dylan pursue college in Vermont and then California while Mingus falls into the trap of crime, killing his own grandfather, and spends the better part this time in jail. It is the final working out of the destinies of these two boys that makes this story not only work but makes it significant in American literature. Many analogies to Huck Finn/Tom Sawyer etc pairings are being touted by readers and those can only be compliments. Lethem lets us learn about street life in Brooklyn - the good and the bad - and also about the history of drugs in America and a solid history of the various movements in popular music and in art. And it is lies the reviewer's conundrum: Lethem can become tedious and self-indulgent, seeming to be bent on destroying the architecture of his own molding. It would have been possible, no - preferable - to confine this story to around 300 pages. At times Lethem perseverates on a topic that is not additive to his story but seems more like establishing his credentials as a "with it writer" and an expert on jive and hip-hop dialogue, and pop music scholar. But stay with him (even though the temptation to just speed through copious pages of redundant detail is strong) and in the end, in the last few chapters of the book he pulls every thread together in a cat's purse of intrigue and love that makes the arduous journey to that point well worth the effort. An example: "For so long I'd thought that Abraham's [his painter father] legacy was mine: to retreat upstairs, unable or unwilling to sing or fly, only to compile and collect, to sculpt statues of my lost friends, life's real actors, in my Fortress of Solitude." But read the rest for yourself: no one can do this work - or this joy - for you.

Kurzbeschreibung From the prize-winning author of *Motherless Brooklyn*, a daring, riotous, sweeping novel that spins the tale of two friends and their adventures in late 20th-century America. This is the story of two boys, Dylan Ebdus and Mingus Rude. They live in Brooklyn and are friends and neighbours; but since Dylan is white and Mingus is black, their friendship is not simple. This is the story of 1970s America, a time when the simplest decisions - what music you listen to, whether to speak to the kid in the seat next to you, whether to give up your lunch money - are laden with potential political, social and racial disaster. This is also the story of 1990s America, when nobody cared anymore. This is the story of what would happen if two teenaged boys obsessed with comic book heroes actually had superpowers: they would screw up their lives. From *Publishers Weekly* If there still remains any doubt, this novel confirms Lethem's status as the poet of Brooklyn and of motherless boys. Projected through the prism of race relations, black music and pop art, Lethem's stunning, disturbing and authoritatively observed narrative covers three decades of turbulent events on Dean Street, Brooklyn. When Abraham and Rachel Ebdus arrive there in the early 1970s, they are among the first whites to venture into a mainly black neighborhood that is just beginning to be called Boerum Hill. Abraham is a painter who abandons his craft to construct tiny, virtually indistinguishable movie frames in which nothing happens. Ex-hippie Rachel, a misguided liberal who will soon abandon her family, insists on sending their son, Dylan, to public school, where he stands out like a white flag. Desperately lonely, regularly attacked and abused by the black kids ("yoked," in the parlance), Dylan is saved by his unlikely friendship with his neighbor Mingus Rude, the son of a once-famous black singer, Barnett Rude Jr., who is now into cocaine and rage at the world. The story of Dylan and Mingus, both motherless boys, is one of loyalty and betrayal, and eventually different paths in life. Dylan will become a music journalist, and Mingus, for all his intelligence, kindness, verbal virtuosity and courage, will wind up behind bars. Meanwhile, the plot manages to encompass pop music from punk rock to rap, avant-garde art, graffiti, drug use, gentrification, the New York prison system and to sing a vibrant, sometimes heartbreaking ballad of Brooklyn throughout. Lethem seems to have devoured the '70s, '80s and '90s inhaled them whole and he reproduces them faithfully on the page, in prose as supple as silk and as bright, explosive and illuminating as fireworks. Scary and funny and seriously surreal, the novel hurtles on a trajectory that feels inevitable. By the time Dylan begins to break out of the fortress of solitude that has been his life, readers have shared his pain and understood his dreams. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Dylan Ebdus is a white kid on a black-and-brown street. As he struggles through public school in 1970s Brooklyn, he is "yoked"--put in a headlock--and frisked for change on a daily basis. Testing into a good Manhattan school, he steps into a long-lasting role: vulnerable among street kids, he's street-

smart compared to his new, privileged pals, and loathes himself as a poseur with both crowds. When he finds a ring that grants the power of flight, he's afraid to use it, but his black friend, Mingus, is not. They try their hand at crime fighting, but like many teenage endeavors, the project fizzles out. Lethem is a tremendous writer, and in the first half he uses magnificent language to capture the complexity of a child's worldview. When he jump-cuts to Dylan's adulthood, however, his switch to a more conventional narrative style is disappointing. The story regains momentum when Dylan rediscovers the ring and a new power it offers, then returns to his old street and ponders a sacrifice: whether to give the ring to the boy who yoked him the most. Lethem explores many avenues: the origins of gentrification, the development of soul music, the genealogy of graffiti, the seeds of the crack epidemic. The different concepts converge in the closing pages, but this often-excellent novel labors under the weight of its ambition. Keir GraffCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved