

is just what it is if many of the perceptions of it are wrong.

The assumption that each person has his or her own reality may seem very comfortable and not at all dangerous. It, in fact, may seem like a useful expedient for avoiding conflict, but it may be just kicking the can down the road. It may create other problems, particularly in the Age of the Internet.

The Internet, while making communication far easier than it had been previously, may exacerbate the problem. With the Internet you have more opportunity than ever before to choose what opinions reach you. It is now easy to surround yourself with opinions that are very much like your own, if you so choose. You cannot only create your own reality, you can choose pundits to reinforce your natural prejudices.

It may be that on the short run complacency that everybody's ideas are of equal value may avoid small conflicts in the short run, but it in the long run with the help of the Internet it is dividing up the United States and will lead to disaster in the long run. [-mrl]

STARLINGS by Jo Walton (copyright 2018, Tachyon Publications, 288pp, Paperback, Print ISBN 978-1-61696-056-8, Digital ISBN 978-1-61696-057-5, ASIN: B073WG5J8N) (book review by Joe Karpierz):

I've not read much by Jo Walton, but even to use the word "much" is a bit of an exaggeration. Up until STARLINGS, the only work I've read from her is her Hugo award winning novel AMONG OTHERS. While I enjoyed the novel, I thought it had a few flaws. Nonetheless, I enjoyed it enough to know that I would be okay with reading more of Walton's work at some point in the future.

STARLINGS is a collection of short fiction and poetry. Walton is not known as a writer of short fiction; as she states in her introduction, novels came much more naturally to her than short fiction ever did. In fact, STARLINGS is her first collection of short stories, and the poetry that is included in the volume is, in her words, her fourth poetry collection. The stories and poetry collected here are as diverse in their subject matter as they are in their style and technique. This was a different kind of book for me to read in more ways than one, not the least of which is the fact that it contains poetry. More on that a bit later on. However, one of the things I enjoyed about the book was that instead of an introduction before each story, Walton gives the reader a background for the story at the end, a sort of "now that you've read it, here's the deal with it". That kind of structure appealed to me and I really enjoyed it.

The book contains a lot of pieces that Walton says aren't stories at all; they might be pieces that play with form, mode, or point of view. A good number of them defy description or summary. For example, "Parable Lost" certainly be read as a parable, but don't get lost in all the jellyfish. Then there's "Escape to Other Worlds with Science Fiction", a piece that's stitched together from newspaper, ads from various science fiction magazines (among other things), and story fragments. It certainly isn't a story, but it's fascinating in any event. There's a snippet of a narrative called "What Joseph Felt", a retelling of a portion of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus from the point of view of Joseph; I enjoyed this one quite a bit. There's a book review, written by an alien, of a novel that has humans as its central characters, entitled "The Need to Stay the Same". At one point the review complains, albeit gently, of the book being the eighth book in the sequence and the "themes are starting to feel familiar"--there's something we see all too much of in this field. "Joyful and Triumphant: St. Zeobius and the Aliens" is a wonderful guide for new residents of heaven who are a bit surprised that there are aliens there. Growing up Catholic, I certainly never thought that there'd be anything other than humans in heaven. I found the piece interesting and delightful. "Turnover" is a piece that I think of as a short story, but Walton says is the first chapter of a novel; if that's true, then this is a novel that I'd like to read. It takes place on a generational starship, and in this particular bit we're joining some of the starship travelers for lunch as they talk about whether they want to go on to the landing or not, as the Turnaround of the story, where the ship turns around and begins deceleration toward the planet upon which it intends to land, is quickly approaching. The idea of residents of a generational starship born during the journey discussing that they didn't choose this life--it was chosen for them--is not a new one in science fiction, but the idea of being a figurative fly on the wall during one of these discussions is intriguing. "What Would Sam Spade Do?" is a piece with a fascinating idea: clones of Jesus are a common ethnic group in the United States. The narrative relates the circumstances under which one clone is investigating the death of another clone at the hands of yet a third clone. The idea that someone would find Jesus' genetic material and create clones of him is interesting in and of itself, and the oddness of the investigation is an intriguing and interesting way of using the concept.

Real honest to goodness stories? How about "Unreliable Witness", about a woman with dementia who meets aliens--and of course, no one believes her? One of my favorite pieces in the book is entitled "Three Shouts on a Hill (A Play)". It's a story told in play form based on an Irish legend. My wife may be half Irish (on her father's side), but I've never heard the legend before. This one had me going for a while as I didn't know where it was headed. It was certainly a lot of fun. "A Burden Shared" is a wonderful piece the central conceit of which is the fact that a person's pain can be shared by other people, but the story is really about familial relationships and how we deal with suffering loved ones.

The remaining prose pieces are generally just as interesting and just as creative and diverse as those I've already talked about.

They nicely demonstrate Walton's range as a writer and storyteller. There are many pieces throughout the book, either some that I've mentioned above or those that I haven't, that I would like to see fleshed out into complete stories or novels.

The second section of the book is a collection of poetry. In the interest of full disclosure, I've never been into poetry; maybe it's because I don't know how to read it or appreciate it for the many and varied forms it takes. I will admit to having a difficult time in reading and appreciating the poetry that appears here. Favorites are "Ten Years Ahead: Oracle Poem", a piece that tries to predict the future; "The Godzilla Sonnets", the title of which I suspect is fairly self-explanatory; and "Three Bears Norse", the subject of which may be obvious.

STARLINGS is a collection that demonstrates Jo Walton's ability as a writer. The pieces within show off her range and versatility, her style and technique. This short story collection may not contain a whole lot of traditional short stories, but what it does contain is a whole bunch of good old fashioned high quality writing, the kind she demonstrated in AMONG OTHERS, and the kind I expect we'll see from her as her career continues. [-jak]

REALIVE (letter of comment by Fred Lerner):

Mark's review of REALIVE doesn't indicate whether the film addresses the central question of cryonic preservation and revival: what incentive is there for anyone in the future to go to the trouble of reviving someone who underwent the process? Perhaps Marc Jarvis is the only person who was cryonically frozen, and thus would be of interest to historians wanting a firsthand account of life in 2015. Or perhaps he is thought to know the location of some buried treasure. But if he is one of many optimists who thought that their medical problems might be resolved in the future, I fail to see what he would have to offer the world of 2084. I suppose that some war or disaster might have set civilisation so far back that the technological knowledge of a random person who had been alive seventy years before might be considered valuable. But would such a post-disaster world possess the technology to revive him? Absent such a cataclysm, the world of 2084 would presumably be sufficiently well populated not to require the presence of Mr Jarvis. If the folk of that year harbored kind feelings toward him they might decide to leave him in the tank so that some future era might choose to decant him. More likely they would decide that the resources necessary to keep him on ice might be more usefully deployed elsewhere. [-fl]

Mark responds:

SPOILER:

The film does address the question of why. Marc is the first and the real motive is scientific curiosity. And one never knows what application scientific knowledge will bring. [-mrl]

MEDUSA (letter of comment by Gregory Benford):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of MEDUSA](#) in the 10/06/17 issue of the MT VOID, Gregory Benford writes:

Good review. Agree with "It's a throwback to a different time, when the sense of wonder that was present in the science fiction that we read--maybe it was just because we read those books as young people with eyes wide open to the future--was what brought us into the field to begin with."

But I think there's a dearth of optimistic, cosmic sf because it takes more work to envision a positive, expansive future than to just see problems and dystopias.

I might also note regarding: "It's not until the final story, where he is called to unknowingly be the delivery system for a virus that will destroy the machines, that the ultimate solution--the unification of machine and man--is the way to get the long elusive peace to occur."

--that this is the ending of my Galactic Center series, too. I think it's inevitable, with much stress before... [-gb]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE SHADWELL SHADOWS by James Lovegrove (ISBN 978-1-785-65291-2) crosses Sherlock Holmes with H. P. Lovecraft's "Cthulhu" world. It is also the first of a trilogy, though it does stand on its own. One thing that I find a bit off-putting is that Watson changes a lot of the original canon, with pretty much the same explanation that he used for not writing about the Giant Rat of Sumatra: the world is not yet ready for the true story. (I hear Jack Nicholson in the background yelling, "You can't handle the truth!") By the time you change as much of the background story as Watson/Lovegrove does, it is questionable whether you still have Sherlock Holmes. And Lovegrove seems to go a bit overboard on the writing styles, both Victorian and Lovecraftian. Still, it's enjoyable in a pulpish sort of way.

HIEROGLYPH: STORIES AND VISIONS FOR A BETTER FUTURE edited by Ed Finn and Kathryn Cramer (ISBN 978-0-062-20471-4) is the product of a challenge to science fiction writers to write more positive, big-engineering (or big-science) sorts of stories. Apparently someone blamed science fiction writers for the current sad state of "big science", saying that they had stopped writing inspiring stories. Well, it is true that ANALOG (and before that, ASTOUNDING) used to publish this sort of story (and maybe still do, for all I know). But an issue of ANALOG would have one earnest story about "big science" ... and then there would be a humorous "first contact" story, and a puzzle sort of story, and so on. Having an entire (thick) volume of earnest "big science" stories just accentuates how they are all trying so hard to send a message to the reader, often at the expense of story and character. I don't mind infodumps, but many of these are nothing but infodumps. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse
gets the cheese.

--Jon Hammond

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