

## A Second Coming and Other Stories

**E. A. Moore**

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*Well-written science fiction stories entertain with exceptional dialogue and a great grasp of character voice.*

Covering familiar thematic ground, *A Second Coming and Other Stories*, science fiction short stories by E. A. Moore, represents a promising debut.

This collection of short stories, mostly set on a realistic Earth, covers familiar ground in science fiction. An alien presence invades, only to offer the inhabitants of Earth—particularly the animals—enhanced mental powers. A strange box allows an unwitting hero to correct a single mistake. A car, gifted with artificial intelligence, toys with its neurotic passenger.

The concepts are solid enough to have filled out a season of *The Twilight Zone*, but they're also less than original. "The Mulligan Box," for example, recalls "The Monkey's Paw" without the grisly comeuppance. On its own, this tendency to build on extant themes isn't a critical flaw, since the stories are otherwise fairly engaging.

However, frustratingly, the book fails to develop its themes to a satisfying conclusion. In "I, Car," for example, the concept of an intelligent vehicle slowly losing its patience with a trying passenger is overshadowed by an overbearing monologue by the vehicle's creator, at the end of which the vehicle exhibits relatively minor evidence of its emotional development. This particular story begs for greater length and exploration, conjuring the possibility of a slowly awakening vehicular social class raised to awareness by sheer irritation with humanity. "The Mulligan Box" also presents a tantalizing concept that could benefit from greater length. A bolder, more aggressive take on some of the themes could also improve stories that seem to wrap up without really concluding. Again, "The Mulligan Box" is a good example of this: having lost the magical, wish-granting box, the main character simply shrugs his shoulders and goes on with his life, never learning any more about the box's dire warning.

The stories tend to focus on personalities rather than on technical factors. Each does a fine job fleshing out believable characters. Dialogue in particular is natural and easy to read, in some cases contributing more to the story than the rest of the writing put together. The standout is Livingston, the telepathic cat of the book's namesake story, "A Second Coming." Avoiding the hazards of becoming either too comical or too wise, the hyperintelligent cat remains lifelike even when he pushes the envelope of plausibility. This could also be why the standout story of this volume, "A Paper Trail," is so engaging. Written almost entirely as memos, this tale of bureaucratic woe allows the author's strength in character voice to shine brightly.

Well written and fun to read, this book entertains. Science fiction fans should expect to enjoy it.

ANNA CALL (July 21, 2015)

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