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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ SCIENCE FICTION

Ambassador to Earth

Gallen Dugall
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With first contact, humanity finally understands it's not the center of the universe.

When Ech, an alien diplomat, lands without warning in Orlando, Florida, Earth's governments and shadow governments find themselves forced to confront a reality where humanity is no longer the pinnacle of evolution but merely the newest player in a galactic game. Gallen Dugall's *Ambassador to Earth* eschews the expected tension of a traditional humanity-versus-alien story to portray in great detail the bureaucratic tedium that may more realistically follow Earth's first contact with extraterrestrial life.

First-contact stories give authors the chance to explore what it means to be human by juxtaposing two sentient alien species. Dugall uses this format to build *Ambassador to Earth* around a fascinating idea. Even though humanity is not the most advanced species, it has made the most advances in the shortest amount of time.

Unlike more predatory species, which evolved with the ability to focus on a single problem to the exclusion of everything else, humanity's scavenger origins encouraged the development of abstract problem solving. Or, as Ech explains, "The human ability with mathematics has direct and tangible applications in modeling and engineering, which explains the sudden rush of human innovation that has advanced your species' technology in just a few hundred years what normally takes many thousands of years for other species in trial-and-error research."

From overly long sentences to inconsistent punctuation, mechanical errors make it difficult to fully engage with *Ambassador to Earth.* Also, the book lacks a cast of believable characters, and Dugall's "Association" is almost identical to Ian Fleming's SPECTRE, a group of self-identified secret masters of the world. "They controlled industrial conglomerates, service corporations, and media giants alongside of political parties and religious sects," Dugall writes, "although their personal offices and board seats held no provable connection to one another."

Dugall distinguishes his cabal from SPECTRE by having it act not only as the novel's antagonist but also as its comic relief. After witnessing the Association's two bungled assassination attempts and whiny conference call, it is hard to imagine this group mastering the art of tying shoelaces, much less controlling the world.

The search for a believable protagonist faces a similar challenge. Sarah Thompson, the independent contract negotiator for the mayor's office, dithers over the smallest decisions. Rather than exhibiting believable development or evolution as a character, she is conveniently altered to fit whatever situation into which she's been placed. If the author used a more nuanced approach to the character, one that shows her taking charge in the small areas of her life, the narrative surrounding Sarah would lead to tighter, more genuine pivotal moments.

Fans of first-contact stories are always looking for new ideas, and *Ambassador to Earth* has a great one. With a few revisions, it would also be a great story.

JOSEPH THOMPSON (October 1, 2013)

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