

Any Other World Will Do

Alex Lubertozi

Top Five Books (Aug 1, 2021)

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Alex Lubertozi's science fiction novel *Any Other World Will Do* presents an alien vision of Earth's possible future. It's a send-up of the genre that wraps its earnest warning in plausible deniability.

In 1986, Barcelona teems with travelers drinking cheap beer and trying to escape. But one tourist, Vikram, is light years from home. When he corrals Miles, an American just out of high school, and Anna, a multinational graduate student cum barmaid, into joining him on his own world, all hell breaks loose. They're chased by warring alien factions who want different futures for Tonshu, a planet that's just hanging on.

The book explores human society and potential futures through an alien mirror. In addition to conspicuous consumption that leads to ecological collapse, the Yishi model human sexual and gender politics through a dark mirror of language, adoration, and diversion in a "synchronicity of people and events [they] couldn't pretend to control or even understand." Audience surrogate Miles bumbles around worlds, alternating between brash naïveté and youthful ennui. Anna's intellectual curiosity is much better suited to the task, while Vikram is an alien counter to Miles and Anna's nascent relationship.

The narration is divided between Europe and Tonshu, though the European portion better modulates between being a thriller and its instances of farcical irony. The plot's loose cannon antics on Earth spin out once off world, as the stakes alternate between being serious and relaxed. The explication of Tonshu's circumstances, from the alien landscape to the nature of the avian Yishi people and how they're able to pass on Earth, is loose.

Earth is left behind in the science fiction novel *Any Other World Will Do*, which is part morality play.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (July / August 2021)

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