

Boon Juster or the Reason for Everything

Garth Hallberg

The Reason for Everything (February 2014)

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This story leaves readers questioning what they know and if they can trust what they hear in the future.

In his compelling, plot-driven novel, Garth Hallberg creates a twisted tale that questions the truth about US space flights and moon landings. *Boon Juster: Or the Reason for Everything* uses NASA photos and documents, as well as a few artifacts created by Hallberg himself, including the cover photo, to drive the book's mysterious events. These elements help build a story designed to make the reader speculate on what is true and what comes from the writer's imagination.

Tom Hammock was friends with Boon Juster forty years ago. Since then, Boon has not only walked on the moon but also played baseball on it. He hit "the first and only home run on the moon," and buoyed the nation when a dose of patriotism was needed. When Boon dies suddenly, and Tom is appointed the executor of his friend's estate, he becomes suspicious. He discovers a hidden room in Boon's apartment where he learns about a classified NASA organization whose sole purpose is to keep the secrets astronauts know under wraps. Tom soon discovers what Boon's kept hidden all these years, and he has to balance his own need for truth with what Boon would have wanted him to do with the information.

Hallberg's ambitious novel, which takes place over a four-day period, offers a number of plot twists and an intriguing, believable main character in Tom. He's a down-on-his-luck guy who takes the reader along on a journey of mystery and discovery. Interesting lines of description and imagery appear occasionally. For example: "Tom was now intent on studying the bits of label scattered on the bar, as if they might be some humbler form of tea leaves."

However, the book's attempts at imagery and metaphor often serve only to confuse. At one point, while talking with a love interest, "Tom finally glanced up to find her studying him intently, the dark charcoal of her eyes squeezed into two perfectly formed briquettes." The reader is left wondering what this means. Does Tom appreciate her appearance, or is there a darker subtext?

In general, the novel moves at a relatively slow pace due, in part, to Tom's repeating his discoveries to each character. As a result, many chapters do not move the story forward, but stagnate, a situation that could be improved by eliminating repetitive material.

Boon Juster has potential. The story sticks in the reader's mind, raising questions about what they really know about historical events, and if they can trust what they hear in the future.

KANDY ALAMEDA (January 31, 2014)

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