



Digital Face: Stories

Zelda Leah Gatuskin

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Fantasy and reality blur in this science fiction collection, full of eerie, otherworldly moments.

The eleven short stories collected in Zelda Leah Gatuskin's *Digital Face* all address, in one way or another, the question of what is real. Interesting ideas and memorable characters populate these stories that lean toward science fiction, with the strongest qualifying as magical realism.

"Tsunami" stands out in the collection. In it, a woman becomes fascinated with news coverage of a natural disaster and is obsessed with thinking about all the things she would have lost if the same thing had happened to her. She begins to play the part of a victim, and even wishes that she'd undergone that kind of tragedy. The story is both a strong character study and a commentary on the strange turns that empathy can take. The prose does a nice job of blurring the line between fantasy and reality.

In the book's title story, a celebrity undergoes an unusual procedure in order to continue looking young. This science-fiction premise is written with bits of dark comedy and strong visual sensibilities so that the protagonist's decision is treated as foolish without diminishing the creepy process she undergoes. In "Silver and Gold Apples," a mysterious woman named Sun Flower operates a "Gallery of Dreams" out of a vacant storefront, and the realtor falls for her. Descriptive writing makes the unusual setting work, as Gatuskin makes the images in the gallery feel eerie and otherworldly. Many of the other stories are short or flash pieces, with high concepts that work well and are paced quickly, though their shorter length gives them less room to explore the ideas they introduce.

Digital Face does begin a bit slowly, with a few short stories that are solid genre pieces, if not as strong as those mentioned above. Still, each piece in the collection features an interesting sci-fi premise crafted well, and the best pieces are written with visually evocative language, which adds to their appeal.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Summer 2016)

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