

e.a.r.t.h. experiment to alleviate racial tension and hatred

Arthur Douglas

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Arthur Douglas takes readers into a multifaceted world that, at first, looks very much like the everyday reality of a blind young woman and her service dog, but expands to reveal a cosmic experiment that has been in progress for eons and is about to expire. The book's title and subtitle reveal the nature of the experiment—*e.a.r.t.h: experiment to alleviate racial tension and hatred*—the result of an offer by the governing body of the galaxy (referred to as the “G.o.d.”) to end the battles between four warring planets. G.o.d. promises them membership in the commonwealth if they stop fighting for a period of time and allow the G.o.d. to evolve the “essence of peace.”

Planet Earth is selected to host the experiment, and the mission of the aliens that are beamed into the aboriginal population of the smallish, beautiful blue planet is to learn to live together. Douglas gives readers alternative perspectives on history, religion, disability, racial bias, ecology, the legalization of drugs, the act of killing in its various forms, change, love, and many other issues, presenting them through the eyes of his characters—each one an “alien” in his or her own way.

Written almost entirely in dialogue, for which the author has a gift, the book reads like the script for a stage play, with speakers identified by name at the left of the page as well as with signs and italics. Though it is difficult to carry an entire story through dialogue alone, Douglas manages the task with skill and wit, as in this excerpt: “>cricket...your excellency...is yet another game...another ball...another field...it's so indescribably complex that a particular sector of earthlings used it to found the greatest empire in modern times...the logic seeming to be that if the enemy could be confounded into learning how to play cricket...they'd be benign for years...and if they ever mastered it they'd be just as twisted as their colonists...and both would get along famously<.”

Unfortunately, the book's many errors, which could easily be corrected with careful proofreading, detract from its overall quality and create confusion. It is unclear whether missing words—as in, “>i'm trying to explain is that earthlings<,” and “>how would you know if wasn't here to answer it<”—are intentionally left out to convey lapses in the transmission of thoughts or are simply errors. Along those lines, readers may wonder if the lack of capitalization and punctuation in the alien's speech (“>aren't earthlings animals as well<” and “>what sort of behavior would direct an earthling to hell<”) is meant to give the impression of a mechanical flatness of expression or is merely careless omission. At any rate, the author would do well to give this work the thorough proofreading it merits, and also include some biographical information.

While the ending is almost too surprising and leaves readers wondering what hints they might have missed in earlier pages, the book offers a refreshing, moving, and sometimes funny take on earthly, and perhaps cosmic, problems.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January 14, 2013)

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