Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Feisengrad
Aaron Richard Golub
John O'Leary, illustrator
978-1-4392-7055-4
Three Stars (out of Five)

> *I want to stay as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center.—Kurt Vonnegut*

Satire has been used by some of literary history's finest authors to expose societal shortcomings with droll, smart and insightful observations. Much like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, Aaron Richard Golub's short dystopian novel *Feisengrad* contains some great *Animal Farm*-type satire and dark themes similar to those found in Orwell's futuristic novel *1984*. Readers might also recognize some of the goofy but hilarious humor of Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The book stretches over a period of three days, Monday through Wednesday, and takes place in a world called "The Z." It begins with the birth of Plausible Feisengrad, Golub's protagonist. Like all of the other "plow 7s" which are the worker citizens in The Z, Feisengrad hatches from a large egg. Golub writes, "The plow 7s, who did what the Z Board told them to, were uncertain about their thoughts and decisions…Feisengrad shook and twitched through the mystery of what was called birth; no plow 7 in The Z ever knew how they materialized."

The plow 7's true function is to perpetuate the regulations and lies that keep the Z Board in power. These laws are enforced by the "Cops" and the "Umpires" who decide whether a plow 7 is "safe" or "out." The plow 7s are not sure how the Umpires make their decisions because their methods are never consistent. Feisengrad is told that in order to maintain a semblance of normalcy and not call attention to himself, he must have a job, friends and a girlfriend. He scrambles to earn all three but doesn't succeed and becomes depressed. As in *1984*, The Z is always at war with an unknown enemy and the Z Board encourages the plow 7s to conform to

their rules and discourages individualism.

At times, Golub's writing is awkward and contains errors. For example, he misspells the word "ask" as "ax." (No doubt, the spelling is intentional, but certain readers will find it detracting).

John O'Leary's black and white illustrations are gorgeous and stand out with brilliance. He captures the weirdness of The Z and also the twists in the real world.

There are great ideas in the novel, but a general lack of editing makes it difficult to read. Furthermore, the author's wit cannot overcome certain elements in the book that have no relevance to the plot and are author intrusive. As a New York attorney specializing in entertainment and commercial litigation, and the author of *The Big Cut*, his writing skill and experience warrants another trip to The Z in a properly edited book.

Lee Goodens