Clarion Review

Science Fiction

First Contact with Humans
Gene Snow Olsen
Xlibris
978-1-4836-1158-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

Funny and readable, this story successfully pulls off the sci-fi alien point of view.

Gene Snow Olsen's *First Contact with Humans* nests philosophy, colonialism, and a first-contact scenario inside a Russian *matryoshka* doll of a science-fiction novel that's not your grandma's space opera—it's better.

Many science-fiction authors have attempted to write from a nonhuman perspective. Most fail by making their aliens too human, or by making them too alien. *First Contact with Humans*, a serious drama sprinkled with humor for balance, succeeds where other novels have failed. Its most important alien character, Jason, lives a kilometer beneath the surface of Earth 2 (E-2) and is entirely opposed to violence. The colony ship *New Hope* comes from a fatally polluted Earth and has a battle cruiser attached to its hull. The human spacecrafts are owned by a small junta of very rich men without a moral code and who seek more power.

Guess which one—alien or human—is the xenophobe.

First Contact with Humans sports a great cover that combines a story hint with humor, via visual juxtaposition. It's a safe bet that this cover will get stuck in a lot of readers' brains—as it should. This is a cover that actually does its job. The design leaves behind the "standard" science-fiction novel's stock content, such as starships in space or on the surface of a discovered planet, or landscapes with no characters and just one tiny unidentifiable something in the far distance.

Olsen is a skilled humorist, using amusing dialogue with a touch of snarkasm; for example, Jason says, "I don't believe [humans] know what they are saying until it comes out of their mouths." An exasperated woman named Carol says, "Jason, you are such an alien."

Grammatical errors, misplaced punctuation marks, and little use of contractions all

contribute to making most of the dialogue a bit stilted: “They must know that there is a large chance that they would lose.” Scattered throughout the text are mix-ups in word form and verb tenses as well. The text would also benefit from a revision with an eye toward increasing character-evoking dialogue. Lastly, some sections of dialogue can put readers off because they’re too long.

This author can be compared with C. J. Cherryh (the *Chanur Saga*), Hal Clement (*Mission of Gravity*), Peter Watts (*Blindsight*), and Octavia E. Butler (the *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy). All chose the alien-as-human meme in their work and stretched this subgenre of sci-fi in novels featuring easily believable nonhumans and very few human characters. They also used a *matryoshka* model structure in at least one novel.

For a first effort, Gene Snow Olsen’s *First Contact with Humans* offers a very readable book. Further journeys into its world would be welcome.

J. G. Stinson