

Frostlands

John Feffer

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A worthy sequel to the thought-provoking *Splinterlands*, *Frostlands* is triumphant and absorbing science fiction, full of ecological and societal warnings. It is a unique and imaginative look at a future Earth scarred by environmental neglect.

Splinterlands focused on a scientist, Julian West, searching for his family members. It created a believable future Earth by extrapolating current ecological woes. *Frostlands* is more polished. With the heavy lifting of creating a future world from scratch mostly completed by its predecessor, it is free to become a vehicle for fast-paced intrigue.

This entry's main character is Rachel Leopold, Julian's ex-wife. She is a founding member of the Vermont eco-commune Arcadia. A drone attack early in the book leaves Rachel racing to figure out who might have planned the assault against Arcadia and why. The revelation of an enemy spy within Arcadia adds a whodunit element, and the interweaving of these threads leads to a solid, cohesive science fiction story that delivers its environmental warnings more subtly but no less effectively than its predecessor.

Despite the environmental-disaster theme, Feffer's sense of humor shines through, with a historic storm named Hurricane Donald and an engrossing cast of secondary characters, such as a pair of artificial intelligences, Rupert and Karyn—the former bearing an aristocratic British accent, the latter an aspiring graphic novelist.

In a short space, *Frostlands* touches on a variety of intriguing subjects. The killer drones and network-hacking warfare of *Frostlands* aren't wild speculative fantasy of a remote future; Feffer is focused on the next fifty years or so, with an eye toward avoiding the mostly bleak landscape that *Frostlands* so vividly captures. Rachel and Arcadia represent the ability of humans to adapt and fight back against even self-inflicted environmental and societal wounds; their story is both edifying and entertaining.

PETER DABBENE (November/December 2018)

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