Clarion Review

Science Fiction

I, robot: Howard S. Smith's I, robot

Howard S. Smith
Howard S. Smith Illustrated by Kathy Harestad
Kathy Harestad, illustrator
Robot Binaries and Press
978-1-894689-05-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

Ignore the recycled title and unfortunate cover art; this techno-thriller has nothing to do with Isaac Asimov's book or Will Smith's movie of the same name. Innovative fast-paced and extraordinarily well-written it's honestly better than both of those stories put together.

The premise could easily have been pulled from tomorrow's headlines. Japan is threatened by an increasingly hostile North Korean regime that sinks its ships captures its sailors and even fires missiles through its airspace yet finds itself constitutionally prohibited from developing offensive weapons that many in the military feel are necessary for proper defense. Besieged by terrorists and disdained by most of the rest of the world Israel is also in desperate straits. Losing a slow war of attrition with their numerous enemies the Israelis make a secret deal to trade tactical nuclear weapons and technology to the Japanese in exchange for a horde of artificially intelligent combat-trained robots. Police inspector Haruto Suzuki is assigned to investigate the death of the owner of an electronics company that makes parts for the androids and gets caught up in the action.

Suzuki is fascinating. Obsessive-compulsive he possesses the drive necessary to accomplish almost anything yet this single-mindedness encumbers his life. He is overly conscientious and obsessed with rules. When officers in his unit accept free meals from local merchants for instance he turns them in ruining their careers while unintentionally accelerating his own. He makes *keibhu* full inspector by age thirty-five an extraordinary achievement. He ruthlessly hones his body excelling in karate as well. This trait saves his life more than once throughout his globe-spanning adventures. When he meets Mara a beautiful Israeli woman he discovers the one thing he'd been missing all his life—true happiness. The challenge is that he is

torn between his obsession to follow the “rules” and the consequences that such actions would bring upon his newfound love. This relationship is convincingly written truly romantic and not contrived in the least.

Smith an MIT-trained engineer really did his homework. Cutting-edge technology is explained in ways that make it readily accessible to the lay-person. Harestad’s charts and illustrations help clarify things even further. Everything from nuclear technology to advanced robotics and artificial intelligence is artfully described believable and surprisingly exciting. The author even describes how a nuclear test detonation could realistically be hidden from satellite surveillance. There’s a thirteen-page bibliography at the end for readers more interested in the technology.

There are few faults in this spectacular tome yet there is a bit of undefined terminology. While there is a short glossary it contains roughly a quarter of the Japanese words actually used in the text so readers can get a little lost at times. The only other drawback is that some of the martial arts sequences are described using incorrect Japanese terminology; nothing that non-practitioners would even notice but a minor glitch nevertheless. Overall however *I robot* is a mesmerizing read with memorable characters great dialogue believable technology and wonderful action.

Lawrence Kane