

Invaders: 22 Tales From the Outer Limits of Literature

Jacob Weisman, Editor

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The stories are what they need to be, and if that involves a doglike alien's wordless meeting with a shepherd, so be it.

Jacob Weisman settles—or perhaps provokes—the debate about what constitutes literature, and what represents “genre fiction”—science fiction, in this case—in the story collection *Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature*.

With a selection of authors and stories that don't always fit the traditional mold of science fiction, the title *Invaders* is not so much representative of the stories contained within, but rather of the “outsider” status of the authors. The list of contributors is impressive—Jonathan Lethem, Katherine Dunn, Steven Millhauser, W. P. Kinsella, and Junot Díaz, among many others—but these authors have made their names and reputations in mainstream literature, not science fiction.

Smartly, Weisman addresses the elephant in the room immediately, with an insightful essay about the blurred lines separating those two sometimes arbitrary categories. Then, it's time to jump into the stories themselves, which vary in content and style from the wordplay of Amiri Baraka (“See, you're intelligent.[...] I'm outtelligent.”), to Millhauser's trippy mock nonfiction, to Kinsella's bizarre and humorous story of an alien who becomes the Seattle Mariners' mascot. There are also affecting stories to be found, stories that probe the future of humanity with imagination and compassion, such as Julia Elliott's “LIMBs” or Deji Bryce Olukotun's standout “We are the Olfanauts”.

Because of the book's variety, it demands a sense of open-mindedness toward what constitutes science fiction. But the writing itself is consistently excellent, and occasionally exquisite. There's never a sense of these authors “slumming” in genre fiction simply because they can, or because they were solicited for an anthology contribution; the stories are what they need to be, and if that involves a doglike alien's wordless meeting with a shepherd, so be it.

At its best, science fiction surpasses simple, conventional tales of “invaders from space.” With wry wit and sincere affection, this collection shows us that many times, the invaders not only have good intentions but also have much to share.

PETER DABBENE (Summer 2016)

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