FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ GENERAL FICTION

Julia and the Dream Maker

P. J. Fischer
Traitor Dachshund Books (May 11, 2009)
Unknown $18.99 (290pp)
978-0-9744287-0-3

In the future, all things are possible. In this novel, set in the waning days of the twenty-first century, cars really do resemble those piloted by George Jetson, water is strictly rationed (no surprise there), and computer technology has achieved frightening levels of sophistication. But in the author's world, many things remain comfortingly the same: the food is recognizable, beer and wine are still imbibed, and graduate students still obsess over pending dissertations, dwindling finances, and the paucity of post-doc positions.

Steven, Eli, and Bennie are three such graduate students, biologists whose expertise lies less in the realm of blood, bone, and tissue than in the province of virtual reality, mathematical electrodynamics, and artificial intelligence. Their immediate need for cash and Steven's looming dissertation deadline coalesce into a scheme to create a commercially-viable "virtual assistant," a project that has the potential to make them all fabulously wealthy, and catapult them into unimagined levels of professional success.

The project gets out of hand, however, when the invention transmogrifies from a computer-driven holographic image into a sentient, mutant life form named Julia. Such genetic manipulations, it is reassuring to note, are strictly illegal in Fischer's futuristic world, and when Steven stands trial for his creation, Bennie is forced to testify against him, while Eli, Steven's lover, wants alternately to destroy and preserve the work they've done.

The author has a background in chemical engineering as well as in physical and social sciences. He has produced numerous professional and technical publications; this new retelling of the Frankenstein allegory is his first novel. Steven and his able assistants let their egos get the better of them, lured by the notion that they, and not their creation, are really in control. Steven zealously declares: "We discovered genes, genetics, and biochemistry. And what did we do with it? We feared it. We made it illegal to create any more new species because, according to our Genesis account, it is logical to think that our world was optimized—it is the best. If God could have done better He would have. But that's just *our* logic. The thinking of one universe. Didn't Galileo teach us anything?"

Fischer's intellectual adventure is a cautionary tale, grappling with issues of moral responsibility, human—and nonhuman—evolution, individual hubris, and social accountability. It is packed with, and frequently burdened by, an excess of such abstract notions, while Fischer jumps from one doctrine to another with warp-factor speed. Yet for all its intricate philosophical precepts and elaborate technological concepts, this parable remains grounded in and relevant to current scientific and cultural conundrums. One need not be a techno-geek to appreciate Fischer's thoroughly sympathetic and personable characters, nor to be intrigued by the cliffhanger ending that gets Fischer's planned multi-volume series off to an auspicious start.

CAROL HAGGAS (August 18, 2009)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author provided free copies of his/her book to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love and make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.