

Minimum Safe Distance

X. Ho Yen

Grand Unification Monastery (Oct 17, 2022)

(396pp)

978-0-9766158-4-2

Minimum Safe Distance is a sobering science fiction novel in which sentient beings battle for survival.

In X. Ho Yen's science fiction novel *Minimum Safe Distance*, human beings fall prey to threats from within and without.

With a large swath of the universe soon to be destroyed in an unstoppable cataclysm, the Cosmologist—part of a unique fusion of technical and biological elements called the SelfMade—and others of its kind are in the process of fleeing to safety. Along the way, the Cosmologist pauses to monitor Laurence, an autistic human whose work with AI makes her a target for right-wing extremists. With Laurence's life, Earth, and the fate of the universe hanging in the balance, humans and aliens alike resort to dangerous measures to achieve their own ends.

The story is set in the mid-twenty-second century, wherein human civilization crumbles under the weight of climate change, economic depression, political instability, and religious extremism. Stark descriptions are used to depict the ravaged Earth—and, in particular, the former United States—as a barren, lawless wasteland where, despite a lack of central government, people still present a danger to themselves and others.

Two duos form the story's core. The first is the Cosmologist and another SelfMade, the Ethnologist, who go to war over how to deal with the impending apocalypse. The second is made up of Matt and Laurence—two humans, one of whom was raised to believe that cruelty is love, and the other of whom cannot understand the concept of deliberate cruelty, but whose commitment to logic sometimes leads to unintentional insensitivity. The latter duo grows up to influence their world in very different ways.

Occasional tense shifts confuse the story's progression, though, and too many sections focus on explaining the technology in use rather than on the beings who are using it. Indeed, long passages are devoted to the history and capabilities of each object. This holds the story itself at a remove, obscuring the human toll of the war between the SelfMades.

Sections that do focus on the characters deliver complex portraits of individuals facing relatable personal crises: Laurence muddles through a world that was not made for people like her, and the Cosmologist, despite its feud with the Ethnologist, misses the conversations they once had. The story of Matt's brother, who worked hard to overcome his abusive childhood only to fall victim to forces beyond his control, is a tragic addition, made more so by the fact that none of the altered beings involved comprehend the scope of that tragedy.

Minimum Safe Distance is a sobering science fiction novel in which sentient beings battle for survival. With its bleak assessment of humanity and its future prospects, the story issues a harrowing warning about how logic and passion must remain in balance to avoid catastrophe. Its warning also contains a small ray of hope, though—that someone, somewhere, may survive long enough to set the world right again.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (October 10, 2023)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to

Source: <https://www.forewordreviews.com/reviews/minimum-safe-distance/>

have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.