

## Opposable: The Halteres Chronicles

**Kirk E. Hammond**

Badass Sci Fi (May 17, 2020)

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*Kirk E. Hammond's science fiction series start off *Opposable* is gory and campy in all the best ways, with captivating characters to boot.*

Kirk E. Hammond's science fiction adventure *Opposable* is a punk rock road trip novel featuring manipulative aliens, psychic cats with opposable thumbs, and blood and guts galore.

The story begins in media res with a young scientist known as Dr. Vanderbilt being attacked by his own cat, Patton. Patton and Dr. Vanderbilt have a telepathic connection, formed when Vanderbilt surgically added mechanical hands to his three pet cats at the instruction of aliens from the planet Halteres. The aliens' intentions are unknown, but Vanderbilt imagines they are unsavory, even as he feels special for being chosen to carry out part of their mission.

Patton's ferocious attack ends with Vanderbilt bleeding out in his family cabin, but he is able to call his drug-addicted friend Xeno to come save him before he passes out. He awakes to stoned Xeno and Ashleigh, a woman whom he has a crush on, stopping his bleeding and rescuing him from aliens disguised as cops. The trio, along with Patton, hops in Ashleigh's car and takes off to the American West, slaughtering aliens and getting drunk and high along the way.

It takes a few chapters for the book's underlying premise to become clear. While Vanderbilt and the other characters' histories are relayed in small bits of dialogue over the course of the book, witty comments provide some fourth wall breakage for added humor, as when, before they take off in the car, Ashleigh says they'll have plenty of time for Vanderbilt's "boring backstory" on their trip. Banter, both among humans and aliens and between Vanderbilt and his cats, reveals the extent to which they all love and hate each other. Human flaws—greed, gluttony, and pride among them—are on full display, with Xeno constantly smoking marijuana, Ashleigh manipulating the men to do as she pleases, and Vanderbilt giving in to the pressures of those trying to control him. Xeno's amiable best friend energy, and Vanderbilt accepting that he must take responsibility for his actions, balance their weaknesses.

The action and settings are described in brilliant detail as the crew traverses the country and defends themselves from aliens from Halteres and its enemy planets. While the text is sometimes hard to follow, its ample fight scenes are suspenseful and thrilling; loveable characters' lives are threatened, and blood is spilled in gory, animated sequences.

The book's universe is expansive, and at times it feels as if the story is working to cover too much at once. Maps and appendices detailing the aliens' worlds help to round out the universe, but their information is not well integrated into the story itself. There is a wide world that this first novel in a series hasn't yet touched, though the ending hints that more excitement is to come.

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AIMEE JODOIN (May 27, 2020)

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