

Rockets Versus Gravity

Richard Scarsbrook

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Rockets Versus Gravity celebrates those who can achieve escape velocity, soaring toward freedom.

Richard Scarsbrook's *Rockets Versus Gravity* is a novel of confluence and departure, bringing characters together or pulling them apart through twists of fate and circumstance. Set in the fictional Canadian town of Faireville and nearby Toronto, *Rockets Versus Gravity* creates its own small universe of hope, frustration, love, lust, tragedy, and comedy. Each chapter adds to a quirky wholeness, forming a haunting pattern evocative of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*.

The unlikely force behind so many conjoined lives is Stan the lumberjack, who has trouble holding onto his wedding ring. Unhappily married for decades, Stan has lost four rings—perhaps by subconscious intention, perhaps by sheer bad luck—yet he dutifully replaces each one and remains with his shrewish wife. Stan has also always been fascinated by space travel and the spectacular rockets that can escape “the tyranny of gravity.” Sadly, Stan cannot seem to escape and soar. His lost rings, however, roll off and find new lives of their own.

Through shifting perspectives, the scope of *Rockets Versus Gravity* widens, then becomes close and connected again. Scarsbrook's tight world is held together by distinctive characters, ranging from powerful to penniless, and from working-class to the idle rich. There is Clementine, a nurse whose teenage romance left her a single mother, along with vainglorious hockey star Keegan Thrush and the wisely poetic homeless man Rhymin' Simon. Khalid, a Pakistani clerk at the Gas 'n' Snak convenience store, is nicknamed Sheik because of his resemblance to Rudolph Valentino. Wheelie Koontz's spina bifida may confine him to a wheelchair, but it doesn't stop him from seeking his own forms of personal justice.

Though the tone of *Rockets Versus Gravity* is often relevantly poignant, an underlying humor adds to the novel's appeal. A roadside billboard proclaims JESUS IS COMING; under this, someone spray-paints HIDE THE BOOZE! One character reads *Take Control of Your Life with NUMEROLOGY!*, while another obsesses over the hardcover edition of *YOU DESERVE BETTER! YOU DESERVE MORE!*

Rockets Versus Gravity celebrates those who can achieve escape velocity, soaring toward freedom, while it offers admirable compassion for those who—for one reason or another—must still remain earthbound.

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