



The Circle

Harold R. Watson

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In *The Circle*, a remnant human population from a damaged Earth is rescued by members of a benevolent alien civilization. The humans take a tour of the benevolent alien civilization while fighting off the evil aliens that brought about Earth's Armageddon. The story comes full circle when the humans return to Earth to rebuild their civilization.

In more skilled hands, the book's plot could have produced a swashbuckling space opera in the classic pulp style of E. E. "Doc" Smith or Edmond "World-Wrecker" Hamilton. Unfortunately, Harold R. Watson's storytelling skills are not up to the task. Action, which largely takes place offstage, is reported in summary form. Dialogue is either stiff and clumsily phrased, or, like the action sequences, it is reported in summary.

The author has also fallen prey to one of the classic traps for amateur authors: fantasy wish-fulfillment. The protagonist, Damon Neville, appears to be an idealized projection of the author. Damon moves from one futuristic adventure to another not because of his own decisions or abilities but because of his well-connected wife. In addition to possessing fantastic wealth and sex appeal, she is the pilot of a futuristic flying vessel, the commander of a secret underground military base, the owner of the local NFL team, and a member of a benevolent, highly advanced alien race that has made plans to rescue a portion of the Earth's population from the planet's impending devastation.

Once Damon and his family become part of the evacuation of the dying Earth, he succeeds in practically everything that he undertakes, despite having no training in alien technology or any particular familiarity with spaceships. Damon is promoted through various military ranks until he and his amazing alien wife are jointly designated the High Rulers of Earth. His triumphs extend to the bedroom. Several explicitly described sexual encounters have little apparent relevance to the plot.

In fan fiction, this kind of superhuman, idealized projection of the author into his (or her) own story is called a "Mary Sue," after a famous satirical story that mocked such characters in *Star Trek* fan fiction. Although many authors incorporate elements of their own personalities into their characters, extreme "Mary Sues" almost always disaffect the reader, and Damon Neville is no exception.

The Toren Empire includes rather obvious projections of Earthly stereotypes: The planet Ebony is home to black people; Erie is the home of the "snow people"; and Aquarius is a water planet whose people live in underwater domes.

Occasional word-substitution errors throughout the book are, in most cases, easily passed over; however, it is particularly distracting when the cities of Aquarius are referred to as having "dooms" instead of "domes."

More careful copy editing could have corrected such problems, and more substantial editing for content and style could have turned Watson's story into an adventurous space opera of the type that populated the old-style science fiction pulp magazines. Unfortunately, *The Circle* fails to fully exploit the potential of its plot.

BRADLEY A. SCOTT (April 16, 2013)

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