

The Limits of My World

Gregory Coles

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A common goal is sought between two contentious groups in the philosophical science fiction novel The Limits of My World.

In Gregory Coles's future-set science fiction novel *The Limits of My World*, a war between aliens and humans seems inevitable—though its origins are at first unclear.

Tei, an accomplished coder, is called upon to broker a deal between aliens and humans, who blame each other for all of the problems in the universe. Meanwhile, Tei's best friend, Kanan, escapes from the sedentary archive career that she's been assigned to but that she—the best runner of her generation—chafes against. Both she and Tei have scanty options available to them, and there are consequences for shirking one's assigned roles. Still, when Tei and Kanan reunite, there's hope that they'll be able to bridge the alien and human worlds.

Focused on language and concepts, the prose is both cerebral and dispassionate. Though the story involves the whole universe, its confines feel narrow at first. And because the worldbuilding involves the extensive redefinition of terms, including "skin," "universe," "human," and "cyborg," its particulars remain vague and disorienting early on.

Tei and Kanan have a number of exchanges with their mentors and others in authority roles; most of these conversations are emotion-free and focused on conveying information. Indeed, many secondary characters seem present most to humanize the book's high-minded ideas of deletion, nothingness, and betrayal. Still, the parameters of this universe are clarified as the book continues—and as Tei and Kanan discover new spaces they've been missing.

Better fleshed out is the book's cyber landscape, where images, dreams, and scenarios are stored. This information can be manipulated and changed ad infinitum, leading people to assume that their resources are endless—and to take much for granted. In contrast, in the physical world, crops are raised, bodies can experience pain, and death is permanent—and, as a consequence of these sobering facts, feelings are given more expression, with people behaving toward each other with both affection and brutality.

Becoming aware of these distinctions introduces different possibilities to Tei and Kanan, resulting in some satisfaction: they learn to take risks; they explore new relationships. Still, because physical contact is avoided in their universe, the book's action scenes are also limited. It takes considerable time to reach the book's climax, which is still more intellectual than it is active, and which involves the planning and execution of a rescue mission.

Exciting, innovative new ways of understanding the shared universe are introduced in the provocative science fiction novel *The Limits of My World*.

MARI CARLSON (December 11, 2023)

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