



The Subterranean Season

Dale Bailey

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A frustrated PhD student discovers a voracious hole beneath his office in this fun and disturbing work of science fiction.

It seems a little bizarre to begin a novel with “then,” as if it’s a continuation of a prior thought, but Dale Bailey pulls off that and much more in *The Subterranean Season*, his tale of the woes of PhD student Alex Kern.

Alex is teaching composition at West Georgia University, trying to pass his exams, and attempting to keep in step with his girlfriend. He’s not terribly successful—or at all successful, really—at any of the above, and things are just getting worse and worse. He moves into a dumpy new office underneath the stadium, adding insult to injury, since athletics trump academics at this school and his job is to try to get athletes to actually pass their classes. Then, on the other side of his office door, Alex finds that there’s a strange hole that swallows objects. Well, people, actually. That seems to present a problem. Or rather, it fixes one. Or two or three.

From the moment Bailey calls the university library a “brick ziggurat of questionable taste” on the first page, it’s clear that these pages are going to move along fast, and observers will just need to keep up. Indeed, beyond the office computer categorized as “Jurassic era” with its “Brontosaurus egg” monitor, Bailey throws out word choices that might stretch imaginations just a bit. Dudgeon, anyone? Flensed? How about deliquesced or caviled?

Bailey’s prior work has won him awards in the areas of fantasy and science fiction, but the science-fiction element of this story takes a back seat to Alex’s just-plain-messed-up life. In fact, the book is really about his messed-up life, with just a touch of science fiction. It is rather fun to tag along on this sloppy, pot-hazed descent.

As the cloud around Alex seems to get thicker and thicker, you start to wonder how this guy continues to put one foot in front of the other. And you definitely wonder, as the book progresses, just where all this is going. But not to worry—Bailey wraps it up neatly enough, and quite disturbingly. This novel offers an interesting look at the inner workings of a university, as well as commentary on how easily a life can spiral out of control.

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