Clarion Review ★ ★ ★ ★ ★   THRILLER

Treasure of the Holy Quincunx: A Travis One-Shoe Thriller

E. T. Ellison
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Treasure of the Holy Quincunx is a fascinating thriller in which authority figures use religion and technology to control the people.

E. T. Ellison's futuristic mystery novel *Treasure of the Holy Quincunx* incorporates Native American mythology and Buddhism and is set in the vastness of the American Southwest.

After a contentious town hall meeting over a synthetic intelligence results in the brutal death of St. Coriander's denizens, a mystery ensues. The SI units shut the town off from society. Twenty-five years later, Travis One-Shoe, a ranger of Navajo descent, finds a dead SI tech at the perimeter of the town. This touches off a high stakes investigation into St. Coriander's mysterious technological secrets and the purported treasure that the town keeps. Travis hooks up with Maya Ng, a former lover and the sister of the dead tech. Together, they uncover the tragic circumstances that sealed St. Coriander's fate. Their lasting impressions suck Travis further into a conspiratorial web.

The narrative is slow at first, delivering a bevy of plot points and technological jargon that threaten to overwhelm it. Around eighty pages in, the story finds its focus, though, and it becomes high octane, tense, and fast moving, incorporating snappy dialogue and improved exposition, too.

Travis and Maya are opposing personalities who click together on the page. Maya is an uber competent heroine with a no-nonsense attitude and creative know-how. Travis is a classic gumshoe—a sarcastic yet calm companion with a snarky sense of humor. Travis relies on logic and critical thinking to decide his course of action, albeit with a little help from implanted tech. While the book's dialogue is most concentrated on Travis's internal viewpoint, he and Maya contrast in interesting ways, both in their actions and reactions. Their villainous counterparts are less dimensional, both monstrous and inept; their zealous and abusive religiosity plays to the duality of the tropes on which they are based.

Technology plays a sizable role in the story. SIs take on human form as authority figures and use religion to control humanity; they serve as Buddhist-inspired gatekeepers to determine who travels to Nevergate, and they use religion to control the residents of St. Coriander before the SI-instigated murder of its residents. Travis's hard-boiled experience helps him navigate the SI's coded subliminal messages during his mission to retrieve hidden treasure in St. Coriander and during his move to Nirvanata. The land of bliss that Travis escapes to after his "retirement" is not paradise but a place of debauchery and transients, a "thousand acres of desert just east of the Little Colorado River in Navajo territory … a flat expanse of oiled dirt pocked with domes and tents and cheap industrial buildings." Appropriately, Travis later returns to St. Coriander to resolve the book's opening events.

Treasure of the Holy Quincunx is a fascinating thriller in which authority figures use religion and technology to control the people and greed corrupts even the most well-intentioned individuals.

NANCY POWELL (July 31, 2020)