

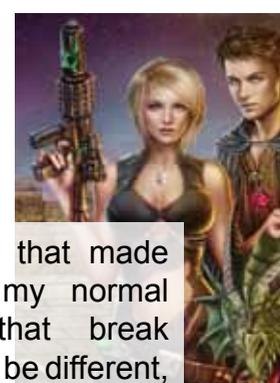


J de Juegos

January 2013

e-zine

Books Edition



A selection of the e-books that made me want to go beyond my normal commuting. Adventures that break molds, protagonists that dare be different, contexts that come out of wild dreams.



Many argue of the advantages and disadvantages of the digital age, many more of the good that digital distribution brings. It's ironic how most seem to reject it all with one hand while embracing it with the other. There are some good things, some bad, some that could be better and some that definitively need changing or, at the very least, a good rethinking.

I have become a fan of the digital distribution, there is something very user-friendly (to a certain degree) when you can just sit and wait for what you want to be available and when it's finally there click on it, pay and shortly after either play, read or watch. I mean this from a usability point of view because it seems that when the time comes to discuss ownership things still get somewhat complicated.

There are many grey areas as far as digital distribution and Digital Management Rights (DRM) go. But I believe things are moving in the right direction –so far. I just wish some would see it as what it is: a channel to reach the consumer; rather than what they want to see it as: a medium to control the buyer. But we have to take the good with the bad, for now.

Over the past few months, in no part thanks to the inevitability of commuting, I have become one among the many fans of the Amazon Kindle, although through its Android App. There is something so user-friendly to be able to try, to look, to explore, to know what others say and, if convinced, to buy and keep on reading in an instant. Sometimes I even wish I could stay commuting just to not let go of what I am reading; I even did go a couple stops further than required more than once.

There are many known authors out there. People with lots of followers and an incredible PR machine behind them. But thanks to digital distribution, to Kindle, there has been no better time to be a self-published author, an Indie Writer. Not all of them are worthy of five stars; many show so much passion, such great

ideas, it is sad that they can't transform all of it into something worth reading.

I like Indie Writers, they are like Indie Game Developers, they risk what is probably their one shot at it presenting us with things that either sound like something we have seen somewhere told in a different way, or something so out of the ordinary that we either get trapped until there is nothing to read, or we immediately look for something else. Very risky for them, can be incredible rewarding for us.

So far my reader intuition seems to have worked well. I have picked a few that got a little hard and heavy to read but that at the end left me with a satisfied grin on my face. With incredible images, worlds, universes, characters and ideas roaming in my mind. There is so much out there that old and new muses must be doing some serious overtime in this, still new, XXI century.

The way that digital distribution helps these Indie Writers is by minimizing the cost of putting their work in the hands of the consumer. On the one side, by using the digital media as the product itself authors can often bypass the need to go to print which saves a lot of time, effort, and money. On the other, the reach they have is much larger which in turn helps them get to more potential customers.

Marketing tools like samples, or offering the first book in a series for free for a day, help with the promotion of the books and their authors. The downside of this successful new medium is that there are so many new authors that good and bad mix, and sometimes it becomes hard to tell them apart. Here is where the consumer himself (or herself) comes into play by providing feedback, recommending or not, commenting and so on.

When choosing I tend to check the attractiveness of the title, then the cover, the number of starts from people who rate the book

and the good and bad reviews. Although at the end I go for the gut feeling and, in most cases, the samples. The best is to see what people who actually comment the book have to say, rather than those that praise it without saying much of why, or those that complain about issues that have little to do with what actually matters: the story, the ideas, the world, the characters.

I know many budding writers have no time, no money or no chance for a good editing of their work so I can forgive them typos and misspellings and awkward sentence construction, as long as the rest make it worth my while to read. In such a case I can forgive a few errors in the same way I would ignore a scratch or two on a Ferrari or a Porsche. Besides, if things go well it doesn't take them long to publish (re-publish?) a revised edition which is, in most cases, professionally proofread and usually even comes with a new, improved, cover design.

This Special Edition of J de Juegos eZine provides a list of my favourite new authors and their work. So far my main category has been Science Fiction, followed by Fantasy, but I do go a little out of that safe area when the book has been misplaced or looks, sounds, feels too tempting to miss. Also when I go for more standard authors and genres.

I don't include a scoring system here, their presence in this selection is proof enough that they were sufficiently good to be read and that they are good enough to talk about. I do like to highlight how engaging they were, although this can be redundant when comparing titles I have little to say about from those that I read almost in one go and need to control myself to stop talking about. Anyhow, in order of importance: *Read It, Liked It, Loved It*.

Read books aren't bad but they most likely aren't that great either. A good read, a decent adventure that helps pass the time. Something good enough to go from cover to cover without looking for other options.

Liked books offer something else. Memorable elements, new contexts, interesting characters. Great writing. They are entertaining and attention grabbers but still lack that something that will eventually cause them to recede to the background of my mind.

Books I Loved are simply those that offer the best of everything including that whatever-it-is that makes me smile when I recall them, that makes me quote them, that makes me look for more from the same author, same context, same characters. Simply, stuff that stays at the top of my head for as long as it can because it touched the right chords in me.

The book reviews are presented in no particular order, perhaps the closest to one would be related to which I read first but this would be relative since with a few of them I spent time in between reading other books.

I don't expect for everyone to like what I did, there is too much of a subjective element in finding a novel that touches our personal something to love it or just read it. Nevertheless, I hope my selection would in the least offer a few good hours of well spent time and money.

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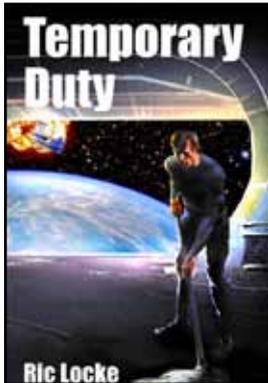
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TEMPORARY DUTY

by Ric Locke

- LIKED IT - Pros:** Fun and entertaining for the first 3/4ths of the adventure.
- **Cons:** The author just didn't seem to find a good way to wrap the ending.

If close encounters of the third kind is meeting Alien Life and of the fourth Abduction then I would say that this novel is of the fifth kind: mutual commercial interest. This novel is great but, sadly, only through the first three quarters.



I believe that Locke reached a point in which he didn't know how to finish it but someone told him to come up with something and finish it once and for all, and he did. Maybe he was trying to think of a way to make the novel a series, the story a chronicle. He failed. A better wrap of things would have

made it a more memorable work –at least, as it stands, most of it is.

Temporary Duty is almost contemporary as an alien vessel reaches Earth's orbit and starts to do business with the local governments. More or less the same way XV Century ships did when moving along coasts and trading in the local ports with the local tribes or merchants. Among the dealings the aliens are doing is offering technology in return for a group of USA navy air forces to join them in their next business trip in order to present to other factions the products of Earth.

The main characters of the novel are John Peters and his friend Kevin Todd who get assigned as the team to prepare the human quarters before the main detachment arrives. The whole context follows a rather down-to-earth approach to life in a spaceship, as well as how things could go with a collaboration with an alien

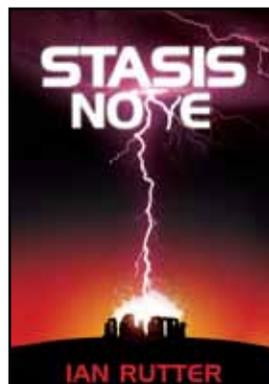
species. Here Locke does a great job in presenting us with the rather mundane adventures of his characters, which tend not to be what we are used to but are, nevertheless, very enjoyable.

STASIS NONE

by Ian Rutter

READ IT - Pros: Context, some ideas, the adventure, some characters, the action moments. - **Cons:** Some of the narrative, the flow of the adventure, the constant retelling of things we just read about.

Past, present, future all seem to meld together as an elite team travels in time to find a solution to a prediction that states the end of our presence on Earth is near. The discovery of incredible technology allows the team to reach points in time that for one or other reason seem important, hold some clue.



Stasis One is a great concept and a very nice read, it could have been even greater if there had been a better balance between the action, the time travelling and the –at times tedious– moments when the characters decide to recapitulate and analyse what they have learned and what they seem to have found.

During those debriefings it feels as if the author himself was trying to keep things tidy in order for them to make sense, to avoid creating a paradox in his ideas, to sound unconvincing to himself. Alas, these attempts at keeping things straight are the dullest moments of the novel because when the time of action is at hand they are simply great.

Ian Rutter presents us with an interesting and novel way to time travel as well as a team of elite forces trained and equipped to

survive it. He also dwells into slightly common territory like AI and Quantum Computing.

His characters are good, the adventure has great moments, the story itself is interesting. The ending isn't all that unexpected but it has a few little twists. A nice read.

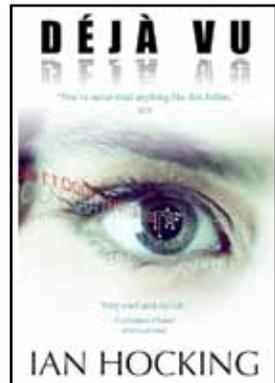
DEJA VU

by Ian Hocking

READ IT - Pros: Good adventure, good characters, good flow. - **Cons:** Missing that something –at least– for me.

Been there, done that. Being there, doing it. A very interesting thriller that starts with a crime and introduces us to a very intriguing character, Saskia Maria Brandt. As a techno thriller the novel offers a very consistent and trapping adventure, as well as a very good flow of the narrative and the dialogues.

As the name implies there is some time travelling involved but not in the usual way, which isn't so much a fresh take on the idea as much as a less fantastic one.



Deja Vu has a sequel now, Flashback, which follows deeper into the time travelling adventures of the main character, Saskia, and presents us with another well written and well made thriller in which we meet another very interesting individual, Jem Shaw.

Alas, there isn't much else that can be said about either work of Ian Hocking without spoiling potential surprises. Good novels, good work and both quite entertaining.

REX RISING

by Christalla Thomas

LIKED IT - Pros: Novel context, interesting characters, nice adventure. -
Cons: Could have been more.

The pace is good, the characters are interesting, the world... we don't get to see much of it but what little we do is different, unique, incredible in it's own way. It is a world where parasites that don't kill their human hosts give them abilities, powers that make them unique, different, special. Because of them a group holds power over all the others. A cruel parasitic god that favours women.



Rex Rising tells us the story of young men and women who have to learn to trust each other, to learn who their friends are. As they get mixed in something that goes beyond

what they thought they were already in.

What traps the most of Christalla Thomas novel is the world in which it develops. The characters, and how they are presented and how they become more complex; the adventure and the story we are given the chance to follow. Very nice and ripe for much more.

INTO THE BLACK: ODYSSEY ONE

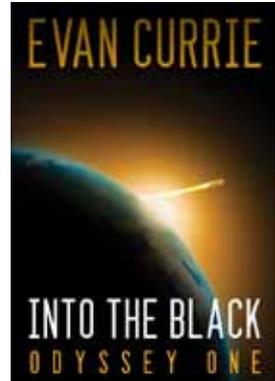
by Evan Currie

LOVED IT - Pros: A Space Opera with today's focus on action, good adventure, great battles, interesting characters and context. - **Cons:** n/a.

There is no denying where the influences for Currie's work lay, he doesn't even try to hide them either as there is plenty of dialogue making the proper references. What makes Into the Black:

Odyssey One so great is the adventure, the story, the characters and what little is there of new ideas and science fiction.

Humanity has reached a sort of fragile peace after a Third World War. Since things have become more stable and technological superiority has been achieved by the winners of the war it is time to look beyond the now... into the stars.



Captain Eric Weston, a World War III hero and ex-commander of the Archangel flight wing, is given the chance to take humanity's first spaceship into its shakedown cruise.

Just a short trip from here to there to test the technology, the people, have a taste of what we can expect out there. He sees it more as a way to keep him happy and the media appeased rather than a promotion. Just the next best thing other than a desk job.

At least he takes some pride in being the first behind the controls of a starship and plans to do his job as it is expected, or better. The initial flight checks seem normal, the first test of the new technology uneventful. Then, an improbable and unexpected beacon changes all that and the new Captain does what he did best, stretch the rules of what is allowed and get deeper into the black beyond.

The best bit of the novel are the fight scenes and the general story, the very engaging action. The bit I personally didn't like much, but it doesn't have to be that way for everyone, is how Currie presents his characters. They sometimes are too human, in a bad way. I can understand the desire to create more realistic individuals, with a past, with fears, with doubts, but their introspections and self doubts feel out of place and diminish, somewhat, the overall experience.

INSIDIOUS

by Michael McCloskey

LOVED IT - Pros: A very unique take on the flow of the adventure, interesting characters, attractive context. - **Cons:** Can be a little confusing and repetitive at times.

The future, full of laws and restrictions. Full of control from governments that want to know what the Corporations are up to. But as is the norm, there is a catch. Now most of those big multinational conglomerates have gone to the stars, built their own space stations far away from anything that can get in their way. Where they can reach the limits of what can be done, or set the limits themselves.

Insidious presents us with a very interesting context and quite a few memorable characters. Starting with Aldriena Niachi, a very good operative for one of the big players. A beautiful woman who knows what she wants and how to get it.



Among the novel ideas that the adventure holds is a unique take on the concept of AI, suffice it to say that when one came to be a whole city had to be nuked. Since then they are banned technology, the only problem is that they are a necessary evil, one that has to be handled with incredible care.

McCloskey narrates following his own style, the adventure doesn't follow a straight path, it presents us with things from different perspectives, from different angles, which can sometimes make it feel as if we are reading the same all too many times (a little like the written equivalent of the visual style of the TV series 24). But it is also a nice way to be given insight into events and things

that unfold that would otherwise be hidden or unknown to the rest of the parties involved. Things do get a little more agile, maybe slightly confusing, when all the story lines start to synchronize.

At the end *Insidious* is a trapping and enjoyable experience. Its characters are well made, the context is very interesting and it includes quite a few novel ideas to the science fiction genre. As the first in a trilogy it sets up the stage for the other two: *Industrious* and *Ingenious* which complement the first by going through even more parallel story lines that let us know what those not present did and were doing.

GHOST FLEET

by D.A. Boulter

LIKED IT - Pros: The context, the characters, the adventure, the battles. -
Cons: Could have been better.

A space adventure with a more classic touch, but with just as much entertainment and enjoyable moments as the best of them.



D.A. Boulter presents us with an space opera that follows the more traditional setting in which spaceships are seen as boats in space. So there are a lot of naval references all around.

Characters are good, the story is nice, the battles are engaging and the context lends itself to so much more. Humanity has been at war over four decades with an alien civilization that simply won't attempt at a diplomatic resolution. A story that repeats after centuries of an imposed cease of fire with another civilization with whom mankind already had to butt heads.

The last incursion of the enemy has cost Lieutenant-Commander

Mart Britol too much, probably everything as he realises he is the last of his line. In order to appease his mind and help him deal with the pain and suffering his superior, and friend, Sub-Admiral Traglini assigns him to a reckon mission, little does he know that Britol will use the opportunity to look for ghosts from the past. Neither could have thought that they will soon be needing all the help they can get.

There is a very traditional feel to Ghost Fleet but the characters, the context and Boulter's universe is fresh enough to justify exploring it. At times the protagonists suffer a little from being too human but that is something that can be overlooked easily enough.

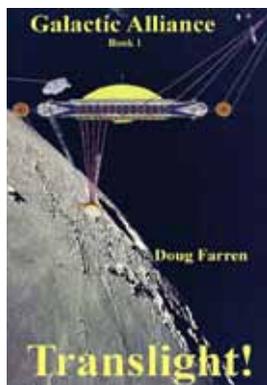
TRANSLIGHT!

by Doug Farren

LIKED IT - Pros: The setting, the characters, the adventure. - **Cons:** n/a.

If anything Translight! (the first of The Galactic Alliance Series) is basically the story behind the events that helped humanity reach the stars. How Jay Kauffman and his friend CAIN come up with a way to go beyond our wildest dreams. It is also about becoming part of an old and well established intergalactic Consortium and doing what it takes to integrate ourselves.

There are two sides to Farren's work. On the one side we have an adventure with action and battles as humanity tries to unify in order to integrate properly among its new found neighbours. And, on the other, a more personal story that involves the protagonist and those directly linked to him. Both are well made and interesting in their own way.



Translight! Doesn't actually explore particularly new ground but everything is done well enough to make it entertaining, a good read, a good adventure. It even holds a few surprises and the inevitable promise of much more, although the story we read is complete and leaves no loose ends.

BECOMING

by Ronnie Barnard

LIKED IT - Pros: The protagonists, the context, the adventure. - **Cons:** Could have been better.

Becoming starts with a breakthrough for the protagonist, Jason Bancroft, he seems to finally have solved all the glitches around the technology he was working on that will allow to create truly immersive VR. After a final test he goes to sleep, when he wakes up he feels as if still dreaming.

Barnard's work is a very entertaining and engrossing adventure, it starts a little slow but doesn't take too long to grab and it can be hard to let go. Characters are good, context has a good level of originality as it also (re)explores known ground.



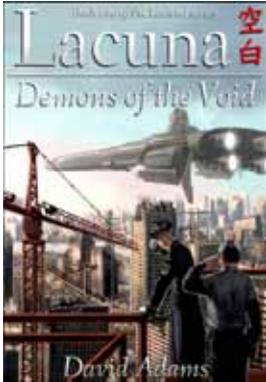
The essence of the work is an action adventure with romantic elements. There is more than one twist to the story, not all of which are fully unexpected but they are well presented. If there is one thing I don't agree with is that there are a couple of situations that, within the context, feel done to satisfy the authors own ethical and moral perception rather than to agree with the rules of the world he created. Nothing that will spoil anything but they do feel unnecessary within the fictional universe in which the adventure unfolds.

LACUNA: DEMONS OF THE VOID

by David Adams

READ IT - Pros: As an adventure it is good. - **Cons:** It doesn't add anything truly 'wow-ing'.

A nice and straightforward tale of humanity's first encounter with intergalactic enemies. It ends up being a nice read but doesn't



particularly add much to anything other than present a female lead character and a context that foregoes the usual USA centred premise.

If there is one flaw in the whole is that things are too straightforward. Characters and relations are too plain. There are no real twists, everything that happens is very much expected. Most of the outcomes just come from following the clues and previous events. This just means that there is no wow event anywhere. It's a good adventure that goes through the right motions, that is all. It does open the promise of much more to come though.

LEGACY UNIVERSE: GENTLE REMINDERS

by Martin Perry

READ IT - Pros: Context, potential, characters. - **Cons:** There is something lacking in the adventure as a whole.

The most intriguing elements of Perry's work are its context and some of its characters, beyond that it manages to be a decent space action adventure thriller but nothing else. It feels like a pilot episode of a series in which we don't yet know very well the context or the characters themselves. It reads well, the adventure and the action flow properly but there is no true novelty there,



maybe just a little spice in the context but that's it. It does open the possibilities for any work that might follow.

The problem I have with Gentle Reminders is that everything feels slightly forced, or maybe extremely well assembled. As if it had been written following some very specific rules toward preplanned outcomes rather than following a more loose approach. This translates in very little surprises, lots of stuff

that is left hanging and no wow elements worth noting.

CONVERGENT SPACE

by John-Paul Cleary

LOVED IT - Pros: The inensity of the context, the characters, the ideas, the incredible adventure. - **Cons:** n/a.

The cover of the book doesn't qualify as impressive at first sight, but the content reminds me of the old saying that one "can't judge a book by its cover". The first pages feel like we dropped down on someone's ongoing adventure, which in a way is true, but it doesn't take long until things become much, much clearer.

Perhaps the best thing about Convergent Space is the magnitude of the universe created by Cleary. We move forward with the protagonist, Ronelle Tintet, but it's very evident that there is a lot of the past –of the protagonist and the context in which she dwells– that the author has but doesn't show us. We only are presented with the bits that are needed to keep the adventure going.

What I enjoyed the most is the setting and the protagonist along with her inseparable companion, Necessity. They don't travel alone but everyone else becomes just a sidekick, someone who

is part of the story but might as well not be there. Together they could just as well be only gossiping and make everything equally entertaining (a little like the Gilmore Girls).

Ronelle is an archeosoldier of Old Earth. One of the many exploring the confines of the Universe to right a wrong. She believed herself detached of her purpose, finally free of a Search she doesn't even believe in any more until another soldier drops on her musings.



Cleary's universe is vast, full, and in it hide many answers that need to be found. Secrets that shouldn't be unveiled. Mysteries that are just doors to more unknowns. The whole is presented as an adventure of exploration that is very entertaining and a great read. It even holds quite a few twists and surprises as some things start to unfold.

EMELINE AND THE MUTANTS

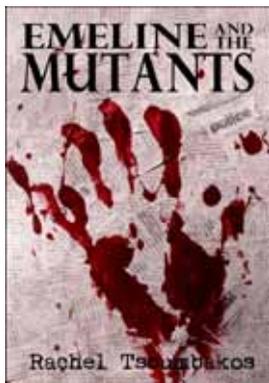
by Rachel Tsoumbakos

LIKED IT - Pros: The take on the fantastic and supernatural, the character and her surroundings. - **Cons:** The adventure itself could have been something more.

A genetic cure promises to make everyone free of every possible disease we know. Except to an unlucky few that seem to be resistant or immune to it. But are they truly the unlucky ones? As time goes on what was taken as a blessing becomes the world's undoing.

Emeline is also the name of the protagonist, one of the few who were immune to the new universal cure. One of the few who remained human. Tsoumbakos adventure is, at the end, just that,

an interesting straightforward story. But it has two elements that make it captivating: the protagonist and the world she survives in.



Because of some serious side effects in the cure everyone who assimilated it is now a mutant, but of a very interesting kind. All those creatures that we associate with fantasy and child stories, or the ones of a darker tone, exist again. They are mutants now. And the survivors have learned to live with them since, after all, most of what was taken as myth and old wives hearsay seems to actually work against them.

As an introductory work Emeline is ok –in a positive way, the pace is good and it develops properly but it becomes nothing more than an introduction to the world in which the protagonist lives. A chronicle of how the old world becomes the new. There is still much to be explored.

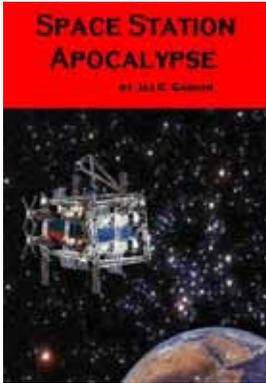
SPACE STATION APOCALYPSE

by Jax E. Garson

READ IT - Pros: There is something there that could, should, ought to have been. - **Cons:** The potential and the possibilities never materialize in the adventure.

As science fiction stories go Space Station Apocalypse has an interesting context but doesn't get to be or offer much more. It is a nice adventure but that's all that it really feels and reads like. Characters and their surroundings go through their motions but that's it.

At times it feels as if Garson wanted to write a horror/suspense story but ends with just a normal adventure in his hands. It is nice to read, good pace, decent characters and setting but it feels



lacking. Like a good food recipe cooked without the proper ingredients, or with some of them missing.

It is a good read but the problem is that it never manages to develop a proper feel. It starts as a mystery thriller, then acquires the pace of an action adventure novel to start having undertones of a horror/suspense. Suddenly, all of it goes out the airlock and we realize it has ended just when it was about to get interesting.

As a read it sort of holds you then let's go, then does its best to grab your attention again.

THE TRILISK RUINS

by Michael McCloskey

LOVED IT - Pros: Context, narrative style, characters, the alien. - **Cons:** Lends itself to a little repetition and some confusion.

It seems that McCloskey has made it his trademark to offer a narrative style that uses parallel story lines that eventually cross and, in the case of this novel, combine and become one. But as weird as reading it feels for a while the end result is very good.

The Trilisk Ruins is set in the same fictional universe in which the Synchronicity trilogy takes place. There are a few things that will be familiar to readers of it but it's not a prerequisite. We are introduced to new characters and a new adventure. Also to a



very well developed first –second?– encounter with a fantastic alien individual.

Telisa is a xenoarcheologist but the laws surrounding any discovery of alien civilizations make it very much impossible for her to encounter anything worthwhile unless she works for the UNSF, which in turn means losing any liberties to let her work and discoveries known –and sold. When presented with the chance to go around such obstacles it takes her little to make up her mind. She should have known better.

The characters are well made so is the context, the adventure and the action in it. I particularly like the parallel adventure of Krizzo, his persona in general and how the other protagonists, literally, bump into his story. Great example of an innocently looking alien being that is in truth so much more.

ZERO SUM

by Justin B. Shier

LOVED IT - Pros: Character, setting, the modern take on fantasy and the supernatural, the adventure. - **Cons:** n/a.

This book is the second of the series that begins with Zero Sight. It continues with the adventures of Dieter Resnick and his friend Rei Aserba Batory, and many of the students and faculty at Elliot College. Since the reader should be more at ease with the characters the author has decided to focus on the context and its development this time around.



I love the overall backdrop that Shier has come up with. His alternative contemporary view of a society with incredible secrets hidden in plain sight. The normal and the

common mix with the fantastic, the magical and the supernatural in an impeccable way. And Zero Sum presents us with so many more surprises than the first book.

Justin's style is back: great writing, great characters and so many fantastic moments. But then again, when your friends include a Vampire, a Druid and soldiers that are wielders of magic it is hard for things not to get hectic fast and easily. The author feels at home when telling the story as well as describing the action, the feelings involved or throwing a silly moment here and there (I love those).

THE GALACTIC MAGE

by John Daulton

LOVED IT - Pros: The basic premise (a Magician trying to reach the moon), the setting, the protagonist, the adventure. - **Cons:** n/a.

There isn't much new stuff in John Daulton's novel, there is in essence just one thing, a world in the middle of a magic revolution and a magician who wants to reach the moon. A simple premise for an outstanding adventure. There is action there, but what I love the most is finding out how Altin Meade overcomes the next problem in his quest to become a Galactic Mage.



The first time we meet Altin he is remembering the frustration he feels at teleporting rock after rock toward the moon and feeling just as far. Seeing no reduction in the distance and not understanding why. Much of the fun of the book is being a passive participant of how the protagonist overcomes the obstacles toward space exploration using medieval know-how and magic understanding.

While much of the adventure is how Altin manages to reach the moon and beyond, there is a parallel story. That of Orli Pewter a girl taken into the stars by chance and who has reached adulthood among them locked in a spaceship. A botanist who has never seen actual soil or plants on it. Daughter of the Admiral that took the newly formed Earth Fleet into a reconnaissance and rescue mission into the void.

John Daulton manages to interweave a rather generic enemy, the Hostiles, to give everything a better feel, a certain degree of urgency and to add it all up for the action part. But although the combat ideas are great the real fun is how a magician manages to reach the stars. Another good thing here is that we certainly haven't seen the last of Altin's adventures.

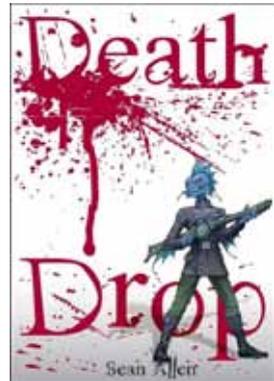
DEATH DROP

by Sean Allen

LOVED IT - Pros: The size of the universe in which everything transpires, the characters, the protagonist, her friends and enemies, the adventure. -

Cons: n/a.

A great adventure, an incredible and fantastic Universe. The Durax are conquering the known Galaxy without anything standing in their way. Only the Dissension opposes their power and since long ago they have lost their strongest allies, now almost a legend, a myth. Just as much as Humans are, beings that belong to a history long past, considered extinct, gone without a trace.



Dezmara Srykar keeps herself out of trouble, hiding behind a mask, she is known as The Ghost, a shadow exploring the known universe. The last of a civilization considered gone for

good. A mystery looking to unlock her own secrets. Little does she know that she is about to get into something she didn't ask for as her ship is wrongly identified.

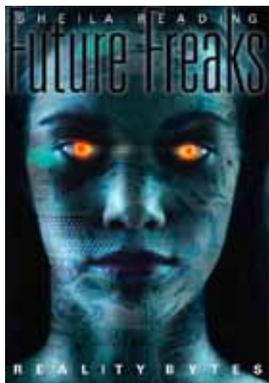
Allen takes the opportunity of Dezmara's exploration to present us with his universe. The whole adventure is action and roller coaster thrills that don't stop until the very end. We are shown quite a lot but it is obvious that there is much more in there. Much to explore and understand, secrets to be told, mysteries to be discovered. Answers to so, so many questions.

FUTURE FREAKS

by Sheila Reading

LIKED IT - Pros: The premise of the adventure, the protagonists, the adventure. - **Cons:** It doesn't manage to include that something, at least for me.

An fantastic mix of ideas where technology, biology and cyberspace are almost one and the same. Where in an almost utopian future we have conquered our worst enemies through gene manipulation and enhancement. When the impossible is possible and everyone is perfect. But still, just a few are gifted.



Future Freaks is one of those books that catch slowly, that feel a little common and slightly dull, where ideas flow back and front, where we grin, we smile, and the next thing we realize is that we should have been sleeping long ago.

Sheila Reading offers us a great adventure and a fantastic set of characters. There is a teen and young adult focus but should

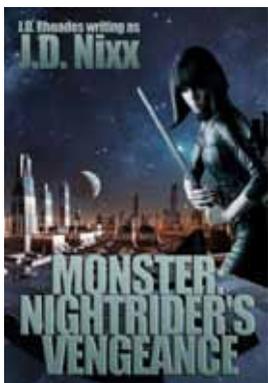
be good for anyone looking for a fun and entertaining adventure. There are a few interesting ideas as well and more than one surprise.

MONSTER: NIGHTRIDER'S VENGEANCE

by J.D. Nixx

LIKED IT - Pros: The character, the setting, the adventure, the AI, the ending. - **Cons:** For me it misses something to be lovable.

The Colonial Authority decided to accept the offerings of a bioengineering company and agree to their genetically created creatures. Beings that were seen only as weapons against the revolutionaries. Monsters that accomplished the impossible, troops that at the end became unnecessary. Beings of terror, of war, of darkness. Now, the last of them is looking for revenge.



What sets Monster aside from normal novels with supernatural beings is the context and the way we are presented to what in our time we call Werewolves, Vampires and Zombies. There is no mystery as to what those creatures are, which is good since there is no way to hide that fact either.

Laura, the protagonist, is looking for those that wiped her battalion, her brothers and sisters. And as she seeks them she starts to find things and people she didn't mean to. The first being an AI that becomes as much the comic relief character (in part because of his just having acquired sentience while at the same time being an incredible fast thinker and highly intelligent) as the brains behind whatever she and Jess, her partner, do.

The adventure is fast paced, there are a few moments of peace

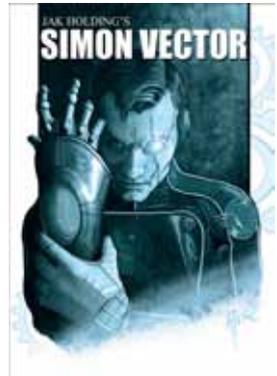
in which all the characters attempt some personal insight but achieve little at the end. The action stays entertaining, brutal, non-stop. And the story moves forward with a few twists and a great ending, even if not necessarily unexpected.

SIMON VECTOR

by Jak Holding

LOVED IT - Pros: The narrative, the context, the anti-hero. - **Cons:** n/a.

In a high security prison where being locked up is almost a death sentence Lucius Feen finds himself as much trapped and in punishment as the criminals he has to look after. He is afraid, scared, out of his mind but does what he needs to. He wants to leave, he wants to runaway, at least he does so until stumbling with something he wasn't meant to find. A secret that should have been kept so. For him it's his little moment of hope. For humanity, it could become the end of everything.



This novel of Jak Holding isn't about Feen's adventures, or suffering, he becomes nothing but a participant of what is to come. A little over half of the work helps set the context for the rest of the action. We get glimpses of the past, of who almost wiped all living beings. Of how humanity met the Harvesters and how one man seems to have been the one to have saved us all.

Three decades after that critical moment, Simon Vector is still sought after because of what he became, of what the invaders did to him, he is being sought to be tried as traitor, to be prodded and studied to gain understanding of the technology of the Harvesters. He is thought to be dead, gone, and at the same

time there is something else surrounding his apparent demise, a puzzle, a secret.

The first part of Jak Holding's work reads like a thriller with a certain level of horror and suspense. The latter, like a thriller with slasher and macabre elements. The author doesn't go into extreme detail to explain what happens, how the horror unleashes around the characters, it just gives glimpses, the idea, the concept, the general strokes to let the reader put as much detail, or as little, as they want. People with good imagination won't need more, people without it would probably be better off.

I liked the tone, the pace, the different characters in the story. The mystery, the suspense, the quiet horror. Then, when all hell breaks loose, there is a change toward the action, fast paced, brutal, crude, a little toward the macabre, but quite right for the context, the type of enemy, the kind of anti-hero that Vector is.

TURING EVOLVED

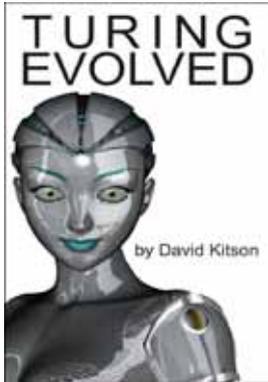
by David Kitson

LOVED IT - Pros: The narrative, the context, the adventure, the characters. - **Cons:** Too many versions available that don't replace the previous ones.

When is a computer program considered intelligent, when does it start to be sentient, when can we consider them human?. In a world where ANGELS roam the sky, DEMONS go to war, HELL and HEAVEN can feel too close.

Turing Evolved is a great adventure with a little romance and a lot of twists and mind games that once they wrap up leave us with a great feeling of understanding and satisfaction. Mixing ideas from videogames, comics and films it is obvious that the main target are young adults, but it should satisfy anyone into science fiction and good action.

Sadly there isn't much to say about the story or characters without spoiling the fun, the little mysteries that keep us going.



If nothing else it becomes clear very early on that Kitson invested a lot of time figuring out the acronyms used in his world because they fit so perfectly and even add their own extra level of depth to the whole context.

The only thing with Turing Evolved is that currently there seem to be like three versions out there, the newest not replacing the old. This wouldn't be a big deal if it weren't for the fact that the later versions have been re-edited and are thus easier to read and understand than previous ones. I read the second and although it still has a few issues it is, for what I read, a much better one than the first. This being said, those who haven't read it yet should make sure to get the latest edition.

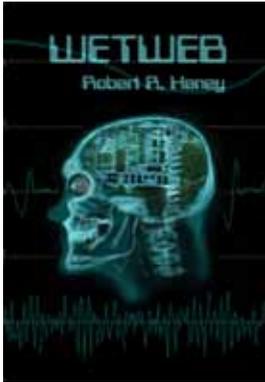
WETWEB

by Robert Haney

LIKED IT - Pros: The adventure, the narrative. - **Cons:** The reasoning and logic behind it all doesn't stand well against overthinking it.

It started as his need to explore other areas of income, to expand his universe of creativity, his options. He was appointed to interview the other person that helped shape the technology now enjoyed by all. And as the days pass, and the hours go by, we slowly learn how it all became, how it all started. The reason why the interview is carried in a prison cell for those in dead row.

Although WetWeb probably attempts to explore a little of our current hyper connected world it provides a unique context in which the protagonist has to live. As he discovers the origin of the technology that took the Internet even further, he also starts



to understand other things, find a different perspective to his surroundings, a more personal level of perception of his own life.

The story is well thought out, the adventure is there but at a subtler level than more action oriented novels. As things develop there starts to appear a layer of mystery around what was supposed to be a simple straight forward report on someone's work. Little by little the protagonist starts to get glimpses of something else than the origin of the technology, there is something else that the creator wants to convey to him. A truth, a revelation. An incredible twist in the story that left me thinking for quite a while.

THE VITALIS CHRONICLES: WHITE SHORES

by Jay Swanson

LIKED IT - Pros: Setting, characters, the adventure. - **Cons:** n/a.

Swanson's work is a fantasy adventure with a technology twist. The world he describes is alluring in it's own way by the detail it offers, by the fact that we are facing the first of a trilogy, a small portion of a larger context.

White Shores acts as an introduction to the protagonists, his world and its history. The beginning feels a little abrupt, something required to provide the main character with a background for his personality, his desires, the reason for his state of mind. It feels rushed but other than include more detail, which would probably end up being clutter, there is no other way, I can see, to do so.

After the introduction things move fast forward for a time then there is action and a little romance with magic, sword play

and some high-tech devices. As things advance we start to understand more of the world of The Vitalis Chronicles, where Humanity feels like they are thriving after getting rid of the Magi. But as we comprehend their –forgotten and misunderstood– role things get a little more complicated and confusing as to the motives of the conflict.



As beginnings go White Shores accomplishes it's role quite effectively. We are given enough to get into the world and the characters and then we are left wanting more.

STRAY (TOUCHSTONE TRILOGY)

by Andrea K. Höst

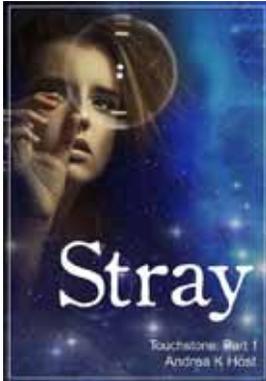
LOVED IT - Pros: The heroine, the adventure, the narrative style. - **Cons:** n/a.

Being in the shoes of Cassandra Eloise Devlin most of us would probably behave differently, a few perhaps better than her, but most would just about go mad. I mean, it's not common for someone to be on her way back home walking from school and suddenly find herself not only in a different place but another world.

For a normal girl from Australia going through dimensional portals is not what she can call an everyday occurrence. The first part of Stray is about knowing her as an individual, seeing her little-girl-misses-home side as well as her more grown up girl-in-control one.

As a character Cassandra is very likeable, Höst presents her as a real person but without going to any personality extreme as some

authors favour. Her heroine, her survivor is not out-of-this-world, she might be out there but she can very much be –almost– any of us. She misses home but she isn't going over it and whining about it on every page. She is smart, capable, she manages to solve her own problems in the best possible way, but neither is she accomplishing the impossible when there are no resources around or she hasn't had any training on the matter either.



Just about when the whole survivor on a lonely planet thing is getting slow and about to turn into a rather dull daily routine –for the protagonist as well as for us, the readers– something new happens. Rescue arrives! But as Cassandra soon finds out there is more to her fortuitous and just-in-time discovery than what she is lead to believe.

From this point forward the story acquires a new level, it becomes a sort of super-hero tale. Overall the whole feels like a mix between Teen X-Men and a touch of Final Fantasy the film. There is action, a time for some little romance and some very girly shopping but there is also something else going on behind. Our heroine finds herself becoming a part of something bigger not because she wants to but because, unintentionally, she can help.

As much as Cassandra hates her role she accepts it, there is a lot of growing up that comes into play here. She is alone, she is stranded, she is among strangers but they respect her, they try to understand her. There is a well made, believable social interaction system between the characters so that the adventure doesn't happen because of her, but with her, and we learn it from her.

Aside of the story, the context and her lead character what makes

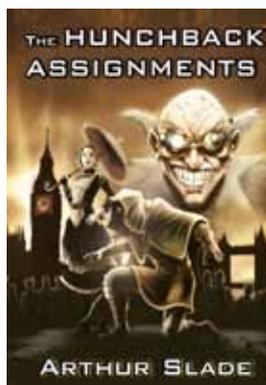
Stray such a unique adventure is that everything is told from the point of view of Cassandra as she writes in her diary. There is a certain unique feeling of involvement to the whole thing as she tells us the events of the day, the past week, the last few hours.

THE HUNCHBACK ASSIGNMENTS

by Arthur Slade

LOVED IT - Pros: The hero, the setting, the adventure. - **Cons:** n/a.

A cross between The Young Sherlock Holmes and The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen with a touch of steampunk placed in the setting, The Hunchback Assignments results in a very nice, easy to read, fun and entertaining adventure. With a focus on the younger audiences I, however, believe it can be enjoyed by anyone who likes a good detective and mystery adventure.



This first volume of what is now a series happens in 19th Century London. The main character is Modo a hunchback with a very special ability and a unique training provided by her protector, Mr. Socrates, and his personal assistant and bodyguard Tharpa.

The whole first part of the adventure feels like an Origin story so traditional in super-hero comics. Then the adventure begins and our hero has to show that he can survive on his own and put into practice everything he has learned.

Every good hero needs a villain and The Hunchback Assignments is no exception. Dr. Cornelius Hyde is both very intelligent and incredible ambitious, but he is also willing to go that critical step

beyond morality and ethics in order to achieve his goals which also make him very, very dangerous.

Arhtur Slade manages very well to present us with an interesting context, believable characters, and a nicely made and presented adventure that I, for one, would love to see a film of. Luckily for those of us just starting to know about MODO there are more of his adventures already available.

MAD SCIENCE INSTITUTE

by Sechin Tower

LOVED IT - Pros: The protagonist, the narrative style, the setting, the fantastic and sci-fi part. - **Cons:** n/a.

The way we are introduced to the heroine of Mad Science Institute, Sophia “Soap”, is direct, fun and a definitive attention grabber. In the few paragraphs that we get to know her we see a smart, silly, lonely girl that has a knack with machines and their inner workings and with getting them to explode... an outcome that is not always her fault, BTW.



MSI is something akin to the Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters but for people with unique mental abilities. More for the Tony Starks out there than the Wolverines.

The story is presented to us from the point of view of Soap and Dean, her older cousin, and how chance events and encounters put them together at the Mechanical Science Institute.

As the story develops things get more complicated and move toward the science and fantasy part but not without getting ever more engrossing and interesting. All the standard elements

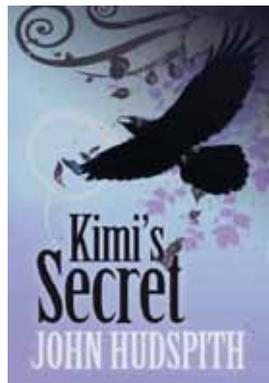
are there, the goodies, the baddies, the heroic types, the megalomaniacs and Soap's toys and explosions. Tower does a great job of putting everything together and giving it a shake to come up with an adventure that manages to have it's own flavour and style. As well as to provide some well deserved homage to some real life heroes and super-scientists of our time.

KIMI'S SECRET

by John Hudspith

LIKED IT - Pros: The context, the characters, the adventure. - **Cons:** It never quite feels unique or different, could be more.

Kimi's adventure is good, reads like something with impossible to hide influences from J.K. Rowling's dwellings in the magical and fantastical and a touch of imagination and fantasy that would be more akin to what we see in Alice in Wonderland or read in the works of Dr. Seuss (a blend of the funny, the strange and the silly bordering on the bizarre, the absurd and the slightly scary). The novel has a young teen and young adult focus but has enough novelty to have a general appeal to anyone into fantasy and the super-natural.



In general the story is fun and entertaining but it does have a few odd moments and turn of events in which not only the main character is left wondering what just happen. Apparently this is due to the fact that the story needs to link to itself correctly with future work of John Hudspith in Kimi's world. There are quite a bunch of loose ends which state that there is a lot more from where this first novel came.

Perhaps what hurts this novel the most is the fact that there is very little that can be considered truly original or new, the feeling that

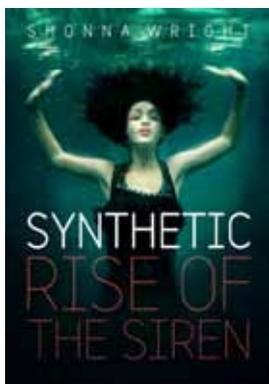
I have already read, or seen, this or that somewhere is always present at the back of my mind. It is entertaining though.

SYNTHETIC RISE OF THE SIREN

by Shonna Wright

LIKED IT - Pros: Interesting take on the fantastic and super natural, the characters, the setting, the adventure. - **Cons:** Never quite manages to wow –me.

Shonna Wrights work is an absolute mix of ideas and literary genres but she manages to make the whole quite entertaining and not without a personal touch. Standard science fiction is mixed with a little of the fantastic and a pinch of the bizarre that would have made Ed Wood proud.



The setting is the future after today's economic woes go through their motions and we are presented with what is left. In Synthetic we meet Kora, a very intelligent but slightly awkward expert in the art and science of creating artificial life. Life that is made to comply with the requirements of the buyer and devoid of true free will, thus seen more as toys. Kora herself feels more a prisoner in her high-tech lab than someone who can leave whenever she likes.

However, opportunity seems to present her with just the right chance to regain her freedom and that of her inseparable friend, an enormous octopus called Ishmael. By request of one of the clients of her particular skills she needs to be present at her residence to bring to life her latest creation, a Siren.

Once in Ruby's state Kora realizes that the place brings back memories she thought lost. There is something here, including

it's residents, that stir her neurons and attempt to bring back not just images of her past but warnings.

CALL ME PHARAOH

by L. M. Beyer

LOVED IT - Pros: The character, the setting, the narrative, the adventure.
- Cons: n/a.

This is one of those tales that starts like the adventures of old. A dark tavern where drunken people tell fantastic, almost impossible stories about their exploits. One in particular seems to grab everyone's attention as he narrates how he saved the galaxy, maybe the Universe, and nobody knows about it.

Once the son manages to send the old man to his house a stranger approaches him and convinces him to talk for a moment. After a while he manages to ask him if what the drunk was talking about had any truth to it. The youngster smiles, then with a very honest and serious face tells him "yes, as far as my sources could tell, every single word is."

Next thing we know is we are being absorbed by the adventure of intergalactic private detective Pharaoh Farrow and his faithful companion and spaceship, The Hilda. The adventure is fast paced, very enjoyable, and of the kind where the hero is pushed and pulled by the circumstances rather than any true mental process of his own.



There is an overall feeling of things not being taken too seriously. Reminds me a bit of the characters and context of the TV series Firefly. It's very satisfying to see our anti-hero survive problem after problem and keep on getting involved in more of them without any intention from his part as everyone he talks to seems

to want something out of him or has a secret agenda of which he is never aware.

The context in which everything unfolds is very old school Sci-Fi, a complex and large Universe full of races each with their own program and beings of incredible power and dangerous innocence. Not to forget, also incredible creatures and situations here and there.

Once things start it doesn't take long for everything to become a confusing mess of orders, counter orders, threats and half truths. What began as the simple job of finding someone turns into a race against time to save them all.

NOWHEREVILLE

by Sean Campbell

LOVED IT - Pros: The twists, the context, the characters, the adventure. -
Cons: n/a.



Because of the title I was more inclined toward a fantasy adventure than anything else, to my enjoyment the first pages of the novel become also the first twist in the story as I face something completely different from what I thought. Something more akin to science fiction and the future.

The most engrossing part of Campbell's work is the different characters, how they are presented and how they interact among themselves. The context puts them in particularly interesting situations. The nagging brother and sister that love and care for each other, the very original android they meet, and the mysterious individual that seems to be along for the ride but hides something, and does it so well that even she doesn't know about it.

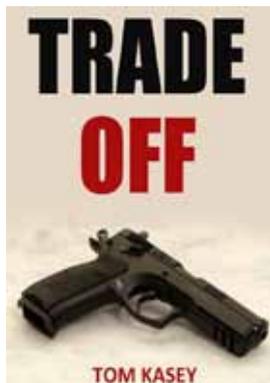
I read the –around– 254 pages in almost one sitting, Nowhereville is the kind of story that if it grabs you it won't let go until something really important, or inevitable, interrupts you. This first book is a complete story but not without a lot left out for later iterations of the series, which is perfect.

TRADE OFF

by Tom Kasey

LIKED IT - Pros: The adventure and the pace. - **Cons:** n/a.

It all starts with a crime that presents a mystery. A couple of FBI agents that get involved into something they thought, almost, as part of a routine. All of a sudden someone, somewhere gets scared, fears a secret might be uncovered if things keep going in the current direction. A contingency plan is put into effect and in almost no time, what might have been easily covered, or smartly sidetracked, turns into a bloodbath that threatens to expose the very same thing that needed hiding.



Trade Off is an action thriller that would make a great TV mini-series or film. The characters are good in their roles as heroes but don't present any additional depth than is required in the shoot-hit-kill department. At some point the need to highlight their background in a rather matter-of-factly way, to make whatever they do believable, feels somewhat forced rather than part of the flow of the story, the narrative or the adventure; I imagine it could have been done differently so it embeds with the rest rather than sound a little out of place.

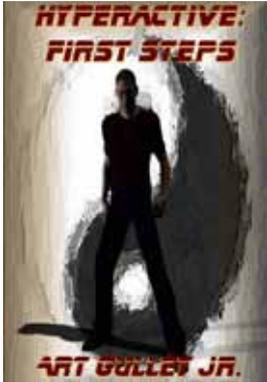
The story has a slight tinge of horror and the macabre mixed in to spice things, nothing too extreme.

HYPERACTIVE: FIRST STEPS

by Art Gulley Jr.

LIKED IT - Pros: Context, characters, adventure, ideas. - **Cons:** Protagonists can act overly human at times.

Hyperactive is about special forces with super-human abilities fighting drug lords and terrorists with the same. This first chapter



of the trilogy presents us with the context and the main characters. With a new start for the Lieutenant Tavian Stone after a mission goes wrong in which he loses more than just squad mates.

The context of Gulley Jr.'s adventures is good, so are the characters, they even have that little extra depth that makes them more interesting and unique in some ways and the whole work ends up being that much more engaging. It doesn't manage to be much else than a good adventure and thriller but that should be more than enough for most.

THE ZUL ENIGMA

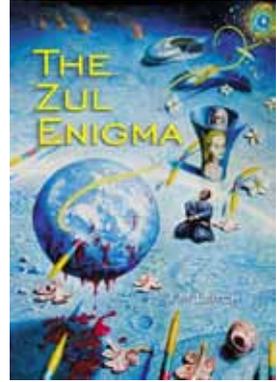
by J.M. Leitch

LIKED IT - Pros: The way things wrap up, the characters, the ideas. -

Cons: A novel that —sometimes— requires the will to read it and needs to be completed to fully grasp it.

The signs are there, people have been saying it for ages, everyone fears what might come next, everyone awaits for the opportunity to help save others, to save themselves. Among the billions of humans on Earth, by chance or design, Dr. Carlos Maiz is chosen to receive a message, to initiate contact, to spread the word.

At more than one point during the first part I felt ready to stop reading this novel. There is so much of a new age –mumbo jumbo– feel to it, so much of an attempt at giving us a message that the author shows, that more than once I had to actually force myself to read it, to move on and continue with the ranting and the adventure. And am I glad I did it.



There is indeed a message there, probably more than one, and most likely many are present at different levels of understanding. There is also a good adventure and an incredible mystery that Leitch manages to keep very well hidden under wraps until it's the time to spill it all out. Although the end feels a little forced, thrown in, done to give closure to the reader and the characters in the story it is also welcome.

After all the secrets, the problems, the action and even the inaction of the characters we, and they, get the chance to see it all through. We are not left hanging or wanting. It might be a moment in which we want to throw the book, or kindle, to the wall. Share the feelings of the character that has to face the ultimate truth, or simply nod and be left thinking a little bit more until something less profound grabs our attention.

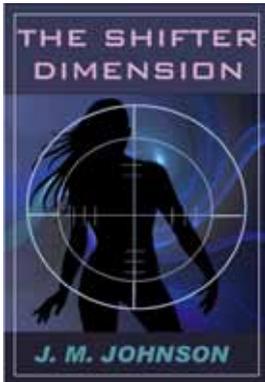
What to many might give it that personal extra is that it is a story of our times, to a certain point. Our fears, our hopes, our needs. It is also a story that makes us think more than once. It's a difficult book to recommend, but I believe it is one worth reading. The biggest problem being that it isn't the first part that will grab hold of a reader, or the middle or the end but the whole. The Zul Enigma is one of those rare books that to truly enjoy it one has to be ready to read it full, from cover to cover and with no skipping.

THE SHIFTER DIMENSION (STARBIRTH)

by J.M. Johnson

LIKED IT - Pros: Setting, context, characters, take on sci-fi, the fantastic and the super natural. - **Cons:** n/a.

Once I finished *The Shifter Dimension* I was left with the feeling that I missed something, there are too many references to something past. Too many situations that should be better understood with the proper background. As it happens that is due to the fact that it is the third book in a series. No wonder then. In other words, read the books that come before first if you haven't already.



That said Johnson's novel reads like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* meets Lukyanenko's *The Night Watch* series. The main character is Lock Harford who is a Shifter with the ability to teleport and who acts as a sort of civilian/unofficial military commander of a British special operations, SAS, team that focuses on counter-terrorism carried out by individuals with super-human abilities.

What is great in this book, and I assume the previous ones, is how the author mixes current and future military technologies and weapons with out-of-this-world powers. The same goes for how she manages to mix standard military action adventure with the super-hero kind. It all becomes an engrossing story that leaves the reader wanting more.

Not everything is action but there is plenty of it, lots of shadow play and mystery underneath as well. All in all it reads nicely and would certainly make a good videogame (strategy or tactical RPG, please) or film. The different characters have a human side

but nothing that hinders them, thus their personalities become part of the context and not their own worst enemy.

THE SECRETS OF YIAMERGIN: THE ORBITAL SPHERE

by Deborah Wood

LOVED IT - Pros: The character, the context, the creativity and ideas. -

Cons: Can't get over the feeling that it could have been better.

Gracie behaves like most teenagers would, seeing her mother as someone who wants to hold her back rather than protect her.



Someone who doesn't listen, who doesn't care, who doesn't love... her. But it seems she is wrong about everything except, perhaps, one of those. She did keep some things from her, important things, most of which she will have to learn on her own.

As a character the protagonist is both, someone one can relate to and someone that would certainly be the type of friend we rather our kids don't have. She is of those explosive personalities that switch from easy going to totally angry in no time. As the adventure unfolds we do get to learn a little more about her, and why she is that way, but even so most times she comes out just as a very spoiled brat.

The Orbital Sphere is the first of a series in the world of Yiamergin, the adventure we are presented with is but the beginning of something that promises to go deeper. There is much to learn still, much to be told, much to understand. Much left out from the past, the present and the characters themselves. Gracie's mother and grandmother in particular; what drove them to do what they did? Why did they keep their daughter, granddaughter,

in the shadows for so long? I am most certain there is a reason, one we haven't been told yet.

Most of the book is about the main character learning about herself, her true self. Meeting new people, understanding a whole set of new rules and possibilities. What makes this tale different from most fantasy settings is that the protagonist doesn't start using incredible powers or acquiring incredible insights just because. She will eventually, probably, get there but for now she is just her usual bratty and spoiled self, at least now she is starting to understand a little more that not everything has to be about her and what she wants or needs.

Deborah Wood gives us a world that is so much alike and so different from so many others. There are times that it is impossible not to laugh or at least smile. Many others in which we even feel sorry for Gracie. There is a lot of teenager growing-up going on in the story but that doesn't take away anything from the adventure, the places, the other characters, nor the world of Yiamergin and the adventure that is barely beginning.

THE PHOENIX CONSPIRACY

by Richard Sanders

LIKED IT - Pros: The original take on Space Opera stealth action, the characters, the setting, the adventure. - **Cons:** Some of the protagonists can feel a little too human.

Captain Asari Raidan is an honoured soldier with an impeccable record. Someone most people would put their lives in jeopardy to follow. Someone with whom most people would blindly go wherever he goes. Today, he is being brought in as a traitor, to be tried and sentenced for his actions. Most people only see one logical outcome to be reached from all of this: death.

Calvin Cross is the young commander of the ship Nighthawk, a

special last-generation infiltration type vessel of the intelligence division of the Empire's forces, the Intel Wing. He is known for not always following orders but has so far escaped harsh punishment



because he always brings results. As part of the crew that found the hidden ship of Raidan, The Phoenix, he has to be present at his trials. It now seems he is about to embark into his own problems when his gut feeling tells him that there is something else behind that which the decorated war hero has done. Not so much a hidden agenda as something that can't be made public, yet.

I am not sure if The Phoenix Conspiracy qualifies as a sci-fi Soap Opera but it certainly has many of its elements. A huge Universe to explore, spaceships, aliens, many factions, battles, empires, rebels and shadow groups that seem to control everything. We follow Cross and his ship as he gathers information on Raidan, his own adventure being more like one of a submarine underwater rather than of the battleships dishing it out among themselves on the surface. There is plenty of action, but there is more fact gathering and clue following than anything else. Obviously, more than one twist here and there.

The change in rhythm that is offered by Sanders's novel is welcome, it presents us with another side of the coin. The only narrative let-down I found is that the characters sometimes go from a heroic stance to one that qualifies as overly human, which in turn means a lot of pages spent going over this or that from an ethical and moral perspective, it can be a change in pace and it can have reason within the context but in general it just becomes a little tedious.

If there is one thing that is left clear at the end of The Phoenix Conspiracy is that the intrigue goes very deep and what little we

do find is barely scratching the surface of it. As readers we are left with enough bait to chew but with so much more left out that we definitively will come back for more. At least we are left with a sensation of certain completeness, not hanging about as if there is something else missing in the book.

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FINAL WORDS

I hope that most of those reading this special on e-books will at least agree with 50% of my own choices, maybe more. There are a few more books I read in between but found them lacking to be included in a list of what can be considered some-of-the-best-out-there.

There is much more to explore, so much more to read, so many new authors and worlds, so many new heroes, heroines and anti-heroes. I wish I had the time to read them all, to immerse myself in their worlds, to identify myself with their characters, to be for a while in their shoes, boots, ships, wings or armor.

Most of those named here were acquired when they were promoted as Free for the Amazon Kindle. Which is why I still have so much more to actually return to. Alas, my time is not always my own but I'll do my best to have a new set of books to comment and share as soon as possible.

If I were to be asked by Indie Authors what they shouldn't do is this:

- 1) Don't use a book to promote others by including "extra" chapters, or the first part of the next volume, it makes me –and readers/buyers in general– feel cheated when the novel I've acquired is only 90% (or less) of the whole.

2) (Extremely) Human characters are nice and realistic but need to be handled carefully, presented as such in the right context. At least personally I don't like to see a hero/heroine, a chosen, behave like a whiny spoiled child, have doubts every three pages, overthink every move, it takes away the chance for me – the reader– to identify with them since they can end up reminding me too much of myself or someone I rather not be; it acts as a breaker of whatever suspension of disbelief I am willing to get into.

3) As an avid reader I would say that I like either trilogies or independent novels rather than –infinite– series. I agree that many contexts and characters lend themselves to episodic novels that act as isolated adventures, but there are also those that require the promise of a beginning, a middle and an end to be truly enjoyable. Great protagonists can reappear in new adventures, it goes without saying that great contexts should do so, but with others ongoing adventures just feel like stretching the original, like putting them through a hero routine. If what makes a protagonist great is going along for his/her first adventure then follow up volumes aren't advisable –unless extremely well done, obviously.

For now, until the next special of Indie Writers and Books, I bid farewell with the so appropriate words of the spaceship Hilda from Call Me Pharaoh: “Ho-yo-to-ho. Hi YA!”.

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There is just so much you can do with a given recipe, a set of ingredients and the tools to mix them. Nevertheless, Indie Authors shows us that you can add incredible touches, colour and flavour to anything with just the right amount of creativity and a change in the presentation.

Join me as I recount the latest list of e-books available in the wild as I get into the unique chance to travel to the stars, cross impossible dimensions, meet with incredible friends and foes. Discover, reach, explore and face planets, galaxies and universes that are most definitely out-of-this-world.

Leonardo Antezana

