



A Trojan Affair: The S.K.A. at Carnarvon

Michael Smorenburg

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A town that time forgot simmering with conflict, a preacher dancing to another man's tune and the naive boy who lights the wick to the powder keg.

When Oxford-raised Dara, a gregarious half-Indian 17-year-old, arrives in the dusty Calvinist village of Carnarvon, he is utterly ill prepared for the bigoted reception that awaits.

Unbeknownst to Dara, let alone the town's pious community, the devious plans of greedy men who have stirred discontent against the SKA, that the vast machine that Dara's astrophysicist mother has come to build, are not what they seem.

And so it is Dara, with his dark, goading, Indian features and posh accent, who becomes the lightning rod in a tale that peels back the layers of pent-up rage, xenophobia and generational friction that has been brewing for decades.

Get lost in this story of zealots, scientists, and scoundrels. Grab your copy of A Trojan Affair today. Smorenburg has successfully married tension-packed intrigue and drama with cutting-edge science to deliver a geopolitical thriller that will have you turning pages long after you should have cut the light.

A Trojan Affair: The S.K.A. at Carnarvon Details

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Author : Michael Smorenburg

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From Reader Review A Trojan Affair: The S.K.A. at Carnarvon for online ebook

Vicki says

This book is an excellent story of how science and religion struggle to come to grips with each other. The dialog between Dara and the adults in the story are compelling and keep you focused on the confusion that the situation he is in brings. He is the product of two scientific parents and sees no problems with thinking scientifically when the townspeople are upset with the project his parents are working on he becomes involved. It is a harsh welcome to a new town.

This is a book that reels you in with science and logic.

Edwin Herbert says

As progressive science seeks to peer deeply into the very origins of the universe with cutting edge technology, fundamentalist Christians move to block the construction of the vast radio-telescope array, all while happily utilizing new, bedeviled technology to do it. Cognitive dissonance abounds! Of course, the conservative creationists already "know" the truth of the birth of the cosmos and cannot abide the outside world's newfangled ideas to negatively influence the minds of their young.

As an author myself, I often appreciate the writing styles of others who take up quill and parchment. Michael Smorenburg has an almost poetic way with words I really admire. A Trojan Affair was both an entertaining read and a learning experience!

Klaus Schirmer says

Michael Smorenburg tackles two issues in his book, the first the inherent conflict between science and religion, the second the tribulations faced by a conservative, small town, Calvinist culture - a culture steeped in tradition and needing to move forward, but unable to come to terms with a rapidly changing society.

Michael Smorenburg uses the SKA project in the Karoo as the vehicle on which to build his novel and explore the conflict. He does so with great aplomb, and using JJ Kruger - who has been exposed to both sides of the proverbial coin and is to me the chief protagonist - to pull all the conflicting elements together, is ingenious. JJ Kruger forms the interface between the "verkrampte" conservative and enlightened liberal mind sets as well as staunch Calvinism and modern science. Add to all that an element of racism, and there you have it - War in the Bible Belt.

What impressed me is that Smorenburg, taking into account the nature of the subject matter he explores, does not, although at times it may appear otherwise, pick sides. He allows the reader to decide. In as much as he does find a somewhat amicable solution to the conflict at the end of the novel, there is plenty of room for debate to continue long after the final chapter has been read.

The only small point of criticism I would have is that I would have liked to have seen a little more of the religious counter arguments to scientific fact. For that reason I rate it a solid 4.5 out of 5 (ok, so we make that a 5).

Read it - but do so with your eyes and mind wide open!

Chris Hand says

A very good read. Interesting characters, brought to life, and very typical of the area in which they live.

A different way of carrying a message across, woven into a realistic novel setting, using real life places, with easily identifiable fictional characters. Current affairs affecting the area in which the novel is set are cleverly used to advance the plot, showing a depth of research that is quite admirable.

Caitlin Farley says

What I liked:

Oh what a premise: This book pits fundamental Christianity against science. It could've come across as the worst type of message fiction, but for the fact that both sides of the argument are well presented. One feels the confusion of the scientists, and the desperation of the locals in equal measure.

The ugly truth: While much of the cultural divisions are intensified because of the small town setting, it still holds true in many ways for the country on the whole. I was friends with somebody who epitomises the staunch Afrikaaner culture, and I've known people who are more like JJ. It never fails to disturb me when white people talk to me as though I'm racist just because I'm white. It also hurts every time a black person is racist towards me, or an Afrikaaner brushes me aside because I'm English-speaking, and a woman on top of it. It's not wide-spread, thank heavens, but it does exist.

Simple Science: A couple of complicated scientific concepts come up in this book. For the most part, the author does an excellent job of explaining them simply enough for anyone to understand.

Nitty gritties: The descriptions are succinct but grabbing, and the plot moves at a steady pace.

It's home: I've been trying to read more books by South African authors, and this one fit the bill perfectly.

What I didn't like:

More nitty gritties: The style is messy. In some places it comes across as third person omniscient while the majority of the book is written in the third person (?). Sentences also tend to be on the long side.

An excellent story that broaches a delicate topic in a sensitive manner. It's easy to connect with the characters, and the plot retains momentum throughout. While it's a little more raw talent than polish in some ways, this doesn't detract from the book. It was difficult to put down once I was into it, and I'll definitely

read it again.

Tamsyn J says

It took me forever to finish this book. Not because it was difficult to read mind you, it was actually an easy story to take in. What took time was my need to do further research as I read. Michael depicted small town mentality perfectly. Perhaps I say that unfairly as not all small towns are backward in the way that Carnarvon is depicted.

Each character was so perfectly described and I found myself feeling like they were people I actually know. He cleverly gave you background on certain characters without having to delve off from the main story line.

The battle between religion and science, as well as a bygone era and the modern world we know, is this epic tale we all know. He tells it to us straight and true in the rawest of ways. Then there is that other truth I wish didn't even exist. I struggle with stories about racism, because the brutality of the movement is real and on going no matter how much society has changed.

The only thing holding me back from rating this book 5 stars was the ending. It felt a little like I was tricked. He left me underwhelmed because it was just too sudden even though it really wasn't. I needed more. I wanted more, which is actually clever I suppose.

On a whole, definitely an awesome story. I'm not usually one for books set in my own back yard but I think it is safe to say that Michael makes me want to read more books set in good old South Africa.

Mary D'Alto says

5.0 out of 5 stars

It takes the reader by the hand through the labyrinth of social structures and human emotions.

I first heard of Africa from Sister Cyprian, my favorite of all the nuns. "When I get to Heaven" she told us, in that way she had of bringing "Him" into every part of our day, even our geography class, "I am going to ask my Husband (she meant God) why He never let me visit Africa." Her words troubled me; Sister had missed out! It was, I think, my introduction to the concept of "regrets". Years, of course, many years, have passed from that long ago day. Yet it was my dear Sister I thought of when I opened this book; here was the world she had never seen. Africa. What had she missed? This book defined it all, and in doing so answered the first question I know she would have asked had she visited; "Are the people happy?" with the answer being, "Happiness is only part of the equation. You must know the history of a people to understand them, and to appreciate what is important to them." Yes, this is an amazing book, and one which I would not have read had it not been suggested to me. I am ever so glad that I did, because it enabled me to take a literal journey that was perfect in its telling, and so full of, well, there really is no other way to describe it, "so full of thought". To say that this book is a tome for the socially conscious is correct, but even so that does not sufficiently describe its breadth; it takes the reader by the hand through the labyrinth of social structures and human emotions. The experience is stupendous, as is the writing. I recommend it highly for all persons interested in learning more about society, and themselves. And yes, I do think Sister would have said, had she read it, "nearly quite like being there." It really is that good!

Nthato Morakabi says

I literally just finished this book and I'm reeling from all the implications that the book carries, although categorically a book of fiction, the details outlined in the story tread across multiple factual truths as well as unfortunate distortions, intermingled with very controversial issues. Kenneth Bacon and his Genesis Answers group would be sourly displeased <- I love this injection of fictionalized truth.

From a character perspective, I must immediately state that the scientists are represented by a myriad of colourful, sophisticated, intelligent, cultured people across the range while the religious are clumped into one simple, shortsighted, racist group of bigots. Their arguments always fall short and show no sign of any intelligence – their answer is strictly biblical naivety. Granted, the location of the story and the cultural background of these characters can be used to justify their mentality, but having a renowned scientist having a debate with these remote individuals is far from a legitimate argument. Like arguing with a child. Even the reference to the “American” version of these religious “Calvinists” and “Evangelicals” does nothing to represent a very intelligent portion of these groups. So from that standpoint, I found the book solemnly one-sided. But it builds up that climatic end like the biblical rains of Noah’s time.

All of that, however, made for a very interesting book and we see Dara, the Indian boy from Britain, uninformed and unsuspecting, dive into a severely racist town. He is met with abject hostility. Man did I cringe. Not just from the slurs, which authenticated the book, but from the trials he had to face, one especially big I didn’t want believe could happen. We see his mother, who is an astrophysicist, work through these issues as both a mother and a scientist. We are faced with a “typical” Afrikaans boy who, in that culture and setting, is the epitome of expectation and how he deals with Dara’s appearance. We have the local pastor who staunchly stands against the S.K.A, the other races that have infiltrated their holy land, question their God and the degree by which all the developments drive him. A smattering of other varying individuals make appearances, falling into either end of the argument, all adding fascinating aspects to the story.

And the tension. So much tension in the book from the word go, right through the pages. And perhaps all of the controversy so close to home jolted it all up a notch. Science is of the devil and must step into the realm of God and religion. This is the topic that not only pulls the story together, but thrusts it forward with unrelenting intrigue and drama. And then it all rolls out from under the table like a giant spider that snares both sides in a twist I did not see coming! Woo!

The writing is smooth and transitory – and Michael Smorenburg doesn’t hold back. I’ve actually learned a few words myself and have learned the true meaning of some of the slurs I’ve heard myself. Really insightful. It is also clear that the novel was written with an audience that doesn’t understand Afrikaans in mind, which at times was an annoyance to me to have it translated. However, the translation is molded into the story cleverly to clarify the preceding texts. I’ve read other books where the author doesn’t do this (Kill Baxter, Dark Things, Moxyland) and it doesn’t change the story, merely adds authenticity to it. No one really translates their own language to English as they think or speak anyway. But it works in S.K.A.

Any book that makes me question my own beliefs and challenges my thinking, is a book worth reading. I feel as though many would fall into the “I agree with the author” route and with good reason, but as my review has, I hope, clearly defined for you that I neither agree nor disagree with either party represented in the group. Although I think which way the author falls is pretty clear. Nonetheless a fantastic book that has

truly wound me up.

Carien says

This book has no down side, the setting and characters came alive in my mind. Wonderfully written, very educational, interesting characters.

Merry Martin says

I loved this book. I found the storyline riveting, the story moved at a good pace and I did not want to put the book down. It was one of those books where I wanted to get to the end to see what happened, but I also did not want the story to finish. I hope a sequel comes up soon!

Louise says

Too much 'telling' and not enough 'showing' - a disappointing read.

Al de Coning says

On the upside, this book tackles the sensitive issues of religion and science while being sensitive to both schools of thought. On the downside, I kept looking out for a "hero" that I could root for, and thought I had found one, but then that character took a backseat for the rest of the book. I'm not going to mention the name because it may just spoil it for potential readers.

Jennifer Withers says

A very different book to the ones I normally read, A Trojan Affair is an interesting read about science vs religion, and a very realistic portrayal of not only South African small-town living, but the attitudes thereof. Although Smorenburg's own feelings towards religion comes through very strongly, and I feel, tilted the scales heavily towards the science argument, I found it to be a keen and observant look into what shapes humanity's attitudes, and how those, in turn, shape our characters. Although much of the science discussions and terminology went over my head, I found it a fascinating read, and would strongly recommend it to anyone with an interest in the inner workings of people.

Denzil says

The importance of this book is that it pulls together the arguments for and against theism in a very entertaining and imaginative way. It's easy to read and has a clever plot, leading up to the final debate which

is the crowning achievement of the book.

Fundamentalist Christians will probably not like some of the points that are being made here, and I would be interested to see their responses. This is really a science vs religion book, and both sides of the argument are well presented in the final debate.

The point of the book, to me - and it is a very well made point - is that religious beliefs are not very compatible with science. I.e., a religious person employed as a scientist has to mentally separate his ideas related to religion away from those related to science.

Andrew says

Smorenburg's book is much more than a novel – by looking at the collision of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, he explores the very essence of human nature. Set in a small town in rural South Africa, the reader is introduced to a community whose religious beliefs are virtually unchanged from those of their ancestors.

The community is ripped apart by the intrusion of Modernity in the form of the many people brought into the community to develop the SKA (Square Kilometre Array) telescope. This potential for conflict is exacerbated by the SKA project donating time and financial resources to the community, a community whose very heart is their God. And this community, whose roots are planted in the many physical conflicts of South Africa, will not accept any challenges to their God. Especially not from a bunch of foreigners who challenge their belief in God with scientific explanations. And especially not from the people whose telescope seems to be dedicated to disproving the existence of their God...

This is a powerful book. And a book that will make you think. But first and foremost, it is a thundering good read, a read that I finished in two sittings not because I wanted to, but because I HAD to.
