



Out on Blue Six

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In a totalitarian future controlled by the Compassionate Society, the Ministry of Pain, and the Love Police, cartoonist Courtney Hall finds herself a fugitive. Her only escape is to an underground society--a society of violence and decadence Courtney must traverse to realize her dreams.

Out on Blue Six Details

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Author : Ian McDonald

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From Reader Review Out on Blue Six for online ebook

Daniel says

I received an electronic copy of this from the publisher via NetGalley.

This is one of the most intoxicating, wild, and imaginative science fiction novels I've had a chance to read. The introduction by Cory Doctorow compares it in terms of broad thematic to 1984 and Brave New World, with good reason, and I understand why Doctorow would return to this novel to reread again and again.

McDonald writes this following two protagonists who are fighting to exist outside of the Compassionate Society, but the third person narration is almost a character unto itself, one that you can imagine speaking in a voice over to impart the mysteries of this strange universe to you as you read. That voice is above all flowing, with poetics and melody that adds meaning to this story far beyond each of the individual words on their own. This is impressive writing. However, it also requires intense concentration while reading, it is not straight-forward and simple, and the plot veers into bizarreness at each turn, though frequently with bits of humor and zeal.

The text of this story is an example of literature at its purest, as a representation of the universe which this story is set, in all of its nature grandiose, yet always seeming artificial, a veneer of shine over something hidden and more base. The flowing complex structure of McDonald's latinate prose is thus peppered throughout with brief moments of Anglo-Saxon coarseness, and punctuated with repetition of simple sounds or ideas.

Beyond the impressive nature of the writing, the characters are not too finely developed, they instead serve to bring schism into the Compassionate society of the story in order to bring highlight to the themes of McDonald's tale. In this respect it reminded me somewhat of a Heinlein story with its almost Messianic heroes, such as "Stranger in a Strange Land". As alluded above, the themes of this book deal with dystopia, a society that values attainment of comfort and happiness to any sort of freedom or risk. In its totality "Out on Blue Six" has interesting things to say about the nature of pain and the role of discomfort in driving things of value, art, and beauty.

This novel is a fantastic find, and this edition is a very cheap option to introduce yourself to an important piece of science fiction.

Mario Di Maggio says

I love science fiction set in the not-too-distant future, so I was drawn to the setting of this book: planet Earth after the (impending?) economic and environmental collapse.

To avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, a tightly controlled Compassionate Society is subsequently established, ensuring happiness and stability become law. Exploitation of others (in any form) is not allowed - with this state of affairs strictly enforced by the Ministry of Pain and the Love Police.

The Compassionate Society ensures people's genetic predispositions and aptitudes - rather than random

choice - guide their lives, with individual happiness as the most cherished value. Consequently, anything that can cause frustration, longing or grief - ie. pain of any kind - is outlawed. This naturally includes competitive sports, space exploration, entrepreneurship - yearning and striving of any kind. If it can result in unhappiness, it's not encouraged and very often illegal.

When I first arrived from South Africa, to me the UK appeared to be a type of 'compassionate society'. I was astounded at how hard the State worked to keep citizens safe and protected, particularly in terms of welfare and health & safety legislation.

Yet is such a 'utopia' necessarily a good thing for human beings?

Out on Blue Six explores this subject with a rich band of characters who form part of a dissident underground network fighting against the stagnation imposed by the Compassionate Society. They struggle to regain for humanity the freedom to grow and innovate and ultimately, survive.

I guess I enjoyed the book mainly due to the over-arching themes described above. Many of the details of the story were a little too outlandish for my liking. Were it not for the way it was professionally read (I listen to audiobooks while driving), I think I may have enjoyed it less.

Michael says

A playful romp and the onset of rebellion among the citizens of a utopia run by computers. It is about 500 years since the big "Break", when most of humanity destroyed itself in some war or ecological disaster, and one city, Yu, was preserved and nurtured by the AIs and now comprises about 1.5 billion people. In this sort of Brave New World, people are channeled into various castes with daily life managed to maximize happiness. There is a Polytheon of gods to worship, and the Love Police and the Ministry of Pain work to assure that those who commit the crime of causing pain to others are humanely reconditioned. But this is no dark tale of dystopia. The AIs tolerate a multicaste cadre of performance artists, the Raging Apostles, who believe they are taking radically creative steps against the hollowness of this "Compassionate Society". And it turns out they are tired of babysitting humanity and wish they would take over their own fate so they can pursue a more interesting endeavor elsewhere in the Multiverse. They conceive of a way to assess the human's readiness.

We spend a lot of time alternating between two characters. One is a man who awakes one day with no memories of his own, who adopts the name of one of the arcologies, Kilaminjaro West, and ends up joining the Raging Apostles. Through him we get a fresh view of this strange world. Our other hero, Courtney, gets shaken out of her comfortable life as a cartoonist. She becomes effectively homeless through an accidental destruction of her home in an arcology by a Love Police raid that crashes the wrong address. As she takes a tour looking for the boundaries of this world, she gets in trouble in a waste zone taken over by discarded bioengineered pets and is saved by a former government leader, who calls himself the King of Nebraska. With a race of computer enhanced raccoons, they assume a quest to get beyond the mile-high walls of their world through the tunnels and abandoned underground food production facilities of the DeepUnder. They are aided by a "cybernetic anarchist" and his sister, who can teleport over short distances. Despite the talent, they run up against warring societies of the old world order, the "Democrats" and the "Communists".

Here is a bit of the flavor of McDonald's prose:

Chiga-Chiga Sputnik-kid, Captain Elvis in neon skin-hugger and power-wheels, rides the high wires in the

wee wee dawn hours when the cablecars sleep in their barns, when four A.M. TAOS gurls call the Scorpions from the high and low places; silver-maned, forgotten samurai in a world with honor without swords; out on blue six through the vastnesses of Great Yu. ...If the Love Police ever catch Chiga-Chiga, he will be seeing the remainder of his yearlong walkabout from the inside of a Social Responsibility Counseling Center learning that words like “danger” and “thrill” cannot be allowed to have any meaning in the age of the Compassionate Society. But Chiga-Chiga Sputnik-kid is too fast, too young, too shiny for that, isn’t he?

This book is a re-publication from its first appearance in 1989, which pre-dates the Internet and our current splurge of epic fantasy and post-apocalyptic scenarios. It reminds me a bit of the playfulness of Gaiman’s underworld of “Neverwhere”, the heroic quest in Mieville’s “Railsea” to scope out a future civilization’s boundaries, and the human revolt against the smothering utopia controlled by AIs in WALL-E. I was glad to experience some the roots for McDonald’s talent that wowed me with his recent “River of Gods” and “The Dervish House.” Ultimately, the humor didn’t ever send me over into laughter, and I was disappointed in how much he resorted to spelling out all his messages instead of just showing you through the plot. It doesn’t quite achieve the fun and excitement of Stephenson’s “Snow Crash”, though it seems to have a comparable ambition. Fellow sci fi author Cory Doctorow, in his introduction, puts the book on a higher pedestal in terms of its historical context:

It’s important because it does to all the Sf that came before it what a Coltrane solo did to the musical conversation that had taken place among all his peers before he picked up his horn. This is a book that shows the unexpected connections between the high and the low, the serious and the frivolous, the sacred and the profane. It’s a novel that marks the end of the Cold War and the start of a too-short techno-optimistic period, and it is prescient in its shrewd guesses about where all that optimism is likely to end.

This book was provided as an e-book loan by the publisher through the Netgalley program.

BobA707 says

Summary: Interesting, Interesting, Interesting ... The premise didn't quite work and I found it hard work to understand the basics. But an interesting and convoluted plot with an unexpected ending. Overall very imaginative

Plotline: Plot seems to go in many strange directions, but it all makes sense in the end

Premise: Slightly weird and not somewhere I would like to be

Writing: Imaginative but the writing didn't really flow for me

Ending: Unusual

Pace: Never a dull moment!

Tom Rowe says

Weird, wild, whimsical. Ian McDonald is quickly becoming a fave author. Imagine John Bruner and Dr. Seuss writing a story like *Big Trouble in Little China*. On audiobook, Jeff Harding really captures the music in the language of this book. And listening at double speed was fun just to hear the rhythm of the whole thing.

If you like weird science fiction, this is the story for you. If you don't like weird, stay away. It will lose you right at the beginning. Actually, the book was better at the beginning when I didn't really understand what was going on. Still, a good book.

Nikki says

Had this from NetGalley aaaages ago, and finally got round to reading it now. It's something very much in the vein of *1984*, with some aspects clearly riffing on that, and it gives me really major *déjà vu* about something I've read before (but which I suspect was published since). It's one of McDonald's earliest novels, published in the year I was born, and yet I don't think it's gone out of date as speculative fiction so often can.

In a way, I found it predictable: once you know the roles of certain characters and how they fit into society, you can see how it's going to end. That doesn't diminish the fun of the ride, though: this is a quicksilver, frenetic book, a strange new world. I love the concepts here, filched from mythology and jumbled back up to make something new: Lares and Penates, household gods, mixed in with stuff straight out of *1984*.

While I didn't like this as much as I liked *The Broken Land*, and the writing style isn't always entirely for me (too disconnected, jumbled, like an abstract painting), I think it's worth a look, particularly if you enjoy dystopian stories. The last chapter or so is all a bit of a rush; a lot suddenly happens in a few words, and I could've enjoyed seeing it unfold more completely, but I like what's sketched in for us as the result of the climax of the story.

Donald says

His first novel, I believe. All of his interests are there: super intelligent computers, AI or as near as, the multiverse (although only referenced here, unlike *Brasyl*), the 'god' who knows all and nothing and a sweet romantic streak. A little shaky in parts but that seems to stem from lax editing and this being an early effort. Read this if you are a completist of Mr McDonald's work but you are better off reading *River of Gods* and *Brasyl*.

Brenda (aka Gamma) says

Brave New World falls down a rabbit hole and goes on a techno-based acid trip. That's honestly how I'm going to remember this.

I might recommend it to someone wishing for more creative science fiction, but I needed to care about a

character or a plot.

David Willson says

I first became familiar with Ian McDonald from his first novel *Desolation Road*, published in 1988, and since have always considered him one of the best writers in science fiction. When I saw *Out on Blue Six* offered at an e-book discount I grabbed it. Even though new to me, it was another early novel in his career (either two or three, based on some rather incomplete bibliographies out there).

McDonald has a definite propensity for putting visual and performing art at the forefront of his stories. *Out on Blue Six* is wildly inventive, both in plot and language. Its environments and characters are surreal and stretch the boundaries of conventional science fiction. And yet, at its culmination, it is pure science fiction. In fact, considering when it was written, it should be considered first generation cyberpunk. Not only that, but it is extremely prescient about the effects of networked computer technology on society and therefore very timely and pertinent to the issues we face in the near future with the advent of artificial intelligence. At times, McDonald's exuberant exploration of language and storytelling requires work on the part of the reader, but it is rewarding. I highly recommend it, and consider it a science fiction classic.

zxvasdf says

In a teeming city of arcologies and love police, the only illegal thing you can really do is disrupt the happiness of others as mandated by The Compassionate Society, a governing body composed of seven benevolent AIs originating from ancient corporate bodies.

Welcome to Yu, where the manswarm walk rain soaked streets the neon and gray of noir Korean films. Yu is where you live in buildings, veritable cities in themselves, that thrust into the monsoon sky where wire runners slide on the cables with feet on wheels. You can see the sparks from afar.

In Yu, you are born into a slot as determined by the psychological profiling of the Compassionate Society; no man or woman is out of place for they are always perfectly placed within compatible castes. No unhappiness is tolerated in Yu, where high technology has become mundane accessories to the facts of life so you can be the best you can be, as long as you be the designated you.

An infant's impression of the world is *tabula rasa*: a man wakes in a room, filled with language, but none of the associated experiences. The language pours forth as the rain fills him with ecstasy, constructing his reality with words that define alien senses and impressions. Within that dichotomy the man exists, filling that void with a self that thrashes within the amniotic fluid of identity. He wordlessly words the world with meaning.

He falls through the manswarm, a fool for all he knows of the world, until he is adopted by Kansas Byrne and Co, in the form of the anarchic performance group Raging Apostles who bear him up and up above the sprawl coming and going on their mundane day to day businesses babbling reassuring inanities whose collective whispers waft to fill his infinitesimal self with the roar that is Yu's heart and soul. They pump that heart and soul with the adrenaline of mischief.

Courtney Hall, pencil-slinger, free-thinker, finds herself at odds with her life and plunges into the chaos to

unwittingly spearhead a decision that will forever decide the course of mankind. Ian McDonald has dipped into world religions (Out on a blue six smacks of an existential species-long Rumspringa) and multiple ideologies and dream worlds to create a chaotic near-hallucination which seems as an impossible but extremely optimistic vision of the future. Here, protean McDonald sprays references and allusions and metaphors in his exuberance, and you see this ability tightened and honed in his subsequent novels, especially that of Desolation Road, the novel most similar to Out On Blue Six.

This is the ride of your life, of seizure-inducing anime injected with comical realism, of derring-do in the name of Why Not and Wake Up People, of Jesus complexes deep in artificial intelligences and ancient technologies buried under newer ancient technologies, of dreams that are electric blue and out of there.

Jay says

I've not read anything from Ian McDonald before, but if this book is typical of his skill, Imma fix that right away.

Take Douglas Adams, William Gibson, and Ogden Nash, blend them together and strain them through Lewis Carroll, and the result might vaguely resemble Out On Blue Six. Excellent, poetic, and zany as hell.

Gettree says

God, I've read so many disappointing books recently. This book had so much potential but McDonald just ruined it with excessive additional vocabulary. On the first page alone we find:

- Arcologies
- Co-habs
- Caste
- Yulp

Why is this necessary? Any form of world building would be appreciated before throwing us into a dystopian world.

I love the concept, but the execution killed me. DNFed

Jaime says

Imaginen un remake de 1984 escrito a seis manos, por George Orwell, Terry Gillian y China Mieville, después se le entrega a Philip K. Dick para que lo reescriba y a final William Gibson lo rehace en clave cyberpunk.

Althea Ann says

It's always a great feeling to find a cyberpunk dystopia that I'd somehow overlooked.

Reminded me – just slightly – of Melissa Scott's 'Dreamships' and 'Dreaming Metal,' – mostly because the story focuses on transgressive artists in a future, cyber city with strict caste rules.

Here, Courtney Hall, yulp (it's the 'yuppie' caste), a successful cartoonist, wants to do a bit more with her comic strip, and introduce some social satire into it. She's given a warning – but when she resorts to using a hacker to get her forbidden cartoon out to her readers, she suddenly finds herself a wanted criminal, on the run through the underground tunnels that she never knew existed.

Meanwhile, the Raging Apostles, in the chaos of a police raid, have picked up a new member. The Raging Apostles are a street performance art group, illegally made up of members from different social castes, that plans 'flash' style events. Their new member is Kilimanjaro West – a seeming amnesiac who picked his 'name' off the side of a building.

I have to admit, I've had mixed reactions to McDonald's work. I loved his 'Dervish House,' but didn't like (at all) some of his more surreal, absurd material, such as 'Desolation Road.' I further have to admit that I requested this book thinking it was a new title – it's actually a rerelease; first published in 1989. There are bits here that I could do without – I'm just not a fan of the gene-modified talking raccoons, for example. However, many of the more 'fractured' elements here do eventually get pulled in – some of them very effectively. I do still feel that McDonald has improved as a writer over the past 20-odd years, but there's a brilliance and originality on display here that makes the book more than worthwhile.

And hey – I totally agree with his message that art, and a bit of anarchy, are necessary for a vibrant, free society.

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John Ostwald says

So, imagine getting buffeted around in a blender with several sci fi novels, a dystopia, a few children's books, a radio dj, a beatnik poet and a generous handful of mind altering substances. That's a reasonable approximation of this book. And yet it hangs together pretty well and is, on the whole, quite enjoyable. Works well as an audiobook.
