



Super Extra Grande

Yoss

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The winner of the 20th annual UPC Science Fiction Award in 2011, the Cuban science fiction master Yoss delivers a space opera of intergalactic proportions in *Super Extra Grande*. Set in a distant future, the novel features creatures of immense variety—Amoebas that cover entire worlds, sensual females that feed on substances from their males' reproductive systems, talking reptiles, and other creations drawn from the classics of Cuban and international science fiction—all of which serve as colleagues, fellow adventurers, sex partners, teachers, or members of the military high command in the Galactic Commonwealth governing this part of the universe. Our protagonist, Jan Amos Sangan Dongo, has a special role in this otherworldly menagerie: He is a veterinarian who specializes in treating enormous animals across the galaxy.

Coupling his own extensive studies in (earthly) biology with his vast curiosity and wild imagination, Yoss brings us a rare specimen in the richly parodic tradition of Cuban science fiction.

“One of the most prestigious science fiction authors of the island.”
—On Cuba Magazine

"A gifted and daring writer."
—David Iaconangelo

"José Miguel Sánchez [Yoss] is Cuba's most decorated science fiction author, who has cultivated the most prestige for this genre in the mainstream, and the only person of all the Island's residents who lives by his pen."
—Cuenta Regresiva

Born José Miguel Sánchez Gómez, Yoss assumed his pen name in 1988, when he won the Premio David Award in the science fiction category for *Timshel*. Together with his peculiar pseudonym, the author's aesthetic of an impetuous rocker has allowed him to stand out amongst his fellow Cuban writers. Earning a degree in Biology in 1991, he went on to graduate from the first ever course on Narrative Techniques at the Onelio Jorge Cardoso Center of Literary Training, in the year 1999. Today, Yoss writes both realistic and science fiction works. Alongside these novels, the author produces essays, reviews, and compilations, and actively promotes the Cuban science fiction literary workshops, *Espiral* and *Espacio Abierto*.

Super Extra Grande Details

Date : Published April 12th 2016 by Restless Books (first published April 15th 2014)

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Author : Yoss

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From Reader Review Super Extra Grande for online ebook

Lucas Remington says

Super Extra Grande is a unique postmodern take on traditional science fiction tropes, in which a giant veterinarian delves into an enormous amoeba to rescue two beautiful women, making an enormous amount of puns along the way.

Strengths:

Hilarious: Make no mistake: this is a funny, funny novel. The obligatory comparison to Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy is especially warranted here, as Super Extra Grande approaches humor with the same bombastic, rapid-fire insanity perfected by Douglas Adams. (Though unlike the original Hitchhiker, Super Extra Grande can get very risqué.) Importantly, it also doesn't seem to take itself too seriously, particularly regarding the portrayal of the main character, who we'll elaborate on more in the 'weaknesses' section. Though the novel does make its view of the world very clear, I never felt like I was being preached to, a trap that much of modern satire falls into.

Well-Realized World: Much of the first part of Super Extra Grande focuses on the development of the world, which is something that usually bothers me--I'm an impatient man, and I want to get the plot started as soon as possible. But in this case, the world that was being built was so damn fascinating that I found myself absorbed in the biological descriptions of the baffling, enormous creatures being wrangled. Encouragingly, this sense of depth and history was present throughout the rest of the novel, especially when describing aliens. It's clear that Yoss spent a lot of time thinking about his world, and made sure to maintain consistency with both his character interactions and descriptions.

Weaknesses:

Culturally Dependent: While the satirical aspects of this novel can be screamingly funny, many of the puns and one-liners only make sense if you know about Cuban culture, or have a fair bit of knowledge about the Spanish language. This criticism might not be entirely fair, coming from a 'stupid gringo' like myself, but I feel that for a novel which roots itself so heavily in a world melding both Spanish and English, it should be understandable for both groups of readers. That said, while those jokes did fly over my head, they certainly didn't make the novel unreadable—while I missed some of the nuances in the Spanglish dialogue, I was at least able to follow the plot.

Inconsistent Tone of Humor: The main character, Dr. Jan Amos Sangan Dongo (apparently, this is Spanish for 'really big') can be a bit obnoxious, although I do think his overbearing misogyny is more of a jab at traditional science fiction heroes than reflective of the beliefs of its author. This confusion pops up in several places, highlighting the main issue I had with the novel: it wants to tell a fun, lighthearted story while also being a biting satire of anything and everything. Not to say that this is impossible; Terry Pratchett, rest his soul, managed to strike this balance in his Discworld series. However, Pratchett understood for this concept to work, the satire in his novels needed to be extremely focused, almost to the point of parody; each one of his books systematically identified and attacked a particular idea. Yoss has taken a more scattershot approach in his novel, poking fun at politics, religion, sex, and traditional science fiction tropes all at the same time, all in under one hundred and fifty pages.

Weird Length: Speaking of the length, one hundred and fifty pages is... unusual, to say the least, especially

because Super Extra Grande has so much to say. If some of the fat was trimmed off, Super Extra Grande would have been an excellent novella, and if some of the sparser sections were fleshed out, it would have been able to tie together all of these ideas together more coherently. As it is, none of the satirical elements get quite enough focus, which is a real shame.

Conclusion:

3.5 out of 5 stars. While this novel was certainly not perfect, it was still an enjoyable, well-paced romp. While I wouldn't necessarily call it a 'must-read' book, I definitely would read other books by the same author, as he has a real gift for both humor and world

Sean Callaghan says

Fun read with lots of surprises. Nice to read scifi with a slightly different cultural referent.

Michelle Morrell says

This book is a new Cuban import, written by Yoss, considered one of the foremost Cuban science fiction authors. He's written over 20 books, many highly regarded. One look at the author picture provided, and you can see he is larger than life himself. "He looks like a heavy metal singer," I thought. And Bingo! He also heads up a pretty rocking heavy metal band. (YouTube has everything)

So what kind of book was I going to find?

Super Extra Grande is the size of the universe's largest creatures. Not feet or pounds, but kilometers and tons. A perfect job niche, actually, because how many competetors are willing to go headfirst into a titan's digestive tract? Someone's got to do it.

It was a smart book. I was fed a whole lot of science and it was mostly effortless. It was fast, yet deep. The ideas were fresh but didn't ignore the scifi foundations. And it was fun.

My only complaint was the Spanglish dialogue. I was surprised that I could puzzle out the majority of what was said, but it stopped the flow of the book for me. I gave up quickly the first time and read through skipping over huge chunks of dialogue, but then the story was good enough I went back and deciphered it all.

One of the Philip K Dick award nominees for 2017, super happy to see them choosing a Latin voice and an underrepresented culture.

Ryan says

I love stories about extraterrestrial biology and admire authors who play with linguistics and culture. I abhor a main character who says, "Call me machismo and closed-minded, and maybe I am, but what good is a woman without her most important opening?" Hanging a flimsy lampshade on a protagonist's repulsive

beliefs (it's OK because he *admits* he's piggishly sexist?) makes it no less repugnant, especially if the whole point of a book seems to be set up to the punchline of a man grudgingly admitting he enjoys oral sex, too. I get the feeling that readers are supposed to sort of smirk and roll their eyes. "This guy," we're meant to say with a chuckle, especially since he "matures" by story's end—though the maturation is akin to a frat boy learning he should see beyond just sorority sisters as vehicles for his pleasure. The jacket itself calls this book "funny, witty, raunchy" and a "rare specimen in the richly parodic tradition of Cuban science fiction." I'm not sure what it's parodying, but I think women (of any species) deserve better. And my definition of funny, witty, and raunchy is something more than just "Lo siento, no filter, bro."

Paul says

Woohoo Latinos in space! Bummer that the protagonist is another fugly character that is the best at his job and gets all the girls. Other than that it is a fun and fast read with some interesting universe building.

Richard Everett says

There were some mildly amusing situations and projections here but not enough to counter balance the crappy attitude towards females of any species. Don't waste even the small amount of time it takes to read this.

Bairdlet says

I'm only ten pages in and the overt misogyny is an unentertaining gut-punch. Plus, even if you're bilingual in English and Spanish (which I happen to be) the weird pidgen they're speaking is really distracting. So far the tons of literal shit the author is wading through (he just gave a giant alien an enema) seems prophetic.

I'll give it a bit longer because of the premise, but I feel right now like I'm reading some fratboy's attempt at NanoWrimo.

Roy says

Anti-imperialist sci-fi story based on a veterinarian specializing in enormous alien animals? What's not to love?

Jonfaith says

Quick and fun, Super Extra Grande details an adventure of a veterinary biologist in the space age future, one who specializes in truly mammoth megafauna. Conversing in Spanglish, humans are but one of seven "intelligent " species who have achieved interstellar travel without the concurrent advances in culture or ethics. Just imagine the hijinks!

Satirical and hilarious, the novel is a treatise on chauvinism and orthodoxy . Intransigence and jingoism rule the day until our eight foot tall half Cuban/ half Japanese protagonist attempts to reconcile his prejudices, his ambitions and his gaping love for the natural manifestations of the universe. Recommended.

jenni says

Eeggghh there were things I really, really liked about this book, yet I still didn't really like this book. What got me: latin@s as the first cosmic pioneers ("SUCK ON THIS, DUMB-ASS GRINGOS"), spanglish as galactic lingua franca, sci-fi from an optic I have literally never experienced before (a space-opera that takes place mostly within alien entrails). things that sucked: machismo, my own vacant knowledge of biology, a pedantic plot, presence of female characters being used merely for the purpose of unpalatable sexualization.

Lauren Stoolfire says

Short, fun, and risqué sci-fi novel. I wish that this story about a veterinarian to super extra grande sized alien creatures was quite a bit longer to flesh out Jan's world a little more, and to have some of my favorite scenes (the rescue mission) get a little more page time. While it's very funny, I know that some of the satirical elements went over my head as well as some of the language jokes simply because I'm not very familiar with Cuban culture or the Spanish language for that matter. I definitely want to try more by Yoss after this first foray into his work.

James says

Embarrassingly adolescent and sexist in places, exasperatingly pedantic in others, and then... periodically... a bit of fun in spite of itself. To wit, regarding the mis-steps, the story ends with our hero espousing the virtues of getting head from a toothless, 6 breasted "gynoid" with a tri-forked tongue. WINK!

Ugh.

Alejandro Sierra says

It was already a long time since I read a Scifi novel, and reading a fellow Latin American writing with this quality was both amazing and amusing. Figuring out how can be the life forms in the galaxy, given the vastness of environments, gravities, atmospheric composition, energies, is a stimulant and immense field for the imagination. But Yoss doesn't stop there and gave us a glimpse of the infinite variants of love and sex in a galaxy with 7 very different space travelable intelligent beans living in harmony. Recommendable nice and short reading.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4.5* of five, rounded up because reasons

#ReadingIsResistance but don't resist having fun! SUPER EXTRA GRANDE is a space opera with wordplay, humor, interspecies sex, and wildly imaginative weirdness. My review is live at Expendable Mudge Muses Aloud. I gave it 4+ stars because I admire Restless Books and David Frye for making a funny, smart, playful, anti-imperialist political book in a market that doesn't necessarily snatch such beasts from the shelves. Resist the market, read this Cuban rocker-cum-author's energetic Spanglish literature classic. (Like that's hard...how many Spanglish books do you know of?)

Matt says

I really wish this book were less sexist. Aside from the sexism, it's great. But that's very much like asking Mrs. Lincoln what she thought of the play.

Interesting world building, a strong narrative voice, and the use of spanglish as interstellar lingua franca can't overcome the combination of the character's sexism, and the narrative's complete disinterest in women as independent beings.

I've seen some arguments that it is the character who is sexist, not Yoss. That may well be true, but the events of the book do not seem designed to make clear that the narrator's views are anything other than correct.

It's a shame. If I can establish that another of Yoss' novels avoids the blatant misogyny, then I will gladly read it.
