

Wired to Inspire

by Ken Nickell

Here I'm at my very best,
Anxious, angry at the test.
A joke is made into a grave;
While I'm a toy, I am a slave.

I made a message on the street,
Some broken glass on a bedsheet.
Standing comical on a stage
I tell the truth, emboldening rage.

I'll take away your burdened me,
So you and they can take the lead.
Peace and grace and love are found,
Though I am now in the foreground.

The safety I had hoped is gone.
This game won't end, so we press on,
Sabotaged by one & all.
All alone I'll stand to fall.
Gathered round are desperate eyes.
So I will bear the undue lies.
May fear, or love become your guides
No place to run, we need not hide
I'm unafraid. This work, these prides.

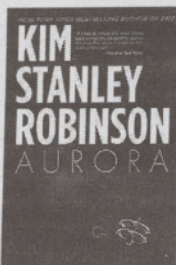
How many stolen? How many died?

'Aurora': Beyond space lies another journey

BY MIKE WOLD
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Space — the final frontier? The last walk on the moon was almost 50 years ago, but there's been little doubt in science fiction movies and novels that someday humankind will break away from our little planet and colonize others.

Now Kim Stanley Robinson, one of the best contemporary writers of "hard" science fiction, has written a book that



"Aurora" by Kim Stanley Robinson

asks a contrary question: What if humanity isn't meant to colonize the stars?

The plot concerns a starship that has taken hundreds of years to reach its destination, while generations of people on it live and die. It finally arrives at a planet chosen because it has

water, a breathable atmosphere and no native life. But they find it is infected with a deadly protovirus, so primitive that it isn't detected before some people are infected and die. The colonists are faced with the choice of taking thousands of years to render a nearby sterile planet livable or voyaging to another star.

Complicating the decision, the terrestrial habitats on the starship are in trouble.

Robinson doesn't assume that keeping plants, animals and people alive on a starship for hundreds of years is simple. Viruses, bacteria and fungi evolve much faster than "higher" life forms. On Earth, this doesn't matter because of the

complexity of the ecosystem. On the ship it means that diseases evolve faster than resistance to them. People are dying sooner, children are showing signs of delayed development and crops are starting to fail.

Freya, a respected young leader and the main character, proposes they return to Earth. For a people who have lived for generations believing that the whole meaning of their existence is to colonize a new planet, this is heresy, leading to a violent split in the group.

Eventually, though, Freya leads some colonists back. This time, they use a new, experimental cold sleep technology to (mostly) survive the centuries-long voyage. Their reception on Earth is mixed.

The people who support sending out starships consider them traitors and quitters. The returnees point out that they were born on the ship and never given a choice about being colonists. Faced with the terrifying vastness of Earth, Freya compares her experience living in a starship to that of a child who has spent her life in a closet.

Other people on Earth are struggling with the effects of centuries of global warming, including a massive sea-level rise. They welcome the returnees when they realize that they can reinforce their argument against providing rich people an escape route from the solar system when the Earth itself needs help. They note that even people who spend most of their lives on other planets — most of the solar system has been colonized by this time — mysteriously live longer lives if they return to Earth every few years. The implication is that humanity is actually tied more closely to Earth's ecosystem than anyone had realized and that this will always be our home.

Robinson's use of ecological insights and

realistic assessments of the difficulties of space exploration sets his writing at a different level from many of the "hard" science-fiction authors writing today. His writing shares some weaknesses of the genre — particularly a tendency to create characters who are types rather than fully complex human beings. Nevertheless, he writes about political conflict in a sophisticated way, which can be both fascinating and tedious, depending on the reader's tolerance for political discussion. He also goes against the typically technocratic bias of most hard science fiction by making Freya extremely bad at science and math. Her talent as a leader is not that she has the answers, but that she listens well to what everybody has to say before proposing her own ideas.

Robinson does clearly believe that, ultimately, we'll find our way out of the mess we're in through technology. One of his most interesting subplots (and best developed character) involves the gradual coming to self-awareness of the ship's computer. Its self-awareness doesn't arise so much from the complexity of its processing as from a search for meaning in its life after Freya's mother, an engineer, sets it the task of writing a literary narrative — this novel — about the voyage.

"Aurora" will be satisfying for science fiction fans, ending with a 12-year roller-coaster ride through the solar system as the ship sheds excess velocity. Some chapters rise close to poetry in their writing. But the novel will also be interesting for the general reader in its exploration and questioning of some of the typical assumptions of science fiction.

Reprinted from Street Roots' sister paper, Real Change News, Seattle



133 NW Sixth Ave
503-222-5694

Open: Tues - Sat, 10 - 2:30
All Are Welcome!



5312 NE 148th Ave.
Portland, OR 97230

Free career training for persons with disabilities in janitorial and building maintenance

- Requirements:
- Documented proof of disability
 - Proficiency in understanding and speaking English
 - Pass criminal background check
 - Pass drug test

Disabilities: Physical, mental health, intellectual, developmental, and learning

Questions ?

Please Call: (503) 261-1266
or (800) 874-7917
email: careers@phcnw.com



Dignity



Poverty