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KALEIDOSCOPE FUTURE

五彩斑斓的未来世界

Oscar De Los Santos, Ph.D.

David G.Mead, Ph.D.



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总 序

继《漫游科学天地,解读生命奥秘》(*Questions of Science, Answers to Life*,上海外语教育出版社,2004年)之后,美国科普作家 Oscar De Los Santos 又向中国读者隆重推出《浩然奇境》科幻小说系列。

在这套系列里,作者以其厚实的功底,独特的视角,丰富的想象,潇洒生动的笔触,引导读者在无尽的时间、空间里漫游,展示宇宙和生命的浩繁、绮丽和奥秘,融知识、娱乐、启迪于每一篇故事中。系列中的每一部作品既有自己独立的主题,又相互关联,组成一个个连绵不断、意趣无穷的浩然奇境。

作者在书末对时间、时间旅行等有关问题做了进一步论述,并附上详细的文献单,为对科幻小说研究感兴趣的读者提供难得的参考资料。书中大量的语言现象脚注为读者提供了方便。

腾飞的中国需要数以千万计的具有现代意识的高精尖人才。这类新型人才不仅专业知识要扎实深厚,而且要富有想象力,能以极大的热忱和敏锐的眼光关注有关人类世界及天地间所有根本性的问题,而这种对于整个宏观世界的关注和感悟,必将为其专业的发展提供无限的灵感和动力。这套科幻小说系列将帮助和激发读者去思考、关注和感悟那些有关人类自身和生存环境的根本性的问题,从中得到无限的启迪和乐趣,并汲取鲜活的当代美国英语的养分。

愿你早日捧上这本难得的好书,在科幻小说提供的浩然无尽、绮丽奥秘的宇宙里尽兴地神游。

Bon Voyage!

祁寿华

2004年秋于美国康州

For Joan

— *Dave*

For JJ Sargent

— *Oscar*

FOREWORD:

A GLIMPSE INTO THE KALEIDESCOPE

A kaleidoscope is a wonderful metaphor for a science fiction collection that showcases varied themes. One peers through a kaleidoscope and encounters a variety of colors and geometric shapes. Turn a dial and crystals cascade into new shapes and configurations. Yet, aren't these new patterns related to the previous ones? Aren't there hints of what has been in what is? And by extension, doesn't the present configuration in the kaleidoscope matrix presage the colorful patterns to come?

Such is the case with the textual kaleidoscope you hold in your hands. Each of the stories in *Kaleidoscope Future* can be read and enjoyed separately, but turn the page and a new story awaits. In many respects, the new tale echoes some of the material in the previous story, and foreshadows themes in the stories to come.

All of the stories in this collection incorporate some of the most popular themes in science fiction. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to take a brief look at some of these themes:

Body Augmentation and Enhancement

"Prisoner of the Peleton" works with the idea that advanced forms of medical technology can preserve our health, heal injury, and augment our bodies. In most cases, these enhancements are initially produced for lawful medicinal purposes. But control of such technologies is fleeting. More often than not, the black market gets hold of them, modifies them, and peddles them to anyone on the street who wishes to experience the latest high. In his important novel *Neuromancer*, William Gibson said that "burgeoning technologies" will be put to uses their inventors never dreamed of, often tested in "outlaw zones" by criminal enterprises. In recent years, we have seen athletes in a number of professions modify their bodies extensively (sometimes to grotesque proportions) via the use of steroids or human growth hormones. "Prisoner of the Peleton" takes this idea a slight step further — but not too far into the incredulous, when one considers the many drugs in today's world that have the capacity to enhance performance, albeit at great cost.

Another story that deals with body augmentation is "Forever Fertile." Here we posit that medical discoveries might eventually enhance our capability to use untapped regions of the brain. We also speculate that there may be long-term negative consequences resulting from these ventures.

Transcendence

Arthur C. Clarke is a grandmaster in the world of science fiction. He is also one of the authors who has written about the theme of transcendence most strikingly. In Clarke's *Childhood's End*, certain members of the human race *outgrow* their need for physical

bodies and move into the cosmos as a new form of superhuman life. Similarly, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the other books in his *Odyssey* series, Clarke talks about a race of “farmers in the fields of stars” who have liberated themselves from their physical bodies, becoming creatures of pure mind. As a result, they are free to move around the cosmos and drop in on various planets where the possibility of life is stirring. They observe and, at times, they move things along with a slight nudge.

Transcendence is the theme at the heart of “Lovetaps.” For all intents and purposes, the principal character looks like an ordinary guy playing drums in a Texas honky-tonk bar. And then the music he plays on the special drum stirs up something long buried within him, something imbedded in his genetic makeup. Trace memories are triggered and he blossoms — momentarily — into a more-than-human being connected to cosmic reality in superhuman ways. The elevation of the character into a transhuman entity (though not necessarily a god) is juxtaposed with the degeneration of the character called The Planet. At one time, he may have been a very talented actor. However, ego and sloth have reduced him to working in low budget movies being shot in tiny Texas towns.

Fanaticism and Terrorism

When it comes to the themes of fanaticism and terrorism, the steps from today’s newspapers to the pages of this book are few and short. The danger of a totalizing ideology, whether religious or political in nature, is a common theme in science fiction, both here and elsewhere. In “A Night at the Space Opera,” much of Earth’s ecology has been injured by fanatics and terrorists of many kinds. Even the survivors, refugees from the global collapse that has made Earth uninhabitable, are threatened by the single-minded, self-righteous New Adamites’ attempts to subvert the communal good

and impose their rigid theology/social philosophy on everyone. We describe the dangers of fanatical sectarian religion in “A Night at the Space Opera” and allude to a terrorist threat in “Cold Fusion” to underscore the harm that the imposition of any single, narrow philosophy can do to the liberty of individuals and the health of the community. We know from the science of biology that genetic diversity is essential to the health of a species; we believe that intellectual and ideological diversity — combined with a willingness to let others believe what they wish to believe — is essential to the health of human society.

On a slightly more humorous level, “The Second Coming” uses a common Judeo-Christian religious phrase (alluding to the return of Jesus Christ at the final judgment of mankind) as its title and explores the power of iconic celebrities. Today, some people’s ‘gods’ are the latest pop singers, basketball stars and media celebrities — like the singer Madonna, the actor Yun-Fat Chow, or cyclist Lance Armstrong. Is it really so outlandish to posit that if some alien culture were to stumble upon a ravaged Earth and find thousands of photos of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, James Dean, Jackie Chan, Tom Cruise or Britney Spears, they might conclude that these were the world’s gods and goddesses?

Ethics and New Technology

“Cold Fusion” is a story that both showcases new technology and makes us ponder the ethics of its uses. Should those individuals making inroads into new developments such as cold fusion and nanotechnology be secretive about their discoveries? Or should all knowledge be shared with everyone in the world in order to help all humanity and prevent any one group from gaining too much power? The answer is quite obvious. Unfortunately, big business enterprises and various government agencies (both of whom fund

experimentation that yields new technological wonders) often get in the way of what is ultimately the “right” thing to do.

The Power of the Media and Information Systems

The world is really getting smaller, thanks to the myriad information sources at our disposal. No longer do we have to wait for our daily newspaper or evening newscast to know what is happening. Cable television gives us “headline news” every few minutes. Watch it for half an hour and you’re caught up with most of the relevant points happening on the planet. If you can’t wait for the next half-hour to cycle through, get on a computer and punch up the latest news online.

Knowledge is power. Printed encyclopedias used to be coveted tomes in many homes. Today, an hour on the Internet spent researching a certain subject often yields an overabundance of knowledge about the given subject. True, a good amount of the data may come from unreliable (amateur) sources, but plenty of worthwhile and relevant material awaits retrieval.

We have tried hard to make our stories reflect the nearly instantaneous dispersal and retrieval of information we believe will continue to be a part of tomorrow’s global culture. If information is generated quickly today, we suspect its transmission will be dizzying in the future. We have featured a reporter in “Think Tank.” To some extent, she still operates the old fashioned way: taking trips to investigate sources and acting on hunches. On the other hand, she works for an electronic newsfeed (Will there be any actual paper newspapers in the future?) that updates itself almost instantaneously.

Ecological Dangers and Human Carelessness

The stories in this volume are not always hopeful. We turn the kaleidoscope wheel, the crystals shift, and we see ecological catastrophe in progress here on Earth, where humanity seems mindless of its dependence upon and place in a global ecology. We see modern mankind consuming every accessible material resource, polluting what isn't consumed, ravaging the environment, and wasting everything that isn't immediately and obviously profitable to our short-term desires. And we see many governments of the Earth denying that anything is wrong. "A Night at the Space Opera" and "Think Tank" deal with events which follow the ecological and political collapse of this world, a collapse which is not unthinkable or even truly fantastic. These stories wonder if we are capable of learning from our mistakes.

Decadence

Another turn of the wheel, and we see what might come if current social trends continue, exaggerated by technological change. We had great fun creating the world of "Lost Vegas" in this collection, which is a wildly exaggerated version of the Las Vegas found in America, in the Nevada desert. The Lost Vegas of *Kaleidoscope Future* made its debut in "A Night at the Space Opera." It began as a certain sector of the starship that brought humans to Earth2 (or "Bright Joy" as humanity's new world comes to be known at the end of "Think Tank"). Eventually, it sprawls into its own massive state in "The Second Coming" and "Think Tank."

Human beings have a fondness and weakness when it comes to engaging in risky activity. Whether bungee jumping, skydiving or placing massive bets on games of chance, human beings get a thrill

from risk and a sense of near-euphoria from beating the odds that are stacked against success. Of course, weak-willed overindulgence can spiral into decadence and moral collapse. Such is the case of those who overindulge in our version of the gambling sectors of the space ark and in the gambling state on Earth2. Via these stories, we posit that decadence will extend itself to increasingly permissive modes of conduct and consumerism. In *Lost Vegas*, one can gamble at classic games of chance. When one considers the permissive nature of television today, and the vast popularity of reality shows, this part of our science fiction world may soon move into the world of non-fiction.

Cloning

The title story of *Infinite Wonderlands 2: Black Auras* featured both body augmentation (in the spirit of H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*) as well as human cloning. In this short story collection, cloning figures prominently in "The Second Coming." In global culture, what started with basic cell duplication led to Dolly the Sheep being cloned and recently, a woman paying a substantial amount of money to have her favorite cat cloned. Some people are strongly against cloning; others see no reason to ban it if it means the growth of organs and other body parts that can extend our lives. The cloning debate is far from over; indeed, it is bound to grow more volatile before any kind of consensus is reached. The subject of cloning and body replication has long been one of the most popular themes in science fiction. As it continues to move off the page of fiction and into real laboratories the world over, the debates surrounding this topic are sure to grow more provocative.

Hope, Human Perseverance and Longevity

A casual reader of this volume of stories may walk away feeling dispirited. If so, s/he has missed a very important point of the collection, and science fiction in general. There is negativity here, true, as there is in most cultures in our contemporary existence, but there is also a tremendous amount of hope and positive energy. Science fiction showcases humanity's tenacity to stay alive; to improve itself; to invent; to push itself to succeed in uncharted territories. It argues that human beings are restless and that we are constantly tinkering with the world that exists in order to make it better. Of course we are full of flaws. In some cases these deficiencies are glaring — but we find ways to compensate for them, overcome them and move beyond them. In these stories, we have highlighted individuals who refuse to be thwarted by a dying planet and leapfrog into space in search of another world. We find a drunkard gambling worker who sobers up long enough to communicate with cloud residents of humanity's second home. We find a sportsman who refuses to cheat, and to lose his soul, by misusing technology.

Science Fiction: Tomorrow's Hope

Science Fiction nowadays is rarely simple-minded projection of what might happen "if" some scientific or technological change takes place. It is more often than not a "thought experiment" which allows us to think about the problems people face here and now by imagining a fictional elsewhere/elsewhen, where humans (and aliens, i. e. humans in disguise) contend with issues of real importance to the contemporary world. The famous American television show "Star Trek" is a great example of such science

fiction. In our stories, we address many serious contemporary issues — ecological catastrophe, decadence, the misuse of technology, extremism — in a way, we hope, that allows the reader to take pleasure from reading a story while also thinking about ideas and conflicts important to our early 21st Century world.

We hope you have enjoyed reading these tales.

Sincerely yours,
Oscar De Los Santos
David Mead

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PRISONER OF THE PELOTON

Jay Irwin was wondering if he'd done the right thing. He was stuck on the butt end of the *peloton*^[1], and he knew in his heart he just didn't have it in him to force the issue, to break away. Not at this stage of the Tour^[2]. Not at this stage of his career as a professional bicyclist, riding in the greatest race of all.

Damn, it's hot, he thought. An unusually early July heat wave was baking all of France south of Paris, and most of the rest of southern Europe. At Lyon they'd had three days of record high temperatures — over 34 degrees. In La Rochelle it had been 25° when they'd ridden out at 10 o'clock. And windless too, despite the town's seaside location. The ride down to Rochefort, along the coast all the way, had been stifling and still. Since they'd turned southeast, toward Saintes, it had just gotten hotter and hotter. The grain fields and meadows seemed to blaze with heat.

Jay looked back, wondering where the team car was. He really needed to douche with some cold water. To cool off, to wake up.

[1] peloton: French for the group of riders in the Tour de France who ride together in a clump, following the leaders

[2] Tour: Tour de France