
OUTSIDE THE BOX

Posted by bulldust - 2017/11/20 15:45

I am going start with my latest pet peeve, proofreading. I will say this again, there are free grammar checks out there. Please check before submitting.

Here is a partial list:

â€œBut the real answer is that this whole ancient family of plants canâ€™t grown hardly anywhere on the planet anywhere because of earthworms.â€•

A door panel slid open in one seamless wall and the hall flights came on.

The awareness that there was intelligent life on other planets might have been a hugely unifying factor among human beings on Earth.

The scene jerked awkwardly as the view moved from the clumsy foraging of the Therizinosaur to zoom in with staggered, seasick leaps to the Visitors on the cliffs.

â€œJesus, I though he would have edited this a bit,â€• groaned Marty.

The Bull is in tight with some physicists that love to talk science over beer. Grab a brewski, and itâ€™s blah blah blah quantum this or graviton that. Four beers in and the Bullster is defending M theory and doing tachyon shooters. While the Bullmeister is a slow dude, he canâ€™t help but pick up a thing or two. In this case, what he remembered was in direct conflict with the science of this cap.

I had to suspend disbelief knowing Gravity is a harsh mistress and exerts its force on photons. Additionally, photons are impacted by time dilation. The more a photon approaches 186k miles per second, the more time slows it down. Combine time and gravity and not only will time bend the light, but the gravity well will slow down the beam even further.

That being said, I liked the cap overall. It flowed well, and while there was no huge climactic ending, it was satisfactory. I was amused that it concluded in a heated argument between scientists.

Is it Monkey material? Iâ€™m torn. I enjoyed the read, so Iâ€™m leaning toward yes. Therefore, I will go with that. However, good buddy Rocks may feel otherwise. The photon is in his court.

Re:OUTSIDE THE BOX

Posted by rockefeller - 2017/11/24 11:11

If sci-fi had to be at all scientific, there'd be no Star Wars. Still, nonscience (and perhaps character development) made what was otherwise a very tasty SF morsel a little hard for Rocks to swallow.

Ancient Earth's biology seemed well researched (although, shouldn't that "herd of five or six sauropods" be a flock?). Scenes were nicely described. The hook was cool, too. Who/what were those time travelers? And how'd they wind up in a 70-million year old Cretaceous Mongolian forest? That this is never answered, while probably the most credible and realistic approach, still smacks of a narrative promise broken.

Passive exploration of the past, a benign sort of time-travel, happens all the time. Looking out into space, or even across a room, one is looking into the past. So our eventually upping the range and resolution through technological advances seems all but inevitable (assuming we survive). But, dear VC, it is Rocko's severely limited understanding that it's widely accepted by the physics community that massless particles such as photons can only travel at the speed of light, and so could not have stuck around for zillions of years to be photographed. Now when we do eventually find a way to exceed the speed of light through space folding or higher dimensional controls or, as speculated by Douglas Adams, the advanced mathematics involved in a party of Italian diners calculating the gratuity, we'll be able to race out ahead of EM radiation that left Earth eons ago and, with powerful enough telescopes, see our own past. Genetically engineered video psychics might've sufficed, too.

But then what's with all the antediluvian sounds? The noisy buzzing, "bright orange mandibles clicking audibly," Gigantoraptors "screaming horribly," forcing Bridget to cover her ears "to blot out the horrible noise." Do compression waves also somehow linger?

"The cameras could be set to pick up images from twenty years ago..." Rocks can't help but think that an ability like this would have a much greater impact on society than to spawn a few museum exhibits. At the very least, crime would become a thing of the past. History would be rewritten.

Other than working at a once sweet job that's gone a little stale, Bridgett, the MC, doesn't have a lot at stake, seems more an observer of than a participant in the story.

Despite all these geeky little nits, Rocks is really on the fence here. So smack dab that one of his balls dangles this-a-way and the other that-a-way over the rail (abetted by Boligard's having stretched his nutsack down on the Floor the other day pursuant to a discussion on the relative merits of Waffle House vs. Denny's). He's read worse at Asimov's. Really, Rocks is so on the fence here that probably if the Bullmeister had said 'No' then he'd say 'Yes' just to ensure it got another gander. So 'No.'

Re:OUTSIDE THE BOX

Posted by architext - 2017/11/29 11:49

Hear me, O mortals, and tremble! And quake! And gyrate! For I am the Decider! Mmm, cider.

"Outside the Box" is a clever concept but its Dutch angle creates an inherent narrative problem. The primary conflict is not the central character's conflict, but that of her boss: whether his core belief (that time travel is impossible) can be perpetuated once there is evidence otherwise. Whether or not the science is valid (as my earthlings have discussed above) is actually irrelevant. It's fiction and the author is entitled to establish new laws of physics at will. However, the reader also KNOWS he/she is reading fiction, so substituting one bit of made-up physics for another doesn't create any tension. In "Ghostbusters" the heroes are told early on that they must never "cross the streams" or they will suffer "total protonic reversal". That's all nonsense but it's the logic of the story and the viewer takes it as significant. In the finale, they intentionally cross the streams, and it heightens the interest of the viewer because they're putting themselves at great risk to their lives. So what's the stream-cross moment here? So what if time travel is possible? And given that time travel vs. being able to see back in time without interfering are both in the same ballpark, why does Dr. Scheul feel so strongly? (His repeated mantra seems a little forced anyway, but I took it as a Sideshow Bob Rake Joke.)

Taking the Ghostbusters parallels a step further, would we watch a movie about Janine, their secretary, who presumably goes home every night to order take-out and watch TV, while the Ghostbusters are out risking their lives battling supernatural monsters? No, we would want to watch the Ghostbusters in battle. Heroes are heroes because they have a central role to play in the drama. They can't just duck out and call it a day. So why are we stuck with Bridgett, the tour guide? It's revealed at the end that the college student tour guides do not number among the geniuses atop modern science, but are just bystanders to its effects, and rather than puzzle out the mysteries of the universe, they go off for a drink and perhaps romance. Me, I'd prefer to stick around with the scientists, and was disappointed by the ending. It's pretty common in sci-fi to have thin characters as a pretext for exploring ideas, but this is in a kind of gray area in terms of its genre, its characters, and its ideas. Bridgett needs to be more fleshed out before we'd care about what happens to her. For example, she's shown no sign of caring about Marty in any meaningful way, so the friends/romance angle from the end doesn't land. And the possibility of her losing her job/fellowship/whatever isn't that compelling to begin with (not to mention that this concern is resolved well before the end).

It seems natural for this story to end with the scientists meeting the Visitors, or establishing some kind of communication, anyway. I grew apprehensive during the approach to the ending as it became clear we would not get any such resolution. Perhaps "Outside the Box" should be the first chapter of a longer piece. The above structural concerns would still apply, but the possibility of the scientists somehow meeting the Visitors would still be there, and Bridgett could still have a heroic part to play in the story.

All that having been said, despite its structural faults, "Outside the Box" is quite enjoyable, especially when describing the activities witnessed in assorted geologic eras. The bits of Cambrian action, images of ancient flora and fauna with names we've never even heard of, worked for me, and I felt the same dismay as the touring children when each visit came to an end. Unfortunately this is where "murder your darlings" must be applied. Ms. Day's prose really comes to life in these segments, but the story would have more punch if there were fewer trips in the Box. We only need one or two to establish what's normal, and another to establish the mystery (the Visitors).

A few smaller observations:

I'm not buying the dialogue. The conversations are expository to such a degree that the characters suffer-- they're like people in commercials who suddenly lecture a friend on all the positive qualities of a given brand of yogurt or hair conditioner. Nobody actually does that. Maybe we, the readers, don't need answers to every conceivable question,

especially when the fundamental premise is scientifically bogus and we have already bought in anyway.

Style-wise it's guilty of adverb abuse. Take the paragraph on page 8. Every sentence has a needless adverb except two (no, I am not counting "dragonfly"). Honestly I don't really mind, it's just one of those things one should usually try to cull habitually.

Lastly, never use the name "Marty" in a story involving time travel.

In sum, I'm voting "no". But in full disclosure I came down in the middle like the others. My narrative complaints are fixable, and I think this piece has a lot of potential if some of the above criticisms are taken into account. Go get 'em!

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