



Merge and Disciple: Two Short Novels from Crosstown to Oblivion

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Walter Mosley's talent knows no bounds. *Merge* and *Disciple* are but two of six fragments in the *Crosstown to Oblivion* short novels in which Mosley entertainingly explores life's cosmic questions. From life's meaning to the nature of good and evil, these tales take us on speculative journeys beyond the reality we have come to know. In each tale someone in our world today is given insight into these long pondered mysteries. But how would the world really receive the answers?

Merge

Raleigh Redman loved Nicci Charbon until she left him heartbroken. Then he hit the lotto for twenty-four million dollars, quit his minimum wage job and set his sights on one goal: reading the entire collection of lectures in the Popular Educator Library, the only thing his father left behind after he died. As Raleigh is trudging through the eighth volume, he notices something in his apartment that at first seems ordinary but quickly reveals itself to be from a world very different from our own. This entity shows Raleigh joy beyond the comforts of twenty-four million dollars....and merges our world with those that live beyond.

Disciple

Hogarth "Trent" Tryman is a forty-two-year-old man working a dead-end data entry job. Though he lives alone and has no real friends besides his mother, he's grown quite content in his quiet life, burning away time with television, the internet, and video games. That all changes the night he receives a bizarre instant message on his computer from a man who calls himself Bron. At first he thinks it's a joke, but in just a matter of days Hogarth Tryman goes from a data-entry clerk to the head of a corporation. His fate is now in very powerful hands as he realizes he has become a pawn in a much larger game with unimaginable stakes—a battle that threatens the prime life force on Earth.

Merge and Disciple: Two Short Novels from Crosstown to Oblivion Details

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From Reader Review Merge and Disciple: Two Short Novels from Crosstown to Oblivion for online ebook

Morgan says

These two short novels offered modern perspective on science fiction. There was some overt sexuality in both that weren't to my personal taste, but the plots themselves were intriguing. Because the stories are short, I had some unanswered questions, but I think perhaps that full length stories would have been too long. I don't think I'll turn to these again, but they were a quick read in a genre that I don't often dive into - for that, I can't give much fault.

Chris Haynes says

I won this book from goodreads First Reads. The two short stories are similar in that both stories are about "first-contact" with alien beings and the human contact needs to help them save their world by destroying ours. I saw both stories as allusions to how we, as human, are destroying our world by our very existence. This is the first book I've read by Walter Mosley. I thought the writing was very good but the stories were too similar for my liking. I thought Merge was the stronger of the two stories. Thanks goodreads for the book.

Pat says

Walter Mosley is always a keeper. I loved Eazy Rawlins and cannot understand why there was only one Easy Rawlins movie. When Mosley turned to sci fi/fantasy, I was dubious but I love science fi. So even though there is not one character that becomes larger than life and part of my life, like E.R., in good sci fi, there are ideas and concepts to wrestle with that resonate in my life. In Merge, the alien merges with the lonely isolated character who becomes a savior of life along with other species. The concept of horrific suffering reminds me of the suffering of a Christ figure rather than a Buddha whose suffering is overcome by inner transformation. Don't get me wrong. This is a fun read. Disciple is also a savior type character, but fun in the sense of what if one's wishes all came true, but came with a horrendous responsibility.

Sunshine ThruRain says

I really enjoyed this book and both stories. Walter Mosley really is a chameleon-style writer. He's so adept at writing sci-fi with deceptively easy reading and storytelling. I've always enjoyed his power-house talent, and continue to do so with this read.

I also like the multiculturalism of Mosley's characters, as well, and how there is cultural inklings yet humanistic bents to his characters that can fit anyone from any background.

David Dacosta says

Walter Mosley is quite simply a literary machine. His most popular works reside under the heading of Mystery, though he's been known to genre-hop for the majority of his distinguished writing career. For his third literary release this year, Mr. Mosley has returned with another addition to his Crosstown to Oblivion short novel collection, which in actuality are two novellas housed within one reversible bound book. These stories fall right in line with previous Mosley Sci-fi offerings such as *Blue Light* and *The Wave*.

In the novella, *Discipline*, the reader is left to ponder the question: What would you do if one day you received an email from a complete stranger who could accurately predict the future? Hogarth Tryman, a depressing shell of a man stuck in a going nowhere fast data entry job, is soon a willing participant in the global scheme of an otherworldly mastermind determined to alter life as we know it. To conjure such a completely insane concept, speaks to Walter Mosley's high level of creative thought, but the utter bizarreness of the story could leave many Easy Rawlins and Leonid McGill loyalists running in the next direction. As always, Mosley animates his protagonists, and breathes believability into their personal universes.

The second novella, *Merge*, essentially tackles some of the same ideas raised in the prior story: extra-terrestrial life, polytheism and the corruptive nature of humanity. Mosley gets a big thumbs up for the complexity of his narrative scope, but ultimately comes off as just another author peddling zany tales from outer space. His writing would be better served with a focus on Mystery/Thrillers. These ambitious endeavours into Sci-fi lack the engrossing quality and ominousness found in works by genre giants like Octavia Butler.

Ira Nayman says

Before I was a science fiction geek, I was a mystery geek. I started with Conan Doyle, moved on to Christie and Stout and eventually read writers like Hammett and Chandler, among others. I still occasionally dip into the work of a mystery author whose writing seems interesting, which is how I discovered Walter Mosely's Easy Rawlins novels.

Rawlins was a black Second World War vet who was trying to get by in the first novel in the series, *Devil in a Red Dress*. (Yes, it was made into a so-so film starring Denzel Washington.) Although ostensibly mysteries focusing on Rawlins getting sucked into other people's shenanigans, the series was an evocative look at the black American experience at different points in the country's post-WWII history. I found the novels to be entertaining genre stories with depth.

When I heard that Mosely had started writing speculative fiction, I couldn't wait to get my hands on some of it.

Crosstown to Oblivion is a collection of six short novels in three volumes; the novels are back to back, like the old Ace Doubles, but otherwise there is nothing old-fashioned about them. They are stories in which "Mosely entertainingly explores life's cosmic questions. From life's meaning to the nature of good and

evil...”

Each novel in the project has a similar structure: the main character is exposed to something fantastic, which, at first, he refuses to accept. In finally coming to terms with what has happened, the character is transformed and, in his new guise, attempts to transform the entire world (usually actively opposed by those in power). This brief outline may seem formulaic, but if it is, it is the formula explored so fruitfully by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero's Journey*, a formula that has informed much great literature. In *Crosstown to Oblivion*, Mosely is reaching for something archetypal, something mythical, and I think he largely succeeds.

That is not to say that the stories are repetitive; in fact, they cover a wide variety of situations, all of which contain original, fully realized characters. In *The Gift of Fire* (my personal favourite), Prometheus is accidentally freed from his millennia of torture, and comes to Earth looking for a human being who can help him fulfill the promise of bringing fire to humanity. A simple man sees a woman that nobody else can see, which opens his mind to a world he could never otherwise have imagined in *Stepping Stone*. A heart-broken young man wins the lottery as a prelude to meeting an alien stick creature who wants to *Merge* with him.

The protagonists of the stories are, for the most part, poor black men. On the one hand, non-white protagonists are rare in science fiction, so Mosely (himself black) deserves praise for, in this small way, expanding the boundaries of the genre. On the other hand, some readers may criticize it as stereotypical – where are the middle and upper class black men? I would argue that the fact that his protagonists are mostly disadvantaged speaks to a deeper truth: spiritual advancement invariably comes from the downtrodden. Those who are comfortable in a society rarely seek enlightenment, and probably wouldn't even recognize it if they did.

Mosely writes spare, direct prose, with a simple, straightforward sentence structure; stylistically, he reminds me of Raymond Carver. However, unlike others whose use of this style makes the details of their works hard to pin down, Mosely's writing is precise and his characters and situations are vivid. (And, when he does occasionally throw an unusual word or complex sentence at us, it makes us pay attention because of its rarity.)

The stories are punctuated by a small number of black and white drawings, usually of the main characters at important points in the narrative. Like Mosely's prose, the illustrations focus entirely on what is important (usually the human figures), stripping out all unnecessary background detail. And, like the prose, they are powerfully evocative.

Some people will not appreciate the techno-spirituality of Walter Mosely's *Crosstown to Oblivion* novels. Those who are willing to take a chance on them, however, will find very thoughtful and rewarding books.

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Nancy McKibben says

Merge/Disciple: Two Short Novels from Crosstown to Oblivion

By Walter Mosley

I opened this novel expecting a mystery and was amazed to find myself reading about an encounter with an

alien. Mosley writes science fiction - who knew! I don't read so much science fiction any more (my dad belonged to a science fiction book club, and I grew up reading whatever they sent him), but I like Mosley, so I plunged into *Merge*, about a formerly down and out young man, Rahl, who has won the lottery and quit his minimum wage job to spend his days reading the Popular Educator Library. When aliens land on Earth, only Rahl seems to have the right vibes to connect (quite literally) with one of them, and the merge of the title refers to the desire of the soon-to-be-homeless aliens to merge with mankind and live on Earth.

Disciple, the other novella, follows the journey of a 42-year-old data entry clerk, fat and unloved, who has given up on life until he is unexpectedly contacted on his computer screen by an alien of enormous power and intellect and called upon to become either the Earth's savior or its destroyer - or perhaps a bit of both.

I enjoyed both novellas. Like most - perhaps all - science fiction, the story is a vehicle for pondering cosmic questions like sentience and love and the place of man in the universe. Mosley's protagonists are flawed, unassuming antiheroes whose greatness - if that's what it is - is thrust upon them rather than sought after. The reader may wince at scenes that graphically depict man's racism and inhumanity, but Mosley also imagines other, higher planes of existence than ours, giving us an intriguing tour through alien minds and worlds.

Mosley has written four other novellas for his *Crosstown to Oblivion* series. I plan to seek them out.

Ahm says

Note: This review is for the story *Merge* only. I did not read *Disciple*.

I am not a sci-fi reader, but I enjoyed *Devil in a Blue Dress* by Walter Mosley so deeply, that I thought I'd try a completely different genre of his work. It did not work out for me. I approached the story as an allegory, but I was never able to determine the greater significance behind the space invasion. I did find Raleigh to be a compelling protagonist, and his life and relationships OUTSIDE the alien stuff was very rich and realistic. But the deeper we fall into the fantastical elements of the story, the harder it is to see the author's point. I guess my key takeaway here is that mankind's leaders don't know what's really important, are clueless, really, and our society's methods of conquering through torture will be its eventual downfall. And maybe a sexy alien is mankind's only hope.

I decided not to read *Disciple*. I'm heading back over to the Easy Rawlins series, where the intended insight is much more accessible.

Jeremy says

This books had some really interesting premises, but in the end they really weren't that different from each other. The main characters, both black males were obsessed with sex and upset with how they were treated as African Americans in today's society. Both had the option to destroy man-kind, both took that option and the perks that came with it such as the woman of their dreams... blah, blah, blah. Really nothing new here.

Luke Bjorge says

Initially I really liked the first story but then the other was almost exactly the same. Plus, the waste of print on numerous sex scenes took away from the overall story and turned it into a Richard Layman book. I really should have gave it a two but the writing was good even if the author has a seventh grade mentality.

Stewart says

Walter Mosley doesn't mess around when it comes to aliens. His aliens are trippy, shapeshifting, impossibly powerful, near-omniscient, and here. On Earth, that is.

Mosley's descriptions of humanity's first encounters with disparate entities can best be described as "Post-9/11 Science Fiction." The "Crosstown to Oblivion" his protagonists live in is a world where the Patriot Act has created a dominating, officious, and ultimately fearful overseer class who shred the Constitution in misguided attempts to protect the homeland.

The aliens who visit Hogarth Tryman and Raleigh Redman are largely benign, even benevolent, though they have their own needs to be addressed here on Earth which require human assistance.

While the genre has changed from mystery, these novellas still have Mosley's signature voice. First-person African-American protagonists, bloody violence, graphic sex, and beautiful, erudite prose.

Still, it gets pretty weird.

Recommended.

Jonathan Kramer says

Its not often I encounter an author whose stories cross several genres such as Mosley. Its obvious his primary genre is crime/detective stories, though the two in this book are pure science fiction with a humanitarian bend. Merge I found curious due to the 'alien creatures' that morph into humans, while Disciple's "Bron" comes across as a 'universal alien/spirit' who picks Hogarth to carry out his mission. Mosley's ability to engage regardless of the genre is quite good, though I prefer his fiction to this genre, "John Woman" his latest and greatest in particular. I enjoyed the two stories and think those who like science fiction will as well.

Robb Bridson says

Two sci-fi novellas, both with basically the same thing going on but a different feel for each. Weird aliens with other forms of consciousness threaten to destroy/change our world and use some unsuspecting normal guy to do so. I preferred "Disciple" over "Merge" because it seems to have more of a point to the interaction

between the human and the alien-- the relationship is far more ambiguous, and there is thought experimentation on morality and on the butterfly effect. "Merge" is a little too much on the messianic side of sci-fi. Both give us strange alien forms of life and sentience, as well as some insights into the human condition.

The two stories are in some ways opposite. In "Merge" the hero is a pretty easy-going guy who won the lottery without alien intervention and just wants to hang out and learn and get over his ex. He is visited by perfect wish-fulfillment new-agey aliens that I actually found sort of irritating (I am really not a big fan of messianic alien races, any more than cartoonishly evil ones) that need a place to stay... but may have to wipe out humanity if humanity can't learn to adjust to them. The story takes on a fairly misanthropic tone as it goes on, with our hero trying to save the human race while embracing the alien race... even as defending our species' behavior becomes more and more difficult.

"Disciple" has a more misanthropic hero, a lonely "loser" who is elevated by alien intervention to a high position of control, changing his life overnight. This alien also threatens the human race because somehow humans are a threat to the universe's collective consciousness, and the relationship between human and alien is more ambiguous-- and the hero waves back and forth between his awe for some higher species, his growing empathy for humanity, and the moral crisis that gets dumped on him.

I'm not a huge fan of the too-much sex (I believe the word "erection" is used more times than "the"), the messianic nature of the aliens, or any of that... but overall the stories are well-told, thought-provoking, and sufficiently bizarre.

Banner says

Two novellas for the price of one. But you could also say in this case, one story told in two novellas. That is not a criticism, but an observation.

Let me tell you what these have in common.

Really weird aliens. I mean out of this world, other dimension, not humanoid, aliens. The kind I really, really like to read about. This is the stuff that makes science fiction so interesting and so unlike other genres. This is done well.

Common guy/nobody protagonist.

End of the world theme. This was good and bad for me. I'm ok with big themes, but these almost seemed over the top. How do you deal with such unimaginable consequences to the choices you make? Seems almost beyond imagination.

Graphic sex & violence. If not for this I would have given these books 5 stars. I'm not prudish, I just don't see the need for some of this kind of stuff authors put in stories sometimes.

Merge: A common Joe wins the lottery (right after his two-timing girlfriend runs out on him...how cool is that). But this is not the most amazing thing to happen to our common man protagonist. No he also connects with some aliens that don't know how to communicate with humanity. The bond between human and alien thickens as does the plot. What do the aliens want? Why have they come to earth? These answer to these and

even other more difficult questions (which I can not reveal without a spoiler tag) is the rest of the story. The answers are not easy ones.

Disciple

Once again our protagonist is a common man, working as a data entry clerk in a multimillion dollar corporation. Just a small cog in a giant machine. One day an alien culture reaches out to him. But of all of earth's population, why him? Can he trust these aliens? With what they reveal about themselves they could either be mankind's salvation or destruction. How do you decide? Through a series of twist and turns the truth is revealed. Reality is not what it seems.

Frances Levy says

Listening to this one on CD during my commute. So far it's vintage for Mosley's books in this genre. Better than some and not as good as some others.

I still prefer Mosley's thoroughly enjoyable (yet intellectual) thrillers, if you can call them that. The characters -- Easy Rawlins, Paris Minton, Fearless Jones -- are priceless.

That said, "The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey" has to be classified as literary fiction. Five stars to this one.
