



Blueprints Of The Afterlife

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Blueprints of the Afterlife alternates between a richly imagined future in which the apocalypse is a distant, hazy memory, and a present in which a man recounts his search for a secret organization bent on harnessing the brightest minds to control human destiny and life on earth. There are giant heads that appear in the sky. The world's greatest dishwasher. Over 600 clones of an ancient pop singer's backup dancer. Red carpet events. A mystical refrigerator.

Blueprints Of The Afterlife Details

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From Reader Review Blueprints Of The Afterlife for online ebook

Edward Rathke says

There's a lot to love about this novel. Conceptually, it's one of the best novels I've read in a long time. Maybe ever. It's hugely ambitious with big ideas that're completely awesome and interesting. The characters and the world are all there and everything's pretty great.

That being said, the narrative style is perhaps my least favorite kind. It's very David Foster Wallace-y, which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it hits on a lot of the recent postmodern narrative trends that I find least pleasant. The narrative is generally solid but sometimes the narration sort of ambles off and begins to feel like it's inside itself in a very deliberate and self-conscious way. I mean, that's all theoretically fine but I generally dislike it and I found it to mostly be distracting here.

It's kind of a sprawling novel that flings storylines out, lets them branch off the page, and then pulls them all together in a way I didn't really feel satisfied by. Boudinot is definitely doing something here that few people ever even come close to attempting, but I think the novel would be much better had it been about 200 pages longer, which is a rare quality to have in a book of this length, especially considering the structure and style.

Even though I laid down the above complaints, this is a near perfect novel. It does a huge disservice to compare it to Murakami, I think, because it's so drastically different from anything Murakami's done or tried to do. This is an extremely american novel, too, so I have a hard time putting it in the context of an author writing across the world, especially one like Murakami who's gained an international audience while remaining very japanese.

But, yeah, this is awesome. Great science fiction with big postmodernist influences. It's funny, stylish, inventive, smart, and consistently fascinating. It's the kind of book that sucks you in so well that you forget it was written by someone, except for the moments when it slaps you in the face with a self-referential sentence that reminds you this was written.

Highly recommended.

Marc Kozak says

Words are failing when trying to describe this one. I apologize in advance.

What we have here is one of the most creative, bizarre, frighteningly hilarious, hilariously frightening, post-post-apocalyptic, science fiction adventure stories there is. This is like Kurt Vonnegut and *1984* mixed with big important Questions like why are we here and what's it all for? And curse words. Lots and lots of curse words.

In this not-too-distant future, the world already ended a while ago due to a multitude of reasons, leaving the planet with about 1/5 the former population. Life still goes on more or less as normal however. People go to Starbucks, play on their iPhones, go out to neighborhood Italian restaurants, sidestepping rubble. Clones wander around doing grunt work and everyone is equipped with nanotechnology, enabling medical care to be administered via a networked system. Just your typical speculative fiction novel, right?

One of the more interesting themes (there are many) is how humanity can achieve such great heights of technology and progress, only to completely abuse it because we are horrible, horrible people. Yes, the linked medical system has saved millions and provided access to medicines for everyone. But then there are those who can take control of your nervous system via that technology and make you do whatever they want. People abuse even crazier drugs. Certain unspeakable acts which I'm sure you can imagine are performed with clones. Every time a new innovation was presented, you could safely bet that people found a way to turn it into debauchery.

And within this novel, there are organizations trying hard to control everything behind the scenes. We follow a few main characters in a style much like David Mitchell's fine novel *Cloud Atlas* - there's even a recurring part featuring an interview almost exactly like the Somni 45 bits. All of the characters are linked by having almost no control over what is happening to them. A man named Dirk Bickle shows up in all of their lives, making sure they are all in the right places at the right time. As we gradually learn how far back these shadowy organizations go, we start to learn more about what our supposed purpose as a species is, and how we are to go about achieving it. There are aliens, there are crazy technologies, and there are powers beyond understanding, but nothing ever feels implausible. Part of the power of the novel comes from the fact that you can definitely see a lot of these things happening in real life.

One more note, as I'm starting to ramble on with no real point here - I really took to the brief sections on how we as humans invent or create things in order to prepare ourselves for the next stages of our mental development. Bickle has a speech towards the end which nicely sums it all up:

"Long ago we fearfully opened our eyes and searched for God. Now we open our eyes with love and create new life that will behold our fading shadow in awe. This is how it has been for all time. Intelligence moves relentlessly toward the creation of new varieties of intelligence and the greatest achievement of intelligence is the dissemination of new life forms."

There is so much to love and think about in this book. The tone is absurd and ridiculous, even as the events are deathly serious. People try to grab some Starbucks as buildings collapse and millions die around them. News anchors yell "holy fucking shit!!" on TV. A movie star legally changes his middle name so he can be called Neethan Fucking Jordan. It's all so incredibly out of control, but yet there is such depth of thought behind it. My only complaint is that, at 400 pages, there easily could've been 400 more, and I would've loved every one of them.

Jonfaith says

My best friend Joel recommended Richard Kelly's bizarre film *Southland Tales* a few years ago. I found considerable overlap with *Southland Tales* and *Blueprints of the Afterlife*, certainly more than between Boudinot's novel and *Infinite Jest*, which appears to be the trope many reviewers are leaning toward. *Southland Tales* also features a familiar future with our liminal excesses appropriated and a plethora of references abound, especially of German philosophy, though Boudinot reaches to Nietzsche whereas Kelly mines Marx for metaphor.

Blueprints proved to be an unyielding vortex, sucking me inward and challenging me part and parcel to parse its disparate elements. The tension between content and context is ruthlessly elongated, it brought 1Q84 to mind, that monastic repetition. Oh well, I liked it but found most threads dangling. Here's to the inchoate and what we label art.

Renee says

Fantastic experience, as always.

The best way I can describe this novel is that I felt like I was in a dream. You know how when you're dreaming, very strange things happen one after another, and sometimes there are gaps, and sometimes people change into other people, but somehow it all flows and still makes perfect sense? That's how I felt. I never knew what was coming next, I was constantly surprised, and yet it all made sense in some bizarre way.

I also felt like I've read a lot of dystopia novels, but this one was the first current one I've read. I felt like it belongs to my generation, instead of reading about "the future" when it's already in the past. The ideas are creative but still believable.

And as always, Ryan's way with words is incredible. Simple sentences are intentional and unique and specific.

"In a parking garage that smelled of desperate cigarettes..."

"If he stared into space and nodded politely she'd relegate him to that category of men who'd passed through her life burdened by their passions for full-immersion video games and the bracketeering of college basketball."

"The last time this line of reasoning trotted its diseased self in front of them he'd had a couple of drinks."

"It certainly smelled like the Pacific Ocean, an olfactory hallucination of decaying kelp and expired crustaceans."

"She felt she might die of awe."

zxvasdf says

One of the best books I've read this year, and it's saying a lot because I've lucked on a chain of much excellent reads. The Age of Fucked Up Shit is something that's got me very excited, despite the magnitude of tragedy involved. A frightening yet giddy vision of humanity's possibilities. Dauntingly optimistic despite the bleak visions of the Bionet and the human-robot relations; The future manages to be painted rose-coloured in fragrant bursts of psychedelia.

You carry your memories in your pocket. An aging crone and her house of hundreds of Federico clones. The addiction that's rave is to get your nervous system hacked by DJs who freestyle your movements. Nanotech delivery systems repairs internal injuries and injects the body with medicine as needed. A sentient glacier hauling a tribe of ravenous polar bears has devastated North America. The cities are abandoned dreams of yesterday, visions of nature coexisting with high technology. A massive civil engineering project in Washington state rebuilds New York City to its exact molecular configuration before the Age of Fucked Up

Shit.

Upon flipping the last page, you wonder if you've been jacked by the DJ Boudinot, turning over the diffuse conclusion in your thoughts, but it's only that way, you think, because Boudinot expects you to piece together the details and differentiate the hallucination from the reality. But... is there a real difference?

Hungry for a similar mind-bending and idea-stuffed galore? You really should check out Sewer, Gas and Electric: The Public Works Trilogy by Matt Ruff, The Illuminatus! Trilogy: The Eye in the Pyramid/The Golden Apple/Leviathan by Robert Anton Wilson, Spaceman Blues: A Love Song and Liberation: Being the Adventures of the Slick Six After the Collapse of the United States of America by Brian Francis Slattery, Light by M. John Harrison, and Zanesville: A Novel and Enigmatic Pilot by Kris Saknussemm.

Tuck says

here's a quote from page 405 as a summation: "Sylvie [sylvie is really abby, but abby now lives in new york alki and has slowly taken on the persona of sylvie, a book editor from the "real new york" who was killed, one assumes, during the fus, and she is referring to the book about love that Woo-jin, another character, has written on pizza boxes. sylvie/abby has been djed so really is not living in "reality"] sighed. "It's about the beginning of a new world. There's a rampaging glacier in it. Clones. Giant heads that appear in the sky." "One of those."

author boudinot has come out with a masterpiece of pomo comedy and the tragic fate of being a human, in these times.

ps i particularly liked the rampaging glacier, but it was destroyed as it was trying to destroy LA.

"Blueprints of the afterlife" by Ryan Boudinot

A daring novel addressing our modern times and the times to come dealing with climate change, our bodies in a digital mode, wars of capital, and human relationships in a place that is hard human. Part sci-fi spoof, part post-modern indie fiction, part great saga spanning the continent and age, this edgy novel has both audacious ideas and stunning writing.

nostalgebraist says

I almost gave this book four stars but I just couldn't do it. It's so flawed, the latter half in particular was such a letdown, but the whole package, the haecceity, is winsome enough that it's hard to deny it top marks.

When I first started this book I fell for its particular haecceity pretty hard. I was in love! I woke up each morning excited because I would get to read it on the subway. It wasn't any one particular thing that Boudinot did just right, it was the whole gestalt, which my mind could only try to begin to describe -- inadequately -- by spooling off endless comparisons for potential use in future GR review. It was Infinite Jest's plucky little brother. It was Snow Crash with a heart, Haruki Murakami with a brain. It was what the

movie Southland Tales would have been if, instead of being bad-in-a-good-way, it had just been good. It was some mixture of DFW, Mark Leyner, Adam Levin, Sergio De La Pava, Andrew Hussie, etc. etc. etc. plus every soft science fiction novel ever written. If allowed to proceed without restraint, my mind could have spooled off comparisons like this to pretty much everything I've ever liked, all the way unto some particular scoop of ice cream I especially enjoyed as a small child, to which, on some esoteric plane, I am sure the pleasures of Boudinot's novel bore a profound resemblance. All of these, of course, were just approximations, tentative approaches to describing Boudinot's particular *je ne sais quoi*.

To be just a little bit more concrete, what works so well about this novel -- a quality it shares with a lot of the fiction I end up loving -- is that it cranks its own absurdity up to the max while also making that absurdity feel real and human, like the absurdity of real life. It's easy to write a novel filled with zany details and pop-culture satire if all you're going for is light and totally unreal entertainment. Boudinot and his peers do much more: they make every joke feel lived-in. The silliness feels like the silliness of actual pop culture, actual technology. Flecks and motes of believable human behavior float around the crazy conceits and convince you of their reality, not through abstract arguments as to their plausibility (as science fiction, this is about as implausible as it gets), but through the writerly equivalent of good acting: "look at this -- doesn't it *look* real?" Indeed it does. There are real people in these pages, even as there are also virtual reality devices that let you relive your memories but sometimes through faulty programming make people in them look exactly like Will Ferrell. Paul Bryant in his review said that Blueprints is "comedy science fiction . . . not the world's best genre." Maybe not, but when I read a book like this I start to feel like "comedy science fiction" is the genre of *my life*.

On the other hand I totally agree with Paul when he says that the second half of the book is a letdown. One of the book's many virtues is a fast-paced plot, full of twists and surprises and little interconnections that click into place with appealing crispness. Unfortunately, after about 250 pages of this it starts to become clear that Boudinot just wants to press the plot twist button over and over again even when the rules of drama (to the extent such rules exist) say he should do something else for a change. Early on the little connections between different parts of the story made me think, "wow, this guy has a plan!" Later on they just made me think, "hmm, I wonder when this will become a real plot rather than one of those paranoid string webs connecting newspaper clippings." Even later they made me think "I expect that at the end of this book everything will be densely connected to everything else but it still won't make any sense." I don't want to spoil anything but that isn't *too* far from the truth.

In the late sections of the book especially, Boudinot takes after boring-weird lit guys like Murakami and Pynchon and just spits more and more stuff at you until it becomes very numbing. There are some of those awful Pynchonian lists that contain zany!!! detail after zany!!! detail and just hammer home how little any of this stuff matters:

A chef arrived, accompanied by a woman with one leg, a horn section in search of a band, some cracked-out bike messengers, and a newman crooner who sang spot-on versions of period show tunes. A couple times Woo-jin woke to find socialites unconscious in his bed or the bathtub. Group sing-alongs at all hours, creative uses for whipped cream, a sink bloodied by some poor bastard's unfortunate encounter with a shattered highball. Various drugs rampantly traveled through the collected horde, with substances snorted, swallowed, injected, shoved into rectums, and illegally downloaded. [blah blah blah, the paragraph goes on for a while longer in this vein]

There are probably people out there who would find this exhilarating -- they are probably the same people who like Thomas Pynchon -- but to me moments like this are cracks in Boudinot's aforementioned sense of reality. Again, plausibility isn't the issue -- I can believe anything if you present it with humanity and

panache, but I won't believe it if you just give it to me in a big list or present it as the latest and least surprising in a series of mechanical surprise twists.

That said, I believe in Boudinot in a way I don't believe in those other purveyors of boring-weird lit, because he really seems to have a story to tell and not just an atmosphere to create. He appears to think it is a story that can't be told without this kind of disconnectedness and monotonous incoherence, and hey, maybe I'll meet him 3/4 of the way on that one. Next to the Will Ferrell jokes we can also find nestling some really giant themes about humanity's long-term future, and Boudinot is determined to make the big Arthur C. Clarke stuff feel big enough to break your little primate brain. Just as sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic, maybe sufficiently advanced plotting is indistinguishable from bullshit. Is that just an excuse? If so, at least Boudinot *has* one.

Anyway, it's only 400 pages and it made me cackle hysterically in public and even its failures are more fun than most books' successes. Read it.

Greg says

January 21st addition to the review:

Ryan Boudinot sent me the page of the manuscript that mentions Minor Threat! How awesome is that!

And now for the review as it was written a few weeks ago:

She yearned for plot but instead absurdity after absurdity had been thrown before her, absurdities that alluded to obscured purposes

A true bit of historical fact that maybe my goodreads friends of the Northwest know, but which I didn't. Seattle was originally called New York. And then it was called New York Alki. Alki, was a word in a local Native American tribe that sort of means someday, or by and by. So for a year or so what would be known as Seattle was called something like Future New York. Then someone decided it was probably silly to name yourself after another city that is in itself named after another place and person, and they went with Seattle. In this book, New York City has been destroyed and it's in the process of being rebuilt exactly as it was on an island in Puget Sound (ok, not New York City, but Manhattan, my own wreck of an apartment wouldn't be reproduced in this recreation, but my blessed New Age section of the bookstore would).

I've been giving quite a bit of thought to this review, and it's stumping me. I'm not sure what I'm going to write, but the book needs a review. It's really good and I need to try to convey that and maybe influence someone to give this a shot. If for some reason you think my taste in books are similar to yours, or you think that because I like a book you might like it too, then the simple quick review here is the book is really good. It's not perfect, but I think it's so worth your time (and even money) to read it.

The problem I'm having with coming up with a review, is that I don't want to spoil anything in the book. There are things I want to write about but they almost all come at the risk of giving away precious bits of the plot. Part of the goodness of this book is the way it unfolds, the slow and tantalizing way the author exposes the story, the backstory, the whole world his novel takes place in. I've read some literary critic or

professional reviewer or someone (I can't remember whom though), who thinks that it is his place to give away all the plot because it allows the reader to fully appreciate the book if they aren't involved in the infantile joys of wondering, what happens next, or why or get involved in any of the real joys of having putting yourself in the hands of very capable storyteller and not knowing where the journey is going to lead you. Maybe it's unconscious, but there is also a strain of goodreads cub-book-reporters who find nothing wrong with giving away the entire basic narrative structure of a book (save for maybe some honest to goodness spoilers) after a few perfunctory dick jokes and maybe the names of some alcoholic beverages written in bold. All of this might just be laziness on my part, I find it boring to write play by plays of a book, but as a reader I've never read Cliff Notes and I have little interest in having a hack breakdown a piece of literature into a book report. But, I'm probably just grasping for straws in justifying my own laziness in writing about the actual plot of a book in my own reviews.

I want to write this review.

I'm afraid of spoiling anything.

I'm going to put the rest of this review in what I hope will be nested spoilers, levels of spoilers. I'd recommend not reading on if you want to read this book. But if you keep reading on, then I'd recommend not clicking on the spoiler buttons within the spoiler unless you have either read the book, or have no interest in reading the book but for some pathological reason feel the need to read everything I write on the internet.

But before I do that, I'm going to say again, this book is really good. It's George Saunders and David Foster Wallace filtered through Philip K. Dick and the movies of Richard Kelly. It's what I imagine Ballard is like when he's at his best, but I wouldn't know because I have only read *Crash*, and he mostly exists as an idealized author in my head, and I imagine him to be awesome, but I fear he won't live up to that awesomeness so I stay away from his work.

It's not a perfect book, but it's so good for so much of the book that the faults I have with it are ok. If you need everything in a book wrapped up neatly, if you need to know what was wrong with Hal and don't care about everything else that is great in a book, then I'd say stay away from this one. That's as much of a spoiler as I'm giving in this non-spoiler zone.

I was beginning to understand that the end of the world wasn't something that came about all at once. There was no climatic event that definitively destroyed life as we knew it. Rather, it happened incrementally, so slowly it was difficult to notice, the frog in the boiling water. A few of us saw it coming but were dismissed as insane, or we blew our cred by drawing lines in the sand and declaring that the world would end on a particular date. You know the cartoons with the sandal-wearing bearded freak on a street corner holding a sign reading "The end is near." The end was a slow but accumulating tabulation of lost things. We lost species of animals, polar ice, a building here and there, whole cities. There was a time when we lived on streets where we knew our neighbors' names but now we were all strangers isolated in our condos late at night, speaking across distances to our lonely, electronic communities. Children used to play in forests. We used to gather around a piano and join our voices together. I tried to determine whether these sad thoughts were just the result of growing old. Probably, but that didn't make them any less real. Maybe I had lost so much myself-my family, my friends-that I couldn't help but project my grief onto the world at large. It was no longer enough for me to grieve for a lost mother, father, sister, or friend. Now my grief intended to encompass the planet

(view spoiler)

Those are some of the questions I have about the book. I kind of would like to talk about some of them with someone, but so far I don't know anyone else who has finished the book, so I'll wait.

Drew says

I'm going to keep this as short as possible, because there are at least three really good long reviews available for consumption, and also because I'm lazy and don't want to give anything away.

This book fucking *works*. Lots of things indicate that it shouldn't: the absurd sci-fi conceits, the use of words and phrases like "Twitter" and "viral marketing campaign," and the blurb that calls Boudinot "the Wikileaks of the zeitgeist," for instance. But Boudinot, like Wallace and occasionally Saunders, manages to streamline even the most absurd sci-fi concepts in such a way that they become plausible, even inevitable. And he tempers his use of post-millennial catchphrases with bits of really ridiculously good writing. As for being the Wikileaks of the zeitgeist, I'm not really sure what that's supposed to mean, but if it sounds strangely insulting to you (as it did to me), ignore it. Boudinot is the shit!

Nate D says

This is one of those sci-fi books that is filled (over-filled maybe) with clones, technological anomalies, future apocalypse scenarios, new methods in transplant organ growth -- all kinds of obviously sci-fi devices -- except that it doesn't feel like sci-fi while you're reading it. It feels like (and probably is the literary progeny of) some of the greats of ecstatic post-modernism, Pynchon and David Foster Wallace, people with big ideas and a taste for both pulpy genre device and formal eloquence, who could write ridiculously about the serious and seriously about the ridiculous. If anything in actual sci-fi, it most echoes the delirium of the late 60s to mid 70s, Philip K Dick and Dhalgren, maybe learning from PKD that traditional narrative and character development can be sidelined if the plot is so irresistible that those conventions would only hold things up (I suspect that maybe 50-75 percent of the text of this book has been cut away without any serious loss, every bit is a revelation, it's only the good parts). In Ryan Boudinot, who has almost certainly read all of these authors without really sounding anything like any of them, who is young enough to have internalized the idea of the internet (though not so literally as one character will attempt) but old enough to have flashes of skepticism about what it means for culture, who seems highly sensitized to the colloquialisms and pop-cultural detritus of the modern world, and no compunctions about mixing them with the high-concept literary (postmodernism again, all of these things are equal, anyway) -- in Ryan Boudinot we may have a defining writer of the early post-millennium. Even though this book spans a hundred years into the future, this might be the one people read in 50 years to get an idea of what we're living and thinking about right now. Although much of the content of the actual story here (or stories, many many of them writhing all over the place) is very weird, and very removed from the everyday, it's still highly informed by it, and has a whole lot of very interesting things to say about it.

I won't actually bother to say what this is about at all. It's unnecessary. It's about too much and it keeps shifting. But at the same time, it'll be clear what this is about in some sense right from the start. And completely unclear to the end, maybe -- like the machine that disassembles itself entirely early on, it's pretty difficult, once all the pieces are in hand, to make out the entire shape and interconnectivity of this huge and complex machine. Which is not a flaw. It keeps us circulating amongst and considering the pieces we're

given to work with. If there's a flaw, it's that with so many stories, and so much going on, and such tricky mechanisms, it gets tough to identify directly with anyone here. They're interesting and often likeable, but incomplete. But this is actually a minor caveat -- the story is made up of all these fascinating people, but the gestalt of the narrative is far more important than any one of them. Anyway, this is great. Maybe five-stars great, even, though I'm slow to give anything five stars, so let me process a little more first. Processing, or even re-reading, will always be a pleasure here.

Charles Dee Mitchell says

Let's imagine that at some point during the 1980's a group known as the Kirkpatrick Academy scoured the country, maybe the world, for the brightest young minds they could find. They then took them to the Academy, which to the outside world does not appear to exist, and set them to work on whatever projects they found most interesting. And what if their plan for saving the earth involved eliminating 95% of the population, the only schism in the group being whether to do it sooner than later.

That's the underlying story of *Blueprints of the Afterlife*, a novel that takes place well after the FUS --the Era of Fucked Up Shit -- when a largely de-populated earth, helped by some truly amazing technology, does not seem to be doing so badly. The scars are there. There has been a devastating war against the newmen, anthropoids, possibly from China, who fight ruthlessly and long. But now they are humanity's servants. Global warming is still a problem, and retirees in Phoenix have to vacuum seal their homes and head north for the winter. Most cities are decimated, victims of the Melaspina glacier that leaves its home in Alaska and goes on a self-guided tour across North America destroying most major population centers. A innovative building project is turning Bainbridge Island off the coast of Seattle into a carefully reconstructed New York City.

Boudinot's novel is told in many voices. Scattered through the novel are taped, pre-FUS interviews with Luke Piper, a young man who has lived through a middle-class childhood, a late hippie phase, become a dot.com millionaire, and happens to be the best friend of one of the architects of the FUS. Skinner is an aging war veteran who provides accounts of just how bloodthirsty the war against the newmans really was. Abbie slips into the darker side of the new society. The bionet is a technology that can cure everything from the common cold to paralysis, But DJ's use the bionet to hijack personalities, controlling their every move until they get tired of them and put them on autopilot programs that may be either destructive or simply boring.

Boudinot keeps a lot of balls in the air over 400 pages, and I am not sure if all the story lines reach real conclusions or if he intends for them to. What he can do is keep you entertained with episodes that range from outrageously funny, to excruciating, to downright creepy. Residents of New York Alki, the name of the project on Bainbridge island, find themselves slipping into the personalities of the dead New Yorkers; whose apartments they take over. (Creepy.) The war veteran Skinner, once he's decided he's had all he can take, plugs into the bionet with the order, "Combat Ready!" and immediately his old head sits atop a G.I. Joe torso. (Funny)

I've read that this novel fits into the "Slipstream" category of books that employ genre conventions but are not genre books. So despite plot elements involving marauding glaciers, dj's hacking into personalities, mass cloning, and the vacuum-sealing of Phoenix, this is not a science fiction novel. Right. Perhaps it's a question of the publisher, in this case Grove Blackcat, and the cover style they choose. *Blueprints* has a classy blueprint cover and does not show panicked crowds fleeing the glacier Melaspina. Perhaps a mass market

edition will have that latter cover.

Caitlin says

Slipstream is a genre name coined by Bruce Sterling to describe a " ... kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange; the way that living in the twentieth century makes you feel, if you are a person of a certain sensibility." This is work that fits somewhere in the interstices between literary fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. It is more like magical realism than any other genre, but it is its own thing. Slipstream contains elements of genre (like science fiction), but it isn't really about genre. It is more the celebration of the fantastical in the ordinary, the joy of playing with the toys of any genre and putting them together in your very own way. Many writers are playing in this form, although they may seem unrelated. I would include China Mieville, but also Thomas Pynchon, Margaret Atwood, Isabelle Allende, and Gabrielle Garcia Marquez. There's Kathy Acker, certainly Jonathan Carroll, Don DeLillo. Also, there's Ryan Boudinot.

Blueprints of the Afterlife begins in the Age of Fucked Up Shit. It is post-apocalyptic and satirical, addressing many pieces of our current fucked up lives - overconsumption, lack of identity, and mysticism. What do we do after the apocalypse with all the junk left over? What do we privilege? Do we create or re-create? How do we begin to re-define ourselves and our humanity (or do we)?

This is a complex and dense book, unfolding in small bites like a tasting menu. I thought of tasting menus developed in the world of molecular gastronomy (its very own interstice with interesting philosophical considerations), but also of the tasting menus of chef working at the top of their game incorporating classic techniques, fresh ingredients, and their own unique visions. Boudinot has written a long, 12-course tasting menu and like such a menu it can be confusing, overwhelming, scary, mysterious, and just plain delicious.

If you're feeling adventurous and don't mind ambiguity and middle spaces this is the book for you. Mr. Boudinot has a glorious uninhibited imagination and a deft hand for pacing and for drawing you into a story that will make you think about who we are, where we might be going, and the fantastical possibilities of what-if.

Ryan says

Well, I wrote it, so I think it's pretty rad. But that's not the reason I'm writing this review. I'm writing to announce a *Blueprints of the Afterlife* **MANUSCRIPT PAGE GIVEAWAY**. Basically it works like this: mention the book somewhere online, send me a snail mail address, and I'll send that address a one-of-a-kind, signed copy of a page from the manuscript. See more details on blueprintsoftheafterlife.com.

Tyler Hill says

(In some sort of frustrating example of life imitating art, the internet just ate my review. As a result, I get to rewrite it all over again. Yay for awful!)

As the legions of you who follow my reviews have probably noticed, I haven't given out any 1-or-2-star review yet. This is because if I'm not enjoying a book by, say, half way through it, I don't have much issue

with setting it down and never picking it up again. And, as policy, I don't review any books here until after I finish them. That said, this book probably came the closest yet to anything I've read recently to receiving a 2-star review. But, at other times, I was tempted to give it 4-stars. It's schizophrenic that way.

Let's discuss, shall we?

First off, one of my problems with this book is that there are effectively five major characters. And, the individual chapters tend to focus on an individual character, telling the story with some of his or her voice. But, of the five characters, there were only two that I felt genuinely invested in, one that was interesting by throwaway, one that was sort of "meh" and one whose voice sort of frustrated me. So, I was only really enjoying 40-60% of the chapters.

Second, the writing itself was horribly uneven. There are some sentences that make you want to break out the highlighter, they are so great. And passages that are genuinely moving in memorable and unique ways. But, there are other parts where the writing seems clumsy and muddled. Or that just of land with a thud. And some passages that seem to be there just for a sort of juvenile shock value. What is doubly frustrating is that a lot of these problems could probably have been avoided with a good -or at least more assertive- editor.

Finally: Too many ideas! "How can there be too many ideas?" you retort. Well, to be clear, there are "ideas." And there there are "good ideas. And "bad ideas." And "heady ideas." And "throwaway idea." And "silly ideas." And "just plain dumb ideas." In short, there are a lot of ideas in the world and Boudinot's approach seems to be to just throw them all at the wall and see what sticks. There are a lot of large, heady ideas about mankind, reality and where we are headed as a species; but there are also a lot of ideas that seemed to be there for no greater reason than a childish giggle. (You could almost see Boudinot adding a string of exclamation marks behind his reveal about the clone orgy, for example.)

What's also frustrating about this is that the ideas often don't seem to tonally match. Some ideas, like the much talked about roving, Polar bear covered glacier, are pretty farcical, or at least high satire. They're fun, but don't really have any reference to something that could really happen. Conversely, a lot of stuff, like the ideas around the Bionet and DJing, seems like more "hard" speculative fiction; looking at possibly future concepts and technologies and exploring their ramifications. I'm not saying those ideas can't exist together, but their seems like little tempt to reconcile them with each other. Or, with the dozens and dozens of other ideas in this book. Even more frustrating, often ideas are just sort of presented and then dropped. Not to say that every idea needs to be explored in full, but I often found myself wondering "why even include that at all?" It muddies the water.

So, in short, a 2-star book at time. A 4-star book at time. I might have been kinder if I felt it resolved itself more capably. But, instead I split the difference and went with a 3.

karen says

here is my page!

isn't it awesome when a power outage eats your book review?? i think so.

let me try this again. i understand greg's difficulties in reviewing this, what with not wanting to give anything away, because this is a book constructed in such a careful way, it could only be spoiled by a careless reviewer.

mfso has threatened to write a "word-limit breaching review" of this, and greg's is pretty long too, once you hack into all his nested spoilers. i am going to try to do this tantalizingly, so you guys actually want to go out and read it, instead of reading whatever watered-down summary i could come up with. they will probably do better jobs reviewing here than i will.

WHY NO FIVE STARS???

i knew i was getting into dangerous waters with this decision. i can completely understand why greg and mfso are cutting holes on this book and making sweet love to it. it is the perfect food to feed their philosophical and cerebral appetites. not that i'm a dummy - i swear i am not - but in this case, the "what is man's purpose" ruminations while completely instrumental to the book, took me away from the parts i was more emotionally invested in: finding out about the "fucked-up shit" and learning more about this new reality. my reality is that i frequently have difficulties with the slipstream, the speculative. i don't have a strong background in science fiction (which i plan to change this year) and i like my magical realism in the vein of jonathan carroll - just slightly tweaked. this book does an amazing job of world-building, or "reality-building", but it is very much in the vein of dfw, where a lot is left out. this is definitely a book that needs to be read a second time, and it might get that fifth star after a second pass, when i am more secure in my footing and i know what i am meant to be looking for. it is a fantastic story, all my personal failings aside, and if i had read this before those dudes, i would have immediately put on my readers' advisory helmet and informed them of its perfection for their particular tastes.

to play a quick readers' advisory game, since the helmet is already on: if you like david mitchell, try ryan boudinot. this is me basing my judgment on having only read *ghostwritten*, but i know mitchell likes to do the scattershot split narrative and temporal murkiness that is all over this book. (murkiness is not a bad word, here, but there is some confusion, for me anyway, as far as when events are occurring. but that is actually a strength of the book, and i like that he makes the reader work a bit)

but let me try to give a better sense of what this book is about.

shit.

okay. it is about clones and "embodiments" and the enduring cult of celebrity and dishwashing and scientific triumphs and mistakes and mudslides and chewbacca and intellectual promise and moral responsibility and a giant floating head and an endless red carpet and the expectations and limitations of organized religion and trying to fix the mistakes of the past while maybe misinterpreting which parts actually were the mistakes. i am dancing around stuff here. but none of the above is a lie - it is just a tricky book to pin down without crushing it's pretty pretty wings.

i could have read another 400 pages of this story without tiring of it.

and what's the story?? one "character" character with the illustrations from doré's *inferno* tattooed on her forearms, one with the illustrations from *purgatorio* - but never one with the *paradisio* - you are killing me, boudinot - why can't we have our *paradisio*?? i suppose the book might answer that question.

"fucked up shit," indeed...

i did a bad job here, but being careful will have that result sometimes.

Paul Bryant says

There's a rising tide of weirdness, you see it in movies (*Being John Malkovich*, *City of Lost Children*, *Love Exposure*, *I Heart Huckabees*), you hear it in music (Six Organs of Admittance, Animal Collective) and of course we see it onrushing into the wonderful world of modern fiction too.

Me, I go only so far. I like jazz, for instance, when I can discern the vestiges of the melody the guy is improvising upon, when there's the merest mental toehold left in the cacophony, it's 99% wildness but there's still that 1% my mind can cling to with one bent-back fingernail. It's the same with fiction, the merest ghost of a rumour of a photocopy of a plot, and that's okay. If my mind can't believe there's any melody left or any plot at all, then I freefall into softly tumbling fearfulness; as soon as I can find a tree branch to cling to, I make a polite excuse and leave.

There's a great science fiction story called *Mr Boy* by James Patrick Kelly from 1990 which is *23 years ago now*. In this charming story Mr Boy is a 25 year old rich guy but he's decided to get biologically "stunted" so he remains physically 12 years old. His best friend has been "tweaked" and now looks like a 12 foot dinosaur. His mother, for a couple of decades now, got herself genetically modified into a small scale replica of the Statue of Liberty – still as big as a house. Mr Boy lives in a spacious apartment *inside his mother*. Actual science fiction has been doing this kind of crazy ass stuff a long time and still is – check out Bruce Sterling, for instance (I love him). Also great absurdist short story satires about America and its possible futures are not hard to come by. From the fecund womb of Donald Barthelme with some pre-birth oofle-dusting from Jorge Luis Borges, you have Alissa Nutting, George Saunders and a whole host ramping around. And there are novels too - *Blueprints of the Afterlife* fits right next to *Let the Dog Drive*, *White Noise*, *My Elvis Blackout*, *Infinite Jest*, *God is Dead*, and very numerous others.

Deadpan surreal future-America satire is what all these are, in their different ways.

And now we have a whole genre dedicated to being weirder than everyone else called bizarre fiction (*The Haunted Vagina*, *The Baby Jesus Butt Plug*, *They Had Goat Heads*, and so on and on - I've not read any of those yet). Can we also mention Rabelais here – his *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is bizarro fiction written in the 1530s.

So, Blueprints has some intense competition. Blueprints is pretty weird, as you have heard by now. Ryan Boudinot is out there frolicking at the edge of coherence, but let us not get carried away.

I did enjoy Mr Boudinot's zest, his phrasemaking and his willingness to have a go. He does boldly plunge. For instance :

"At this point he may want to start dismembering you. Most likely this will begin with your fingers and toes and move on up the extremities. You are expected to react with appropriate terror and beg for your life."
Stella. *"I can do that."*

Henrietta. *"Then he will likely decapitate you. Please, at this point, if you could, feign death."*

Or

The apartment was on the fifth floor of a tree-ringed, green-built, post-FUS building, with windows overlooking the retinal-rape neon of a takeout Szechuan hole-in-the-wall.

That's RB's style, right there. It therefore seems a shame that he lapses so frequently into dialogue which can only be describes as *fifth hand crap* :

Squid said, "You guys just need to know it's not safe for you to be digging into all this shit. Just leave it alone and walk away."

"We're all in danger, dude. I'm putting myself on the line just talking to you."

Also, alas, he badly needs a lame-comedy detector. If he has one the batteries must have conked. One of his main characters is Neethan F Jordan. His sections are largely satires of future-celebrity and TV culture. The target was obvious, the humour was crude and cartoony, and *30 Rock* already skewers celebs and tv and all of that brilliantly.

Also, here's another (minor) moan. When Hollywood used to do historical drama, they got the costumes reasonably authentic-looking but the hairstyles of the actresses were always glaringly contemporary; in Blueprints when anyone plays music it's always 100-plus-years old music, like Guns 'n' Roses or The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy – yeah, probably the very stuff our author grew up listening to. Well, it's his book, but it didn't seem likely that people from the age after the age of FUS would be listening to "albums" by acts like that. Anyway, why should I be bothering about abrogations of verisimilitude in such a novel as this, which uses as its main plot device the "and ...and...and" of a fairytale dreamscape... and then I was in a field, and my aunt said to me...and then we were being eaten by George W Bush... In fact RB anticipates my own complaint right there on page 228 :

She yearned for plot but instead absurdity after absurdity had been thrown before her, absurdities that alluded to obscure purposes.

I don't really want to put the boot into this book, it was colourful and there were a lot of bells and twinkly lights and there were some cute little doors which you could open and there were people inside who waved at you, but...it's comedy science fiction. Like Christian death metal, not the world's best genre.

Nick Black says

A smart book that doesn't really go anywhere. Lots of interesting ideas at the level of a TEDtalk--i.e. a book that makes you sit up and say "hrmmmmmm!" but then you think about it for a few seconds and realize things are full of holes (and thus a grand book for pretentious literary types without much formal training). Owes a tremendous debt to Pynchon, especially *The Crying of Lot 49*, which is made explicit by a roaming, destructive glacier (a clear homage to the giant adenoid from *Gravity's Rainbow*). A fun read, with fewer scientific mistakes than most books of its kind. Starts off better than it ends and doesn't really wrap up some/most of its plotlines, but neither does it invest heavily enough in them to piss you off.

Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says

"The world was full of precious garbage." This first sentence of the book immediately collided with me like the planet Melancholia mercilessly crushing the Earth, both because it's densely packed with meaning that yearns to be unsealed and extrapolated, and because it *immediately* reminded me of this great TED talk that the author had given in the months leading up to the release of this book, which I've watched/listened to several times, including once more, right now, with new ears, as I begin the process of walking the fine line between spoiling the book or boring the reader.

In this talk there's no mention of the book or any of its specific content, but it is a beautiful one-mouthed oration on several central themes found spackled over its 427 sentence-raked pages. It's entitled "Nature, Humanity, and Technology" and is a 16 minute 45 second philosophical ode to such "precious garbage" and is constructed out of things like tranquil childhood recollections, early epiphanies about civilization and the composition of the human mind, and his frustrations with radical idiots in college—all tied together with an earnest inquisitiveness, wry humor, and a sharp intellect that are channeled through a gentle-yet-deadly-serious tone and demeanor. That string of adjectives can be applied to his writing as well. The content of this talk would make for a great, Goodreads-style review of this book. But alas, since the author and I are distinct creatures (I'm pretty sure), I'll have to come up with one of my own instead.

Blueprints of the Afterlife is the best book I've read since I read *Infinite Jest* some eight years prior. The only complaint I have about it is that the page count wasn't multiplied by a minimum of two--that and the font for the chapter titles could've been something more aesthetically pleasing, more in line with the cool cover design or the purrry font in which the author's name and title appear on the top of each and every page of the book. I had high expectations for this for a number of reasons, the primary one being that I am a huge fan of his debut publication, a collection of short stories entitled *The Littlest Hitler*. Another reason I became further tantilized by the impending release of this book was that I stumbled upon an article that connects an element of the book to an element of a favorite film by a favorite filmmaker. (I've gushed about my love for the first book here and thoroughly fellated the favorite filmmaker here.)

This book addresses concerns so pertinent to me, and in such an agreeable and soul-penetrating manner, that I began to playfully speculate that, much like elements of this book's reality, author Ryan Boudinot had been transported from Seattle to Chicago, brought into a painstakingly detailed replica of my home, surrounded by my things and traces of habits and daily living, and slowly began to grow into my identity, like a reverse shedding of skin, the kind that cicadas and snakes adhere to the biorhythms of. Then Ryan-dissolved-into-Josh read a book written by Ryan Boudinot and began to feel a vague and unnerving feeling that he was not who he was supposed to be. Et cetera. Of course this would all be perfectly insane, but also an example of some of the more mind-bending elements of this high-expectation-transcending novel, as well as a cutely relevant way for me to say that I, a discrete non-Ryan person, absolutely love this book. That it spoke to me. With me. It read *me* while I read *it*. That I may as well have done to it what a certain all-lowercase-typing, all-book-consuming, karen-named-person claimed that I had.

What's This All About Then?

The massively destructive and/or productive abilities of human beings. The nature of identity. The reality shaping powers of the internet, entertainment-saturation, and computer technology merging with medical science. The power of empathy. The power of mythology and metaphor. The immense weight of sorting through the detritus of history and passing time and decay. The Meaning of It All. And more!

Worlds Within Worlds

What is easily known about this book from a quick synoptic-glance, is that it involves an exact replica of Manhattan being built upon a roughly Manhattan-size island in a watery womb, occupied by scattered in-utero islands, known as the Puget Sound. This fact—among other details laid throughout the book about facades and replications—got me thinking about what it is that's so appealing to me about replicas and miniature models of things, or to have something taken to be real to be exposed as a prop or set piece, etc. They're used in several of my favorite works of art, not excluding Kaufman's aforehyperlinked film and his others, as well a section of Ron Loewinsohn's woefully underappreciated novel *Magnetic Field(s)*, and elsewhere, including this recently discovered artistic achievement in which a small scale New York City was built out of twigs, leaves and bark.

So what is it about this kind of stuff that fills me with a feeling that's difficult to give linguistic life to? It has to have something to do with words like *perspective* and *meaning*, *context* and *re-examination*, but this feels incomplete to me. Why does it feel so pleasing and cosmologically profound when I think about, say, the boy in *Magnetic Field(s)* discovering a hidden room in his home with a model train set and a miniature model of his house beside it that also contains a model of the very hidden room he's standing in, containing an even smaller scale model train set? Is it the infinite regression of things containing things containing things without end that just leaves the mind dumbly blown? Perhaps that's part of it. But I think it's really about putting things into new perspectives, which in turn gives them new meaning, which in turn can often be a more truthful or optimistic meaning, even when it may call into question or seemingly diminish the default position that we immediately come to the table of perceiving the world with. To imagine things like civilizations in molecules and our own known universe as but one of them is more than a frivolous childhood flight of fancy or exercise in clichéd dorm room toke sessions—this kind of imagination and openness to endless logical possibility is the lifeblood of human innovation of all kinds, both for good and ill.

These kinds of imaginative expressions also must tickle the edges of that famed "God-shaped hole" in which human beings desire for their lives to be witnessed and cared for by someone "outside" of the creaturely, Earthbound realm (view spoiler) and getting a view of things from a 30,000 foot plane ride, or an astronaut's camera angle, or having a contemplative look at a miniature replica must bring this to mind, too.

And facades and replicas themselves invite musings about the nature of identity, the urgency of which gets ratcheted up when the replicas are not just buildings of glass and steel, but of walking, talking, thinking, feeling human beings.

Laughing Through the Age of Fucked Up Shit

This book goes head first into the deep end, yes, but it's lined with both scathingly satirical and clever rib-poking humor as well. There are plenty of instances when something utterly horrifying is happening or some deep thought's getting pushed out some narratorial birth canal or another while something hilarious is said or is happening at the same time. Some of the funniest bits are mentions of a future pop cultural landscape in which things like reality shows about competitive defecation flash into the eyes of sedated masses; where television hosts say things like "What does this fuckin' thing do and shit?" to engineers of amazing technological feats and get similarly 'blue' replies; where a channel called the Clothing Optional Network exists and movie stars compliment the pubic hair styling choices of their interviewer.

One of the funniest scenes is the entire chapter where we first meet Neethan F. Jordan, a successful movie star type who issues the exact word-for-word summary of his latest season of an action-adventure TV show to every Entertainment Industry fool shoving a microphone in his face. He actually had his middle name

changed to Fucking, which is something I can see Lil "Weezy F. Baby" Wayne doing soon enough. Much like I mention in my review of *Infinite Jest*—concerning its years being purchased by brandnames—the reason that some of the more cheeky, over-the-top details in this book work so well is that they are *just absurd enough* to stand out as unusual and funny, but upon a second thought they're really not that far off from the very reality we live in. Most of the world's current reality television shows and 24/7 infotainment nightmares are one small step away from being defecation contests. *Toddlers in Tiaras? I Didn't Know I Was Pregnant? Bridalplasty?*

Similarly, in Boudinot's well-orchestrated world, familiar corporate brand names have attached themselves to military forces (Boeing, Microsoft, Pfizer) and firearms (Coca-Cola, Office Max, Nike Air). There's something funny in itself about someone unholstering and aiming their *Fresca* at someone. But again, is this terribly far off from reality? As far as any of us know, any major corporation could be in the business of making guns or bombs under a separate-but-connected sub-corporation. It's not far-fetched at all. What's alarming about it is how insignificant the difference really is between a company being brazen enough to *not* rebrand their handguns with different names to distinguish them from their soft drinks or shoes or office supply stores, and the current, viable reality in which they simply fund these things and no one cares to look into their vast, complex networks of wheelings and dealings to find out.

Clones and Drones and Embodiments, Oh My!

This book also gets close to Bizarro™ levels at moments. Fans of speculation about cloning and/or time travel and/or personality-rearrangement will feel right at home in many of these pages. I'm looking at you, mutual friends and/or readers of Caris O'Malley's *The Egg Said Nothing*.

There's a really interesting element in this book in which people can be "DJed" by computer programmers, having their entire nervous systems placed in the control of some remote keyboard tapper and that remote keyboard tapper's pre-programmed, auto-piloted loops. There are early 90's rave-like parties where this is done for the purposes of dance and entertainment. Some use these arrangements as ways to improve their lives by being programmed into being wittier, or having increased sexual prowess or professional success, etc. One can easily imagine how this technology could and would be used for more dubious purposes as well. And of course, the little philosopher within can also put their free will vs. determinism hat on during these descriptions, if that's where their mind wanders to. Mine did, a bit, but mainly I was wrapped up in the fantastic descriptions and fully immersed in the world I was presented with.

Another future world invention involves the ability to upload and erase and re-experience memories. There was one memorable scene in which I became totally teary-eyed while reading about a grizzled, retired military man viewing his childhood speed by in a series of impressions—not through his *own* memories of it, but through his *father's* eyes.

The Words

I intend to re-read this eminently re-readable book soon, and when I do I plan to take the time to write down many of Boudinot's stand out lines, of which there are many. Almost too many. He seems to effortlessly ink out some rather beautiful and unique descriptions of things both mundane and fantastic, and unlike some of his self-professed postmodern forebearers, his sentences are usually very clean and average in length—not a single, winding, page-long one in the mix. And not that there's anything wrong with that, of course, but I've come to admire the ability to keep things descriptively interesting without using a hundred-thousand commas per page, especially since I began to crawl through the infant stage of fiction writing myself and find it difficult to not make each sentence an ornate marathon, punctured by a every-star-in-the-sky-populated

forest of parentheses, dashes and commas.

The structure consists of an ensemble cast of distinct, duly-fleshed-out, and uniquely compelling characters who slowly begin to collide in interesting and unexpected ways. It's not overly complex, but just complex enough to warrant a re-read which will deliver all kinds of new-angle goods.

Every page of this book is wildly entertaining. There are no lulls at all. This is extremely, top-of-the-endangered-species-list rare, even amongst my very favorite books. Boudinot has achieved something truly great here and I hungrily await more.

End Times

Well, it looks like it was easier to leave specifics out than I thought. I don't think I really gave anything away that "spoils" anything. A lot of the really great specifics require the full context of having read the book to really land a solid strike. Suffice to say that I left out a lot of things altogether, almost all of the major characters and plot trajectories completely unmentioned. I also left out a lot of thoughts about the book because of the inability to bring them up without making spoilers or testing the patience of anyone who might read this already lengthy thing. I'm sitting here, frustrated, realizing that the urge to divulge details is really just the urge to have many people I know read this book so we can talk about it. Take the collective word of Greg and Karen and myself for it: READ THIS BOOK, MODERN HUMANS. With that, I will bow from this tiny stage upon stage upon stage upon stage...

LeeAnn Heringer says

This book started so well. It was a coherent, if a bit wacky, story with a strong protagonist, Woo-jin Kan, that seemed to be going somewhere what with finding the same dead girl in the same field on the way home from work every day. And then everything fell apart and that whole A+B=C storytelling thing got thrown out the window because that's so last century, that's so pre-FUS.

When I figured out toward the end of reading the book that the author had done TED talks, it all started to make sense to me. It's not as if there aren't some terrific ideas floating around this novel -- the malevolent sentient glacier with roaring polar bears on the back of it destroying cities, the biological internet which uses factories within our bodies to receive commands to heal us (with software updates being provided in food), what it means to have 8 billion people on the planet, what our next stage of evolution is, terminally obese people being used to grow extra body parts for transplant.

The line that best summarizes the entire book is in the last paragraph where a character says, "The impending dystopia you talk about only looks like dystopia to those of us who've lived surrounded by privilege." Because for all the end of the world apocalypse, the actual dystopia is kept vague and brief.

It's as if the author just wants to stand on a stage and throw things at us. As if he's not really interested in telling a story and so he doesn't. It's more like he's presented us with an enormous brick wall that has 8-10 interesting graffiti murals on it and a 1000 scrawled tags and we're supposed to nod our heads and say, oh, I get it.

Kyle Muntz says

This is the best book I've read in 2014, and maybe the last few years. It does lot of things at once, but almost all of them work--and, in particular, it seemed like Boudinout is succeeding where so many other writers have failed.

Blueprints of the Afterlife has a lot of the elements we generally associate with "postmodernism" (structural innovation and layers of narrative; a cerebral but also casual tone somewhere in the post DFW tradition; moments of metafiction, etc) but what seems most important is how they're used to add to the narrative rather than take away from it, and the storytelling itself is always in top form. This book is a kind of ultra contemporary, near-future SF I don't usually like very much, which I think makes the effect it had on me even more impressive. It's 400 pages but always perfectly paced and beautifully written, while constantly becoming more complex. Also, at times it's incredibly surreal but always consistent, which is incredibly difficult to pull off--not to mention that despite how elaborate the book is structurally and conceptually, the characters never become less important.

And, though it's too easy to describe writers in terms of other writers, here are some other places I think Blueprints of the Afterlife succeeds where others have failed:

It's a little like what might have happened if David Mitchel knew how to tell stories rather than just put them in interesting boxes;

Explores a kind of concept heavy narrative reminiscent of Phillip K Dick but with much better prose and characterization;

It's especially similar to Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash in a some ways, especially the comedic/satirical elements, and it's also equally concept-heavy, but consistently more dynamic and enjoyable (plus not so deeply entrenched in the 90s);

And, since I don't want to keep this going too long, at one point it even becomes the Dot Com novel Pynchon's Bleeding Edge wanted to be but never became.

Anyway though, it's been a long time since a book has impressed me this much, and (after not having the best luck with texts this year), it's a good reminder of why I read books in the first place, which is maybe the best thing a story can do.
