



Osama (FANTASTICA)

Lavie Tidhar , Raúl García Campos (Translator)

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Joe, detective privado, recibe el encargo de encontrar a Mike Longshott, autor de unas novelas pulp muy populares, protagonizadas por un personaje de ficción llamado Osama bin Laden. La tarea parece fácil, pero se va complicando a medida que se acumulan los misterios: nadie parece conocer al autor, la editorial de las novelas no es más que un apartado de correos y los interrogatorios le llevan a poner en duda que Longshott sea una persona real porque algunos hablan de fantasmas o refugiados de otra realidad paralela. Al mismo tiempo, Joe empieza a leer las novelas protagonizadas por Osama, que están repletas de actos de violencia, que se parecen sospechosamente a atentados reales de nuestro mundo.

Osama (FANTASTICA) Details

Date : Published June 26th 2013 by RBA (first published 2011)

ISBN :

Author : Lavie Tidhar , Raúl García Campos (Translator)

Format : Kindle Edition 336 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fantasy, Fiction, Alternate History, Speculative Fiction

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From Reader Review Osama (FANTASTICA) for online ebook

Eric says

I really liked this book. It completely sucked me in. I read the last half in a single sitting.

And, frankly, I have no idea what I just read. Maybe there's a part of me that doesn't grok the big picture metaphors going on in books (and it's why I hate critical literature) but I've been sitting here for an hour after I finished this book, and I still don't know what the hell happened.

But I do know I enjoyed it quite a bit.

Go figure.

And "Mike Longshott" is a GREAT pseudonym for a purveyor of "terrorism porn." Just saying.

Jm_oriol says

Este libro en realidad requiere dos valoraciones. El estilo es absolutamente fascinante, creando una atmósfera envolvente, pero la historia en si no me ha llegado y el giro final ya está muy visto.

Tj says

review first appeared at skullsaladreviews.blogspot.com

In the interest of full disclosure, I admit Lavie's someone I know and interact with online. I received an electronic review copy straight from the author himself. That said, Tidhar's new novel, Osama (PS Publishing, 2011), is a difficult novel to review without spoilers. I will do my best here. But let me just say upfront that I loved, loved this book! Sometimes when getting a book from a friend or acquaintance, there's a hesitance to review it because of the risk of hurting feelings. There was no need to hesitate reviewing this one.

On a superficial level, at least through roughly two-thirds of the novel, the story is pretty simple to explain. It is about a private investigator named Joe living in an alternative present where 9/11 and The War on Terrorism are the stuff of pulp novels. Osama bin Laden is a popular character in a series of cheap paperback thrillers detailing the lives of terrorists by an author named Mike Longshott. When removed from reality, the exploits of the terrorists make for entertaining reads in this alternative history. There are even conventions dedicated to Longshott and his Osama novels. People dress up like Osama and terrorists at these conventions and have roundtable discussions concerning the social relevance of these novels, much like at a Trekkie convention. The fictional acts of terrorism are all entertainment, nothing to fear.

Joe's story itself reads much like a paperback thriller. He's a hard-drinking, smoking private investigator searching through the seedy underworlds of Europe. Joe is hired to track down Longshott and travels around the world looking to uncover this author. In the process, he starts to learn a thing or two about himself.

The last third of the book is full of revelations. Our reality and Joe's alternate reality collide and the text grows increasingly slipstream and surreal. I won't say anymore about plot because I don't want to spoil the experience for anyone. The less one knows going into this novel, the more they will enjoy it, I believe.

Ultimately, this is a novel about identity, a novel which reflects a reality of the modern age in which we live. We choose our identities in many aspects of modern life – whether it be through a pen name as a writer, the personas we take on in differing social situations, or through online handles and avatars. As one character states in the novel:

"You have to choose what to be. When you've been stripped of everything; a name, a face, a love – you could be anything. You could even choose to be yourself."

A wonderfully entertaining and thought-provoking book – My six pack rating: 6 out of 6 Trader Joe's Vienna Style Lager

Christopher Buehlman says

This is the book that won the 2012 World Fantasy Award for Best Novel, beating out four other finalists, including my own first effort, *Those Across the River*. If only the rest of life's small disappointments seemed so just. Mine is a horror novel, and, I think, a good one-but this? *Osama* is a fable, an opium dream, a prose-poem, a meaningful contemplation on life's fragility and the absurdity of violence, containing perhaps the best articulation of Purgatory I have ever read. My favorite detail? "...a picture on the wall of former French President Saint-Exupéry against a blue background..." *Lavie Tidhar* has given us, among other things, an alternate Paris in which the author of *The Little Prince* became his nation's leader instead of dying in a plane crash. Just let the delicious contextual implications echo for a moment, and then seek out this exquisite, multi-layered book.

fromcouchtomoon says

Detective noir with comic book flavor, hints of alternate worlds, a vein of historical journalism, and light, heart-tugging sentimentality. Better than any prime time comic news show, *Tidhar* brilliantly conveys just how ridiculous and pulpy our tragic violence might appear to a world without the G WoW, while at the same time levelling blame at the proper parties. Bravo!

Bandinnelli Bandinnelli says

Novelón de *Tidhar*. Primero que leo, y no el último.

Con un inicio que explota los clichés detectivescos hasta la náusea, explora ideas que estremecen, y expone ideas sobre el terrorismo y política de una manera muy peculiar.

Si bien es cierto que su estilo puede hacer que algunas mentes se pierdan un poco (el final me costó un poco), la veo muy recomendable para aquellas personas que buscan historias poco usuales, donde no se

exponen los hechos de forma nítida y dejan mucho a la interpretación, donde la trama se desarrolla de manera orgánica, creciendo ante los ojos del lector.

Y para aquellos con ganas de gresca, claro. Tidhar es provocativo a su manera.

Nikki says

I've been avoiding reading *Osama* for a while, as I didn't really feel tempted by the summary, but I ended up picking it up in the library -- because that can never hurt! -- and really enjoying it, as it happens. Rather more than the books that Lavie Tidhar wrote for Angry Robot, actually, even though superficially they might seem more up my street.

I think a fair amount of the trouble people have reading this is that they're expecting the wrong thing. A classically noirish detective story, a thriller, something solidly science fictional that deals with multiverses... but it's none of those things, or not only those things. It borrows some of the trappings of each: the protagonist is a detective in a classic noir style; there are excerpts that're meant to be from a thriller; there are at least two parallel universes, it seems...

Going into this as I did, without too many expectations, let me enjoy it a lot. Each chapter is short, so it ended up flying by, and while others complained about the metaphors and imagery, I actually enjoyed it a lot. Borrowing from a genre that gave us "shop-worn Galahad"s and the like, I don't think the writing style was out of place at all.

It's much more quiet, meditative, than most noir-ish things, though. Although the character is in many ways insubstantial, that's kind of the point. If you're looking for a thriller, this ain't it: though there's plenty of violence and mystery and so on, really it's more about an internal journey.

Melanie Lamaga says

Wishing Terrorism Was Only Fiction

Many people have compared the novel *Osama* by Lavie Tidhar to books by Phillip K. Dick. It is similar in that the main characters come to realize that reality is not at all what it seems, and that there are those who would stop them from learning the truth. However, *Osama* is much more beautifully written, and without the heightened paranoia of many of Dick's works.

This is not a difficult book to read, but it is a very difficult book to discuss. I finished it over a month ago and I am still trying to articulate my response.

It starts out simply enough. The first couple of short chapters are beautifully atmospheric. We see Joe, a loner, having his morning coffee, watching the sky and the people in Vientiane, Laos. But this is an alternate Laos, in a more peaceful, less technologically advanced world. A world without global terrorism. Here Osama bin Laden is just the hero of a series of violent pulp novels which Joe enjoys reading in his downtime.

At first Joe seems like a cliché private detective, complete with an anonymous office and bottle of booze in the drawer. A mysterious woman literally appears in Joe's office and hires him to find Mike Longshott, the

writer of the Osama bin Laden: Vigilante books. She presents him with a strange black card that provides a seemingly inexhaustible supply of credit.

Joe begins a quest that leads him from Laos to Paris, London and New York, pursued by some “men in black” types. So far, so typical... but as Joe drinks and smokes his way across continents, following clues, noir-detective style, his sense of identity and purpose begin to unravel.

First Joe finds himself falling in love with the mysterious woman who hired him, and is nagged by the sense that he knows her from somewhere. He also comes to realize that his world, inhabited by insubstantial “refugees,” may not be the only world. The reader realizes that the men in black, in fact, may be from our world.

In Osama, like classic detective fiction, the unanswered questions draw us in and lead us along. Who is the woman who hired Joe? Who or what are the refugees? Who is after Joe and why? And what is the real identity of Mike Longshott? But this book goes far beyond detective motifs, into uncharted waters.

As the narrator comes apart, the reader, too, experiences dislocating shifts while reading the passages that are presumably from the Vigilante novels. This is because the excerpts presented from the “novels within the novel” are not pulp fiction at all, but our reality. They are written like news reports — flat and factual, sometimes using lists — and describe the terrorist attacks at Dar-es-Salaam, Sharm el-Sheikh, the 7/7 London bombings, and others, as well as the actions and (from an omniscient point of view) the thoughts of the terrorists.

As John H. Stevens astutely noted in his excellent review, “Tidhar is not writing about our angst or a sense of postmodern slippage so much as he is demonstrating that reality is plotted and that our identities are constructed to make sense of the world around us.” In other words, when reality is too horrible to comprehend, the mind will do what it must to protect the psyche.

The facts of terrorist acts are presented without melodrama. The terrorists are presented as humans, too: on a mission to destroy that which they perceive is out to destroy them.

This is dangerous territory for a novelist, but Tidhar handles it with great finesse. I found his portrayals to be moving and completely free of jingoism. He lets the events speak for themselves: they are shocking enough. Sensationalism, such as we see so often in the media, only cheapens the truth.

This world of violence and the unending “war against terror” that kills innocents in retaliation for the killing of innocents should, by any moral compass, be the stuff of pulp fiction. Instead, it is our reality.

The list-style is used again in a couple of powerful passages toward the end of the novel. One where the mystery woman reveals all that she knows about Joe: a desperate, emotional plea in which Joe’s choice is made clear.

In the other, we get unexpected, fragmented litany of first person narratives by terrorist victims, expressing the bewilderment, shock and grief of experiences that are only half-understood, half-remembered.

Though the language is beautiful and the concepts are powerful, it is difficult to connect with Joe, because he has no interest in connecting with himself. The ending, for this reason, was a bit of a let down for me. But on the other hand, I have to acknowledge the validity of the author’s choice here, for it reflects a reality that we face when confronted by horror: to attempt to make sense of insanity, or to take refuge in comforting lies.

Novelist Lavie Tidhar has had more than his share of brushes with terrorism. In 1998 he was in Dar-es-Salaam during the American embassy bombing. He stayed in the same hostel as the Al-Qaeda operatives in Nairobi, and “narrowly avoided both the 2005 King’s Cross and 2004 Sinai attacks.”

Brad says

What I really dug about this book was the sense of diminishment it left me with: the diminishment of Osama as a man; the diminishment of Osama as an idea; the diminishment of the attack on the WTC; the diminishment of terrorism in general; the diminishment of the US government and its war machine; the diminishment of violence and our rationalized motivations for violence; the diminishment of humanity; the diminishment of our own little tragedies. And it did this while celebrating knowledge and love.

It told its strange tale of afterlife in a string of pseudo-short stories that massed together into a novel, all with some wonderful imagery. Yet it was littered with similes that began to smell like trash in a steaming, tropical landfill (exactly!). It was interesting, but I could put it down and forget about it for days. I wanted it to be better. It could have been so much worse. I think I'd rather read the novels in the novel than what we were given as the novel itself. And I wish I cared more.

Tom Lloyd says

It galls me to write this, because Lavie's a friend and frankly is unlikely to let me hear the end of it, but this is a seriously good book. Beautifully written, spare but not short or lightweight as I find some novels of this ilk are. It's an unsettling story reminiscent Paul Auster, but with substance in the place of narcissism. The PKD similarity is clear, but I was also put in mind of *The City and the City*; the ending of which I found a massive disappointment. Osama didn't disappoint and I think it will stay with me for a long time.

Tudor Ciocarlie says

I thought that this wonderful novel about our identities in this world will be more like *The Man in the High Castle* and less like *Ubik*, but it is the other way around and I like it. And fortunately, the writing is so much better than anything Philip K. Dick ever put on paper.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nwhyte.livejournal.com/1891438.html>[return][return][return][return]An alternate history novel where the War on Terror never happened, but instead the history of our world is experience in a series of pulp novels about Osama Bin Laden; the plot concerns the central character's quest for the author of these stories, which takes him on a long journey including a brief step into our timeline. So it's basically *The Man In The High Castle* recast for today, though with lots of added literary allusions to the noir genre in particular. I wasn't completely satisfied; like a lot of alternate history stories, this seems very pleased with its own

cleverness (perhaps in a slightly different way to most of them), and I found the low-key ending a but unsatisfying after such a convoluted journey. But Tidhar does hold a mirror up to the history of our own times and get a rather interesting reflection. I like this more than the other BSFA nominee I have read but hope I like others even better.

rastronomicals says

Spoilers, yo.

The deliberate internet contrarians who are starting to pop up notwithstanding, I think the comparisons to *The Man in the High Castle* you see in many of the reviews here are dead on.

Joe's reality at the beginning of the book has simply unraveled by the end of it, and if that ain't Dickian, I don't know what is.

I enjoyed *Osama* more than I enjoy most of PKD's fiction, and the reason is interesting to me. Dick, for all the gobsmacking he does, for all the times when he turns the reader's expectations upside-down in the span of one paragraph, was quite ordinary in plot and in characterization. You might well then say that this sets up the greater contrast for him, and I wouldn't argue, but the fact is his characters are boring. They have boring jobs, they're married to boring wives, they live in boring places.

Well, not so Joe. He's a deadpan drinkin' 'n' smokin' gumshoe in Laos. How about *that* for exotic? How about *that* for coolness? It's as if Dick had written his Deckard in the way that the movie did. I've been obsessed with cool ever since I learned how to behave and affect my way out of being the grade school nerd; of course I wanna read about Joe. Shit, I'd love to *be* Joe. Cheap suit, bottle of Johnny Walker in the top drawer of the dusty desk, and always two packs of smokes at hand, in case you empty the first one.

Of course, there's somebody else who deep down wanted to be Joe, and that's the ur-Joe, the Joe that existed before he became a refugee, or fuzzy-wuzzy. And Tidhar wants the reader to think about that well.

Sure, you've got the gradual unmooring of reality. Sure, you've got the pain of these clinically-described terrorist acts, but *Osama* is also a rumination on how we'd--most of us--love to re-write ourselves in response to social and literary tropes.

There's another book with the word "Castle" in its title that comes to mind when considering *Osama*, and that's *Lord Valentine's Castle*. Silverberg's book begins as the once and future Coronal ascends an overlook. We the reader know nothing more, and neither does the character. He has had the entirety of his life ripped away from him by an act of war, and like *Osama*, the rest of *LVC* is concerned with the discovery by the main character that the life he is living is on every level a fabrication.

The only thing is, Valentine, when confronted by the facts, chooses to resume his earlier life. Silverberg's book is heroic fantasy, and what else would a hero do? Full of duty, he (at times reluctantly) reassumes the mantle of kingship, and goes back to who he had been.

But Joe's no hero, and neither are most of the rest of us. At the end of the book, Joe is literally slapped into recognition of his former life by the woman whom he had loved, and still--STILL--he refuses to go back. He'd rather continue playing the hardboiled detective in the tropical paradise.

Of course there are other things going on. Joe's wife was murdered in ways both brutal and clinical, and that's a pain he'd have had to deal with every day for the rest of his life had he chosen a return.

Yet it remains that Joe took the easy and lazy path. He uncovered the truth and ignored it, and I can only assume it was because he liked the fantasy life--the cardboard fantasy character he was playing--better.

You see criticism of Tidhar's characterization in *Osama* here and there. I find that interesting because his Central Station stories are almost exclusively focused on character, at least given their particular exotic milieu. So, what? Did Tidhar forget his characterization skills for *Osama*?

Not likely. Instead, I'm sure that he wrote to pulp trope to serve a purpose, to highlight an uncomfortable truth about us: that we'd play a fantasy role, even a stock one, rather than inhabit the well-rounded, if mundane, one we are all heir to.

Patrick Hudson says

This is an interesting reaction to current events, digging down to mess about in the collective unconscious. There are some striking moments - the interstitial chapters describing terrorists balance journalistic precision with a poetic eye for detail and Joe's imprisonment by the mysterious CPD is rich with irony, taking the Man in the High Castle elements to a new level.

I'd rate this one a 3 1/2 - I would like to have rated this thoughtful book higher, but some elements didn't quite gel for me. In particular, the private eye vernacular was laid on a bit too thick for my liking, especially in the beginning.

On the whole it had an alienating effect making it difficult to get interested in Joe, and these elements are, sorry to say, a little hackneyed. One needs to work a little harder to say something new about them. They were also built mainly on movies - Casablanca and Chinatown in particular - and I'd like to have seen a more literary frame of reference.

However, it's not a long book, so none of these elements had a chance to hang around long. It has a great atmosphere and the generic elements - as much as I moan about them - do a lot to put the terrorism theme in an insightful historical context.

Marvin says

Osama was the surprise winner of the 2012 World Fantasy award for best novel beating out both Stephen King and George R.R. Martin. Its premise involves a quest to find the writer of a series of pulp thrillers featuring a vigilante named Osama Bin-Laden. In Tidhar's alternate reality tale, we have a world in which there is no war on terror and no World Trade Center. Joe (just Joe) is a private investigator hired by a mysterious woman (Is there any other kind in this type of story?) to search and find the creator of the fictional Osama, Mike Longshott. The story starts out with all the qualities expected of a crime noir novel a la Chandler or Hammett. But Lavie Tidhar's style of writing doesn't allow for that type of formula for long.

Osama is more like a Phillip K. Dick novel, especially *The Man in The High Castle*, yet even here the reader finds something else is going on. It is to Tidhar's credit that *Osama* is hard to place in any type of category. What starts out as a typical detective thriller turns into a literary chess game in which Joe is asked, usually between getting beat up, if he is a "refugee" or is told to look for "Fuzzie Wuzzies". After a series of bizarre and entertaining turns, Joe's task, and actually his world, becomes like nothing he ever expected. I like where Tidhar leads me . Yet somewhere near the end it becomes purposely vague. Normally I would like that sort of thing but the author's lead-in demands answers we never receive or at least assumptions that are better rewarded. *Osama* is certainly no *The Man in the High Castle*. Yet it is an original novel that deserved its award and is deserving of more attention from those who love science fiction and fantasy. Three and a half stars.
