



# **A Star Curiously Singing**

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**\*\* Reader's Favorite Gold Medal Award Winner \*\*** Sandfly is a debugger. He is property, bought and paid for in an Earth under sharia law. All faiths but one have been banned. And the rule of the great Imam is supreme. As a debugger, Sandfly has an implant in his head that connects him to the world's technology-and doles out mental shocks to keep him obedient. All he wants is to fix bots and avoid shocks Now he's been called into Earth orbit. The masters have a new spacecraft-one capable of interstellar flight. On its maiden voyage, the only robot on board went mad and tore itself apart. Why? Better question: does it pose any risk to humans? When Sandfly reviews the bot's final moments, he perceives something unexpected. Something impossible. As Sandfly pieces together the clues, a trap spreads beneath his feet. If he solves the mystery, he may doom himself. And if he fixes the robot, he may shatter his world. Suspenseful, unique, and awash in cyberpunk jive, A Star Curiously Singing presents a bleak future that might be closer than we think.

## A Star Curiously Singing Details

Date : Published January 22nd 2016 by Freeheads (first published September 30th 2009)

ISBN : 9780983965596

Author : Kerry Nietz

Format : Paperback 252 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Christian, Christian Fiction, Fiction

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# From Reader Review A Star Curiously Singing for online ebook

## Kat Heckenbach says

I am not one for simple plot summaries when it comes to book reviews. I will say it's the story of Sandfly, a "debugger" sent to fix a robot on an experimental spaceship. Sci-fi, yep. Not heavy, hard sci-fi. Very character-driven. And voice....

The voice of these novels is what really grabbed me. The plot is awesome, the characterization top-notch...the pacing, descriptions, everything, no complaints. Spot on.

The voice, mind-blowing.

Especially when you consider the point of view they're written in.

OK, lesson time for you non-writers (or maybe you writers who could use a refresher):

Novels are written in a multitude of pov's, including third person omniscient, third person limited, second person, and first person.

Third person (either kind) is written as though someone else is telling the story, as in, "He stared into the murky depths..." Second person is nearly never used, and involves directing its prose at the reader, "You see, it don't you? Over there...." First person is written as though the character is telling the story, "I dug through my backpack, searching for..." (Keep in mind, this is the narrative part. Dialog is a free-for-all, folks.)

You also have your choice of past tense or present tense. The "he stared" is past tense, the "you see" is present tense.

Most books choose third person (limited--meaning you only get into one character's head at a time), past tense. Next in popularity is first person, past tense. Quite a few new books--including Kerry's here--are coming out in first person, present tense. Second person is pretty much not done, but Kerry works it in here and there.

Which (finally) brings me to my point. First person present tense is like singing a capella. Third person past is more like having instrumental accompaniment. For some reason, third person, and even first person past, is just more forgiving when it comes to style. Maybe because it's what we're used to reading, so we don't look for anything "off-key," same as listening to singing with background instruments. But first person present is different, rare, like a capella singing, and you have to get it perfect or every eensy-weensy mistake is amplified. Second person, forget it. It's like having someone sing right into your ear.

Kerry does it though. Flawlessly. He sings this story, no back-up, no reliance on convention.

I could not put these books down. They're completely addictive, just like a great song--the kind of song you put into your mp3 player and let it play on repeat for hours.

In my book, Kerry is a star, curiously--skillfully--singing.

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## **Kyle Pratt says**

In "A Star Curiously Singing", author Kerry Nietz fully develops a dark dystopian, but believable world. On this future Earth sharia law prevails, polygamy is common and women are covered from head to toe. But, even more frightening, conformity is obligatory. Those few allowed to think outside of required norms are mere slaves, their very thoughts controlled by pain. From the first page to the last, we see this Orwellian world through the eyes, and the mind, of one such slave, Sandfly.

Nietz had one non-fiction work published in 2003, but this is his first work of fiction. If you are looking for explosions, gore or sex, move on. The author wrote none of that here. This is a novel for the mature reader of science fiction. Concepts such as a space elevator and nanotechnology are presented realistically, but with little explanation. What Mr. Nietz did accomplish in his 301 page novel was to present ideas, some scary others compelling, within the context of an interesting story. I give him high marks for accomplishing that in a first novel.

At one point Sandfly states, "...those who claimed to fear government were the ones who increased the power of it. And in defense of rights, they somehow managed to surrender theirs, blindly, to the worst of those they sought to defend." Later in the novel discussing a time, centuries earlier, when the Muslim faith took control of the world, the novel's main antagonist states, "We struck and then we hid. We talked peace will planning destruction. We used our own brothers' suffering as fuel against those who were more sympathetic of such things. We sowed discontent." However, such thoughts are just guideposts, pointing toward the overarching premise of the novel.

While I share the author's views, that is not necessary to enjoy the book. The comments I sited are sprinkled lightly over the course of the novel, not tightly bound to the plot as in Robert Heinlein's Starship Troopers.

It was only after finishing the novel that I noticed, "The Dark Trench Saga Book 1," on the cover. A quick check of the author's website revealed the sequel should soon be available. That's good because I enjoyed "A Star Curiously Singing" and look forward to the next installment.

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## **C.J. Darlington says**

I should've read this book a long time ago! Great science fiction story with strong Christian themes. Stick with it if you're confused in the first few pages. You'll quickly become immersed in the story. Nietz has an amazing imagination.

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## **Lydia Presley says**

This book was not available for me to check out from my library. It's not available on the bookshelves in Barnes and Noble for me to look through - so without the INSPY awards, I can guarantee you I would have never purchased this book and taken a chance on it.

So thank you INSPYs for putting this book on my radar and for forcing me to take that leap and read a book that totally blew me away.

Christian Sci-Fi - what does that label make you do? Does it make you wince and imagine some hokey story with a message that's dumbed down and beat into your head? And can you tell I've read quite a bit of .. just plain bad Christian fiction? So if any of this sounds familiar, then you are exactly where I was before I began reading *A Star Curiously Singing* by Kerry Neitz. In fact - I put this book off until last because I was afraid of just how bad it was going to be.

How wrong was I?

Seriously, this book was like the sci-fi, Christian version of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. And when I say sci-fi, I mean hardcore sci-fi - not some wimpy fantasy/sci-fi hybrid. This is a look at the world once it's been dominated by a version of the Islamic faith - pushing the boundaries of "what-if" women were concealed at all times and children were taken from their parents to become living "computers".

I was blown away by the story, by the message of faith (which did not come across as preachy, but rather "sang" the glorification of God). Although *A Star Curiously Singing* did not win the INSPY award, it was one of my favorites to win and I'm here to tell you that as a Christian and a sci-fi fan, this is a book worth owning.

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## **Ellen Maze says**

In a futuristic world where sharia law is in place and mankind relies on technology to perform the simplest task, DR63 "SandFly" is about to find his life turned upside down. A 'Chosen One', SandFly was chosen as a youth to be implanted with a device that would allow him to speak to all of the machines that run the planet. Even though this would seem to give him incredible, unstoppable power, it does not because those in charge who 'chose him' hold a controller that zaps him if disobeys. SandFly is a tool who belongs to a master, no more, no less. So how can he change the world? And what's wrong with the world anyway?

I'll leave that up to you to find out. Let me just tell you how fun this book was to read.

As an author myself, I read lots and lots of books. Some I enjoy, some not so much. This book, *A STAR CURIOUSLY SINGING*, is one that I hated to put down and I couldn't get it out of my mind. Because of my work load, I was only able to pick it up an hour at a time, but every time I set it down to go back to work, I thought about it all day. I sympathized and fell in love with the lead character immediately and worried for him as I longed to get back to the book. I can easily say that this is one of the best books I have ever read, and this is my very first sci-fi novel.

A review would not be complete without mentioning the technical aspects of Neitz's method and style of writing. SandFly speaks in first person, and he speaks often to me, the reader. He calls me a 'freehead' (I have no implant, you see!) and through his point of view, I know him very intimately—and I like him! He is such a well-rounded, three-dimensional character that I felt often that that if I released just a little bit, I could imagine he is real and this book is true. I am looking forward to reading the sequel to this story *THE SUPERLATIVE STREAM*.

Bravo Mr. Neitz and God bless,

Ellen C Maze

## **Morgan Busse says**

From the first chapter, I was hooked. The book is written from the first person point of view (we see the world through Sandfly's eyes). His role as a debugger leaves him in a needed but barely tolerated role in this futuristic Islam society. I was fascinated with the idea of being connected with the Internet and all the information available via an implant. However, that same implant also ensures you obey. If you think an angry thought about your master (the one who owns you as a debugger), you get a zap inside the head. Refuse an order? Zap. Wander too far from the Islamic beliefs? Zap. Freedom and enforced restrictions at the same time.

I've mentioned before that one way I rate a book is by how fast I want to get back to reading it (does it feel like homework? If I have free time I'll go back to reading it? Or do I find a way to get out of every job I have because I need to finish this book?). A Star Curiously Singing fell into the latter. Every time I had a free moment (or could make one by leaving the dishes in the sink) I went back to reading. The writing is magnetically engaging, Sandfly a deep and complex character, the storyworld fascinating.

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## **Jill Williamson says**

Review by Jill Williamson

In a future governed by a strict rules, there are two types of people: masters and debuggers. A debugger is a person whose brain has been implanted with a computer. Debuggers' masters use them as a tool, to fix things, to run errands, or to discipline if needed.

Sandfly's master sends him to space on a special mission. A robot tore itself apart and the masters want to know why. As Sandfly investigates, he discovers not only that the bot picked up a signal that proves the primary rule invalid—that means the strict rules all people live by are wrong—but that his life is in danger. But should that bother him, really? He isn't human anymore, right? He's just a machine. Isn't he?

This book is the most unique thing I've read in a long time. It took me a bit to get into the flow of the futuristic and sarcastic voice of the main character, but once I did, I didn't want to stop reading. How much control can a society get away with before it comes back to hurt them? History has proven that people don't respond well to slavery. Yet there are always some who keep trying to get their own way, no matter who is hurt. I found this novel deep and intriguing and totally creative. If you love science fiction, computer stuff, movies like The Matrix, and creatures like the Borg, you must read this. It's quite entertaining.

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## **Holly Heisey says**

Kerry Nietz keeps the fast and glitzy of top-notch cyberpunk without the sleazy and nihilistic. Seamless

writing, great narrator, clever cyberslang, and a great sense of humor. A tad slow in the middle, but wait for it because the ending is killer! One of the best books I've read in a long time.

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### **Joe Young says**

An outstanding story based in a universe where class subjugation is enforced by the Masters by using chip surgically implanted in the head of the working class at a tender age of ten. The society has come together after many wars and is justified by religious hierarchy loosely based on Islam. The working class (debuggers) have an ability to communicate using their implanted chips and access all data that is accumulated defining nano technology, robotics and other smart technology they exist to maintain. An engaging social and physical structure exists that insures the debuggers are relegated to second class citizenship existing only to serve the ruling class (Abduls) who wield the pain inducing chip controllers to insure the debuggers remain subservient and obedient. As in most cases where an imbalance of power exists, the Masters use of the pain chip is frequently abusive and capricious. Change is introduced when a intergalactic star ship receives a singing message from a distant star which reprograms humans and robots. The participates an opportunity for two debuggers to find each other, explore the source of these strange communications from the stars and completely through off their yokes. The worm turns and society will have some bumps to overcome before humanity finds a religious balance. This is a generous creation of a compelling universe where the underdog has a chance to overcome over whelming odds to find true freedom and humanity. The imaginative scenery and edge of chair suspense keeps this a real page turner! A Kendle e'book the is well worth the low price. I'll be looking for additional Kerry Nietz books to keep me entertained. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys science fiction,

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### **A.K. Meek says**

This is the first book by Nietz that I have read. At first I was skeptical at the thought of sci-fi intertwined with overtly Christian ideas, but decided to buy it on a whim. I am glad I did, for the following reasons.

The first thing I noticed about the writing is that it's intelligent. You will not find a phrase such as, "He was very, very, very happy." Nietz (and his editor) took great care in providing a clean, clear story. It did not force emotion, but let it play out through dialog and Sandfly's POV. There is a mega theme of freedom through the book. Freedom from mental, societal, and physical constraints. The bondage (and the will of opposition to it) occurs on many levels in a multitude of scenarios.

The second is the setting of the story. I haven't read many sci-fi books, but of the ones I have read, none of them have as intriguing of a world as STAR. Like other reviewers mentioned, Nietz weaves a world where Islam has effectively taken over. It is interesting to speculate on this, and the author did a great job developing a society with this foundation in mind.

The third is (as I mentioned earlier) how Nietz intertwined Christian ideas into a fictional story that didn't feel contrived or cheap by any measure. My skepticism faded like a cheap Polaroid as I flipped the screen (equivalent to turning a page).

The story was enjoyable and I look forward to the other two books in the trilogy. On a side note, I never thought I would be upset over a bot being destroyed. :)

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## R.J. Rodda says

Way too exciting for a late night read! This is an amazing Christian dystopian SF. Sandfly is a debugger - a superhuman slave - who tells his story with unique, sarcastic flair. He is as mouthy as he can be, even to his Master. Debuggers have an implant in their head that enables them to access and process any available information from the information stream and communicate silently with other implanted beings. This is fettered power though - they are given mental blocks to prevent illegal thought and any subversive thought they think or say is buzzed. Sandfly life changes when he rescues a female debugger Hardy Candy from a group of Abbys. Shortly afterwards he is sent to space to work on an impossible problem on a spaceship - why did a robot self-destruct?

Trapped on a space ship it increasingly looks like Sandfly won't make it out of there alive.

One comment I must make is that I didn't love the dystopian aspect coming from a recognised religion - not sure that that is helpful.

But this was too well-written with such clever Christian themes to be anything other than a five star read.

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## Carrie-Anne Thomas says

To start off with, I have to say that *A Star Curiously Singing* is probably the most interesting book I've read in a long time. The main POV (point of view) is fascinating and different than any other book I've ever read. A couple of weeks ago, I was thinking about how authors write the five senses. Usually sight is the primary sense, with hearing as the secondary one. But in this book, the main character, Sandfly, is different. His primary sense is an electronic one called the stream, which us non-electronically-implanted people ("freeheads") have never experienced before. So it was interesting to step into that kind of a perception of the world.

The story is set in a futuristic world where sharia law is dictated to the tiniest thing: thought. There are Abduls, ruled with their calls to prayer and duties toward "A." And then there are debuggers, who have a chip in their head which works as a sort of shock-collar, corralling their thoughts into submission even while connecting them to the wealth of information needed to fix machines and keep their world running like well-oiled cogs.

The world itself was fascinating. The amount of unfamiliar tech used in every scene was sometimes overwhelming. And the author didn't stop to explain anything—Sandfly, after all, knew what everything was. So the reader was dropped into a world totally unfamiliar, and left to get a feel for it by... well, by living in it. And gradually you come to the conclusion: it's not so different from our world, after all; merely an extreme possibility (maybe with some liberties taken, but, hey! this *is* science fiction).

The main character may have been a little obsessive over the female debugger, HardCandy, but, considering the fact that she's the only woman he's seen since he was ten and looking at his mother, that's pretty understandable.

Near the end, it may have gotten a little preachy, but all-in-all, it was a thoughtfully put together world and a character interesting enough to keep me engaged.

Also, the cover is pretty cool. Just sayin'.



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## Matthew says

<http://vernacularcatholic.blogspot.co...>

It's hard to find good fiction. And by good I mean good. There is a disturbing lack of Christian fiction these days. What happened to the days of Tolkien and Lewis? My preferred genres are fantasy and science-fiction. Good luck trying to find something that is both fantasy/sci-fi and Christian! Oh, wait - I did.

Marcher Lord is a small Christian publishing company specializing in Christian speculative fiction. Recently I read the debut novel from author Kerry Nietz entitled *A Star Curiously Singing*. When the book arrived I really didn't expect much. Some small publishing company I've never heard of, an author I've never heard of, and Christian sci-fi. What kind of sappy drivel was I going to read? My expectations were, needless to say, low.

The cover was the first thing that hooked me - I know what they say. I knew nothing about the book when I got it, but the cover started to give me an idea. I immediately started browsing through it and started in on the first couple of pages - then I never stopped. I put down *Ender's Shadow* for this book.

Nietz has done a wonderful job creating a compelling and richly realized new world. Set in a technologically advanced future ruled by sharia law, *A Star Curiously Singing* sets the mood early on and it is bleak. Slavery, behavior control, a wide division between rich and poor, a strict caste system, and an overbearing sense of hopelessness and apathy. Just what you'd expect in a place ruled by extremists but with robots.

The story is told through some very interesting and different literary devices for this genre. *A Star Curiously Singing* is told in the first person present. I'll give you a minute to pull out your high school text book. The main character is telling the story as it happens. Not only this but he occasionally speaks directly to the reader. This creates a real sense of urgency and involvement on the part of the reader and it works very well.

Sandfly is a debugger, a person with an implant in their brain that allows him to interact with the nanotechnology of the time and with the stream, something akin to the internet. Debuggers are basically paid slaves of their "abdul" masters. Sandfly is chosen for a task in which he must solve the mystery of what happened to the servbot that accompanied the crew of an experimental deep space flight to a distant star. The robot picked up a transmission and promptly tore itself apart.

Now none of this may sound very Christian and that's exactly what I was thinking. However, this is the first in a series and at the end of the novel you get the first real sense of the Christianity in this story ("He stoops!"). *A Star Curiously Singing* is a quick and easy read, yet a compelling and intriguing novel. I look forward to future novels in the Dark Trench Saga as well as other books from Marcher Lord.

I know I haven't said too much about the plot, but that's because I don't want to spoil this deceptively simple novel. I highly recommend it.

Thanks to Karin Beery. Her blog got me a copy of the book and she has an interview with Kerry Nietz.

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## Melinda says

### Foreshadows a Troubled and Troubling World

Kerry Nietz, who wrote this novel in 2007, clearly had visions of a world under Shri'a law, except where high tech was used everywhere. Even the Imam of everyone Muslim gives permission for deep space adventures for future profit and knowledge.

Instead of using societal pressure to control behavior, the masters use chip implants for their technical design and debugging personnel, who are now chattel. Punishment comes from manipulating a collar, or from the implant itself in the form of physical pain.

You will struggle with Sandfly, protagonist and level 12 debugger, as he squirms within his boundaries in a world populated by freehead Abby ( a pejorative for Abdul ), masters and the high tech world they don't quite understand. The conclusion is irony itself; delicious, freeing, not logical but wonderful nevertheless.

More people need to read this book. It has a great protagonist, wonderful secondary characters, a strong storyline and very plausible worldbuilding. It has more in common with old school SFF because of its strong human storylines and less about special tech. This makes a good standalone, or you can read the trilogy.

Just read it, it is free right now on Amazon. Well worth the time.

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## Timothy James Dean says

### COME, FREEHEAD, TO THE STARS

*"A Star Curiously Singing"* is an offbeat, unconventional and absolutely enchanting read.

I love stories - I have since childhood - all kinds of them, crossing genres and periods. If an author can rub words together, conjure a world and people it with complex characters, I will follow him or her just about anywhere.

So I'm pleased to report - I will go with **Kerry Nietz** to the stars.

Fast forward five centuries. One particular religious/cultural group dominates this brave new world. Call them "**Abduls**" ("Abbies" for short. And yes, everyone is compelled to pray to "A," while facing "M").

Well - almost everyone. There's an elite group that prowls this technological future, fixing things. They are the **debuggers**. Unlike their hirsute overlords, the fixers are taken from their parents early and "de-haired" - but baldness is just the skin-deep manifestation of their true transformation.

Like our hero, **Sandfly**, debuggers have an implant in their brains. It plugs them into the "stream" - the internet to the nth degree. This empowers their work - imagine the schematics of every bot at your neuron-tips. But these potentially powerful specialists have limiters built in. Even begin to think something forbidden, and the brain pain crackles.

An Abby master (and each debugger has one) carries a remote that gives him the digital whip hand. Those like Sandfly (and his female counterpart, **HardCandy**), must knee-jerk to the master's every wish in order to avoid the screaming heebie-jeebies between the ears.

But as Sand is about to discover, a spaceship, "**DarkTrench**," has returned from a journey to a far-off star. There, something traumatic and infinitely mysterious transpired. A robot tore itself apart as a result - and an artifact of its memory provides a glimpse into the significance of the novel's title.

It sets off a chain reaction that will spin our hero's life around - and may even transform distopia.

In the nature of fantasy series like **Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings"** and **Herbert's "Dune"** books, "Star" is the alpha volume of the **Dark Trench Saga**. It will lead you inexorably to Mr. Nietz's next novel, "**The Superlative Stream**."

*Come, freehead. Travel to the stars and find out what - or Who - is out there.*

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