



The Golden Globe

John Varley

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Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards, John Varley is truly one of the "greats" of science fiction, comparable only to Heinlein, Herbert, Asimov, and Clark. Now the all-time master returns -- with his long-awaited epic novel of life beyond the great beyond...All the universe is a stage, and Sparky Valentine is its itinerant thespian. He makes his way from planet to planet as part of a motley theater troupe, bringing Shakespeare -- a version of it anyway -- to the outer reaches of earth's solar system. He journeys through the outlands, where thousands of artificial satellites drift, conglomerates of junk and rock welded together to support meager communities of human life. Here Sparky plies his trade, transforming himself from young to old, fat to thin, man to woman, by altering magnetic implants beneath his skin. Indispensable hardware for a career actor and an interstellar con man wanted for murder -- for while Sparky Valentine may have a song in his heart, he also has a price on his head. But his galactic roamings are bringing him closer to home, closer to justice -- and closer to the truth of his strange and prolonged existence...

The Golden Globe Details

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Author : John Varley

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From Reader Review The Golden Globe for online ebook

Punk says

SF. Sparky Valentine, child star turned con artist/actor, is on the run from the Charonese mob. Can he make it to Luna in time to play Lear? Though that's only nominally the plot. Mostly this book doesn't have one. It reads like a mix of Douglas Adams, Terry Pratchett, The Garbage Pail Kids, and Shakespeare. And it does several things that I normally won't tolerate.

It breaks the fourth wall, repeatedly; Sparky not only talks to the reader, he addresses the typesetter, requesting that they stop putting the flashbacks in italics. The extended flashbacks, of which there are many, are in third person, even though all but the news articles are narrated by Sparky, who is in first person for the rest of the book.

And, yet, those things are all done well, especially the flashbacks. I found myself liking this book despite its slow start and flimsy plot. It's all about the writing and the narrator, and I enjoyed both of them.

Things Varley does well: humor, descriptions of environments, technology, neighborhoods, all the details of space travel and living and working in space, the narrator's conversational, flippant tone.

Things Varley handwaves obnoxiously: culture, everyone speaks English because it just happened to work out that way after the "Invasion"; race, at this point no one's all black or all white -- apparently those are our only options?; sexuality and gender, Sparky, born male, has been modified so that he can change his outward gender at will. He makes a point of saying it's rare to be 100% heterosexual, yet all sexual encounters described or even hinted at are male/female. The one male/male encounter is during a production of Romeo and Juliet, with Sparky as Juliet. He and Romeo are supposed to have sex on stage, but his male partner, being 100% straight, can't get it up, even with Sparky physically female at the time. This would have been an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between gender, sexuality, and the mind, but Varley totally passes it up. It's disappointing.

The ending comes with a one and a half twist, one which you might see coming, and half of one that sounds like something from the last five minutes of a Law and Order rerun. By that time I kind of didn't care what was going on anymore because it was already clear this isn't the kind of book that gives a concrete resolution.

Warnings for child abuse, grisly fight scenes, and animal harm.

Three stars. It took a while to get going, but I grew to like Sparky, or at least to be entertained by him. I'll be reading more by Varley. He gives good space.

Nicholas Armstrong says

Golden Globe is thus far my favorite Varley. I haven't read the Titan series yet because I'm an ASS but I don't see how it could beat Globe for a place in my heart.

The main character is deeply conflicted, original, and interesting. As Varley often does, he jumps through chronology. We spend portions of the book in the present (er, future?) and in the past (er, still future?) of the protagonist. What I found most surprising was that I was as invested in both settings. When I read a book

that does this I typically find myself hurrying through one portion to get to the next. 'Okay, Okay, he got beat as a kid - get to the mafia chasing him NOW.' With Golden Globe I was just as eager to read every aspect of the protagonist's life. I can only assume that this is because both times have conflict - I mean GOOD conflict. Characters who we are curious about in the present we see detailed in the past and vice-versa. We see where some of those bizarre parts of the past ended up in the present and I found myself eagerly reading to find out as much as I could about everyone.

Okay, that aside, the world is great. This is the same world as in Steel Beach and from what I know (could be wrong) all, or most of his books. And by world I mean Universe. Point is, it is as good as it ever was. I actually read this BEFORE Steel Beach which I think is the precursor, or maybe not, but Steel Beach goes much more in-depth into the political and economical situation these characters live in. That being said, Golden Globe still does a phenomenal job of tuning the reader in to where they are and what is going on.

Lastly, the Shakespearean nature of the main character in a sci-fi setting was just too cool for me to pass up.

This is probably up there in my favorite books.

David says

This one started out well enough and I thought it was really going somewhere. It had some interesting ideas, both plot wise and Science Fictiony ideas.

Ken Valentine, a.k.a. Sparky is an actor--- or he is a con man-- or he is a murderer--- Well, apparently all of them at one time or another. As a kid, he played Sparky on a top rated T.V. show, but now travels the theatrical circuit either hamming or scamming (my line, pretty original, eh?)

He's got mafia hitmen after him. He's got money problems. He's got mental problems. His best buddy, a Jimmy Stewart modeled imaginary friend named Elwood, advises or commiserates with him.

About halfway through the book we finally get the background through some dreamlike sequences, telling about his abusive childhood, his rise to fame-- and how he taught a certain producer never to speak ill of his father. For an 8-10 year old, he had some really clever scam ideas-- that he attributes to his father.

But the book doesn't go anywhere. Oh, there's a chase scene with a hitman-- but the author seems intent on explaining things like the Science of certain locations at times when I wanted the story to move on. The section of published reviews re: the Kid's programming competition was cleverly but overly done.

I rarely give up on something after 200 pages, but I did with this one, though it had some intriguing stuff... it just kept bogging down in stuff that wasn't nearly as intriguing.

Jeff Youngstrom says

My review from November 14, 1998

Megan says

SHAKESPEARE! IN! SPAAAAACE!

It's hard to tell how good this book actually was, because it was the perfect book for ME (as Mikah told me several years ago -- see, I do get around to recs!). Minus one star for too much weird middle bit, and for not foreshadowing the conclusion quite enough, but a good space romp and overall so much fun. I mean, as far as I'm concerned you can't beat the opening line "I once played Romeo and Juliet as a one-man show."

prcardi says

Storyline: 1/5

Characters: 4/5

Writing Style: 4/5

World: 4/5

I came to this wanting to dislike it. I found myself here because I tend to finish series that I start, and I had already read the first two. I hadn't particularly liked them, but I could give some grudging respect to numbers one and two. That's more than I can say of Varley's Gaea Trilogy, which I count as the worst science fiction trilogy I've ever read. And it is not just that I had low expectations; I actively dislike Varley as an author. There's plenty of science fiction authors whose embrace of the genre seems to be due to its sexual, speculative possibilities. Whether it be Robert Silverberg toying with how time travel can permit one to fornicate with his ancestors, David Gerrold exploring the multiverse's possibilities for radical self-lust, or Larry Niven/Fritz Leiber's/[choose from about a 100 other science fiction authors] titillation at the idea of cross-species sex (and for brevity's sake, let's just leave Heinlein's later works alone), I'm always a little weirded out sharing these (typically older) men's techno-fantasies. The Golden Globe didn't start off quite as vulgarly as did Steel Beach, but Varley's still playing with the potentials of rapid sex changes and exhibitionism. So, Varley gave me just what I was really looking for: another reason to dislike him. So as I settled in to compile a list of what other offenses I could catalog, I found myself in an odd position. I was intrigued.

Initially, this intrigue was inexplicable. Varley's "stage" is actually a stage; he's following the life of an actor - a Shakespearean actor in our future. I'm ignorant of stagecraft and oblivious to the merits of Shakespeare, so this shouldn't have tempted me. Further, there was no plot. Not just at the 20-page mark or the 50-page mark or the 100- or 200- or 300- page mark - there just wasn't an obstacle or goal for the reader to overcome along with the main character. I should have been celebrating Varley's demise, his failure to write a variety of characters to appeal to a myriad of interests; I should have been happily recording errors for my harsh review, listing the missed opportunities that would have allowed him to turn to some recognizable goal. But... I confess, I found I was enjoying the story. That offensive character; well he is rogue, but his disdain for civilization has a lot of commentary on our own. That backdrop of the thespian life: Varley made it bitter, depressing, artful, conceited, tawdry, and glorious throughout the tale. It was a drama. The characters were on a life-path of their own choosing with all of its humiliations and triumphs. That lack of a plot? Varley fills it with backstory, a backstory that seems to overshadow the main story until you realize that the interconnection between the present and the past *is* the story. It really was a drama - a drama at multiple levels. There are different ways to enjoy a novel, and what I least expected from Varley was to be impressed. But there I was, 517 pages later, impressed.

The Golden Globe puts a little more effort into the sequel format than did the Steel Beach, but still, Varley didn't do a good job making this a series. The connections between this and the last were never surprising,

didn't lead up to much, and generally were a wasted opportunity. That said, you could probably read this as a stand-alone just fine. There are a couple of overlapping characters, locations, and events, but it is not necessary to be able to identify them to appreciate the Golden Globe. Also worthy of note: this won the Prometheus Award, the award for libertarian science fiction. I found that I was equally horrified and attracted to the libertarian social/political/economic commentary scattered throughout - the same reaction I have to libertarianism as a serious political philosophy. Finally, the ending was disappointing because it wasn't imbued with the same craftiness as the rest of the tale had been. In fact, it opened up the tale to what I think was an unintended direction and questions, and I would have liked it better had Varley taken us there purposefully.

Mitchell says

This is my favourite science fiction book by my favourite science fiction author. Set in the same universe as Steel Beach (a modified version of Varley's "Eight Worlds" universe), The Golden Globe features one of the most memorable narrators in science fiction: Kenneth "Sparky" Valentine, a washed-up child television star who now wanders the Solar System as an itinerant thespian, not to mention conman, thief and general miscreant. Sparky's wisecracking narratorial voice is easily the most amusing and readable of any I've ever come across. He regularly goes off on tangents and anecdotes, often in the employ of worldbuilding, which never fail to entertain and fit in seamlessly with the narrative; something that was often beyond Steel Beach's Hildy Johnson.

While Steel Beach focused on Luna, Sparky's story takes him from the ramshackle boondock orbitals beyond Pluto, across the system to Luna; a Grand Tour of Varley's world, and one with a much tighter plot than the loose, rambling story of Steel Beach. Sparky is bound for Luna to play his dream role of King Lear in an upcoming stage production; in pursuit is a near unkillable member of the Charonese Mafia, pursuing him for one of his many crimes. This is nothing new for Sparky, who has spent his adult life on the run for a much more serious crime – which the blurb gives away, so don't read it.

Like Steel Beach, The Golden Globe retains a certain cartoony, satirical aspect reminiscent of Terry Pratchett; it feels somehow less mature and serious than other science fiction novels, or indeed than Varley's early novels. It is, however, much more readable, and I feel that this tone is a deliberate result of the specific zeitgeist of the Eight Worlds: namely, they don't have one. Their culture is entirely derived from Earth, and they are overcome with obsession about the vibrant history of the world they lost: an artificial ocean on Pluto that recreates famous historical scenes from the Pacific, movie studios on Luna modelled after the famous studios of Hollywood's golden era, Shakespearian productions, fashions and styles taken from centuries past... while the Invaders are barely referenced in these two books, it's clear that humanity is still mourning for Earth, and that sooner or later a second confrontation will occur.

I dearly hope this happens in Irontown Blues, the as yet unwritten book which Varley has said will feature a police detective and round out the "Metals Trilogy." This is the book I long for more than any other. Until then, however, The Golden Globe is the most enjoyable and readable science fiction romp I've ever read, and Sparky Valentine one of the greatest characters.

Noel says

The Golden Globe is an Eight Worlds novel -- mostly closely related in setting and world to Steel Beach, which was one of my favorite science fiction novels to come out of the 1990s.

Will you smell a whiff of Double Star as you read it? My goodness, yes, you will. On the other hand, Double Star, by Robert A. Heinlein was one of his best, so there's no shame in that.

But Varley does give things in his novel a uniquely Varleyish twist. The characters are entertaining, and the worldbuilding as lavish as only Varley can. (Don't believe me? Read the Gaea Trilogy. Great Stuff!)

This novel is also where Varley lets his starstruck side out to play more than usual, but hey, after Demon, what can one expect.

The plotting does wander a bit, but even if the story isn't quite as tight as it could be, it's still extremely entertaining and keeps you turning the pages. I highly recommend it whether you're a fan of stage, theater, science fiction, Shakespeare or all four.

Olethros says

-¿Podría Billy Wilder haber escrito este libro?.-

Género. Ciencia-Ficción.

Lo que nos cuenta. Sparky Valentine es un actor con unos implantes muy particulares que le ayudan en su profesión pero que actúa lejos de los grandes lugares y, por el contrario, representa obras en lugares apartados del espacio. Y es que Sparky tiene un pasado del que prefiere estar bien alejado, pero un importante proyecto sobre una de las grandes obras de Shakespeare, el autor favorito de nuestro protagonista, le tentará a correr riesgos.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com....>

Kathryn says

Okay, so this book is about a hundred-year-old actor who's on the run from the law, and who travels illegally from planet to planet, taking whatever acting work he can find, occasionally changing sex when there's a part he just CAN'T pass up, gender be damned.

There's also a lot of flashbacks to his life as a child-star (and this is in a civilization where career of a child star can last, oh, at least fifty years), a race across the solar system to get the lead role in "King Lear", and a red-haired psychotic assassin who's after the main character for reasons that aren't fully explained until the end of the book.

I also consider this to be Varley's last GOOD book, before he decided to go with the whole Junior Heinlein style, and yes I AM going to complain about that every chance I get.

Matt says

One of Varley's very best, and the most honoring of Heinlein. Makes me want to go re-read Steel Beach, set in the Eight Worlds universe, but mostly excited for the imminent release of the 3rd book in set in this universe, Irontown Blues. Steel, Gold, Iron . . . perhaps they should be called his Metals collection? Anyway, fun from start to finish, and if you've enjoyed Varley before, this one is a must-read.

Elizabeth Wallace says

I almost (almost!) liked this one more than Steel Beach. It was close. It's all about a wandering vagabond of an actor and his dog, about a thousand years in the future. He's got to get from Pluto to the Moon before they cast the part of King Lear, and he's having a tough time of it, what with running out of money and being pursued by a psychopathic assassin. The usual...

Alaine says

Another fun ride with John Varley. These books are always more entertaining than I expect, and well written to boot. Very enjoyable series.

Henry Avila says

A former child television star Kenneth , the rich and famous, "Sparky" Valentine in the 23rd century is now an itinerant actor, excuse me thespian scratching out a living beyond the orbit of distant Pluto, (on a floating, ugly city, an eyesore) in the future a planet again, worse yet he's a runaway from the law using numerous aliases to stay that way, poor but free not a big fan of incarceration, what the felony was, is never stated . Let's face it his wretch of a touring troupe, of which Valentine was a member...never any good financially speaking or artistically, shaky at best but the audience were grateful for any entertainment in their hell holes... Sparky isn't the star either, the versatile actor has done many parts, men's and women's, with modern medicine not difficult, the stage has changed too, anything shocking goes and does...Invaders have taken our Earth and the native population those that survived , fled to the moon, "Luna", Mercury, Venus, Mars and their various satellites of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus , Neptune, many remote asteroids, space stations and yes Pluto and her heinous moon Charon (inhabited by a ruthless, merciless, savage mafia, the toughest in the Solar System) hence Eight Worlds. Earthlings have made a remarkable recovery though, billions are alive now, since death has been postponed, hundreds of years...that is a problem where to put all these fertile humans...Sparky if I may call him that, best friend is Toby his loyal dog, an excellent performer too, he earns his keep, acting, doing back flips and able to count money at least to five coins. Even after being a fugitive for seventy-one years since the age of 29; yes he is now a spry 100....middle aged by the era's standards. Nevertheless Sparky has an imaginary buddy the good Elwood, who resembles a well- known Hollywood actor from the past , only he sees...call him his conscience not insane . Some unpleasant heated discussions occur when Elwood tells Sparky of his wrongs, he knows, but the former star of the long - running "Sparky and his Gang," has committed many violations , still he likes to eat, mostly petty crimes, cons, stealing here and there if you're kind say misdemeanors, usually from those who can afford it, a new Robin Hood Mr. Valentine believes he has become, forever an actor...On the cold, bleak, strange world of Pluto the artist, is a master of Punch and Judy shows in emergencies, the lack dough , which are sadly very frequent , goes too far ... crosses the line, taking a priceless Japanese artifact of old Earth from a wealthy however foolish woman. She hires or her family does the barbaric Charonese mafia (no offense if you are Charonese), to settle the score, find him, kill him but not before a very slow torture lasting many months, they enjoy the

work and always get their man, (Isambard Comfort, a misnomer, the heartless, cruel, relentless, immortal pursuer, is still a Sparky fan) like the Mounties...the lady ironically doesn't care about the artifact...At last the fleeing Sparky gets the role of a lifetime, King Lear, in a prestigious theater on the Golden Globe, that is Luna...he will risk everything to play... If you think the weirder the better, this novel is for you, fans of the bizarro universe will be pleased...

Alex Sarll says

I think this is the only book I've ever owned with both a mail order coupon and an address for the publisher's website in the back; a perfect encapsulation of the odd position a slice of SF from 1998 holds, neither quite classic nor modern in its style and its projections. But you shouldn't trust that statement too far, and the same goes for narrator Sparky Valentine. He's dangerously silver-tongued, and that's about the only statement you can reliably apply to him, since this actor/crook can change his body and even gender near-instantly with a little attention to certain handy implants. The cross solar-system adventure romp is good, the world-building is excellent, and the angle on acting is even better - but the garrulous narratorial voice is best of all.
