



Living Next Door to the God of Love

Justina Robson

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Where do you run when a world is out to get you?

AIs, Forged beings, superheroes, angels, and worlds that change in the blink of an eye—here is a richly imagined tale of ordinary redemption in an extraordinary world from one of the most provocative writers working today....

Francine is a young runaway looking to find a definition of love she can trust. In Sankhara, she finds a palace where rooms are made of bone, flowers, and the hearts of heroes. She finds a scientist mapping the territory of the human mind. She finds a boyfriend. And she finds Eros itself—incarnated in the androgynously irresistible form of Jalaeka.

But not everyone is in love with the god of love. Unity, for one, wants to assimilate Jalaeka along with every other soul in the universe. And contrary to what everyone always believes, love alone can't save the day. It will take something both more and less powerful than the human heart to save the worlds upon worlds at risk when gods collide.

“For Robson, world-building is a literary device like any other, useful for exposing buried fears and desires to the light of day, no matter how strange the sun.” —*New York Times Book Review*

Living Next Door to the God of Love Details

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Author : Justina Robson

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From Reader Review Living Next Door to the God of Love for online ebook

Simon Brooks says

This book is not for everyone. It is complex and at times clumsy. But I found it hard to put down. The beginning of the books rockets. The style, the ideas, the characters are fabulous. The concept of the worlds Robson creates is also fabulous. The end of the book seems to be almost a different book, an appendix maybe, but one that is not at the END. The way we discover some of the characters relationships with the main protagonist is well thought out, but then the additional info towards the end takes us from this previous style.

I liked the worlds created. Some things were not really talked about enough, so we are left guessing at things like 'Stuff'. There is a lot of metaphor going on here about our own lives and sometimes I felt that Robson was talking about how our stuff in this world (real life) made us who we think we are or want to be - in the book the Stuff is making us, or unmaking us!

The rape scene threw me for a loop. Why? What was the REAL point? Not keen on that sort of thing and I wasn't sure what the purpose was, other than to show us even more what a diabolical person/thing Theo was. Did it need to be rape? I think not.

The way the book wrapped up seemed rushed and not as coherent as it might have been. It is a trippy book on a few levels, and despite it's weaknesses I enjoyed reading it, in fact found it hard to put down!

Nicholas Whyte says

http://www.strangehorizons.com/reviews/2007/04/the_2007_philip.shtml[return][return]I had high hopes of this book. In its favour, Robson explores the questions of individual identity in a world where artificial intelligences are in charge of both the ordinary world and of various pocket universes which can be easily accessed, very much in the tradition of Philip K. Dick. The plot concerns the struggle for dominance between two god-like entities, Theo and Jalaeka, but one that is brought down to the level of their human friends and lovers, particularly through researcher Greg Saxton and runaway schoolgirl Francine, in a pocket universe called Sankhara.[return][return]Unfortunately I really had to struggle to finish this. Robson's high-risk strategy of jumping between eight different first-person narrators does not really pay off; I often had to flick back to the start of each chapter to remind myself who was speaking. This lack of signposting in the narrative was matched by an equally frustrating lack of signposting for the context; it is all very well to start a book with little idea of how this world works, but it seemed to take a very long time before the picture of what was and was not possible in it emerged. I found this frustrating. Robson is a good writer, and there are lots of good ideas here, but they are not laid out clearly enough. For almost the first time I can remember, I found myself wishing that the book had been equipped with a glossary and dramatis person

Wendy says

I think I probably need to read this book again before really reviewing it. It's a dense and complex book, too much to take in on a first reading.

This book is kaleidoscopic - it uses fragments from many points of view to build up the story. Sometimes it switches POV in the middle of a single scene, though usually you'll stay in one point of view long enough to

see a particular sequence of actions through. It does a wonderful job of worldbuilding, and rarely indulges in infodumps. This is a book you have to read with your full attention, just to put together the plot and the characters and the world.

And that is where my problems lie - as much as I loved this book, I felt like there was a lot I didn't get. For example, at a climactic moment, one character says to another:

I told you all this and remade you for one reason only. If you don't know what it is by now, then you'll never know, and my winding down to nothing won't matter.

The character being addressed apparently does know, but I haven't got a clue. And that's far from the only time the book left me going, "Huh?"

Also, a warning: The story features the rape of a major character as a plot point. Twice. I don't particularly feel that it's gratuitous in either case, but I know some readers just don't want to go there.

Compelling but frustrating book. I'll definitely be adding more Justina Robson to my to-read list, though.

Bart Everson says

The themes and concepts and world in this book seem mighty intriguing. I think I might have liked this book more if I'd understood what was going on. I think I might have understood what's going on if only I'd read Natural History, of which this is apparently a sequel of sorts. But I didn't so I didn't.

Meagan Houle says

Oh, but this was an absorbing read. I know why it has a low rating: it's lengthy and very, very bizarre indeed. It's hard to follow, partly because of the unfamiliar words, worlds, and creatures, and it's partially because the author neglected to specify who is speaking before every change in point of view. The table of contents does specify, but who wants to flip back and forth like that?

All this aside, it is a beautiful blend of science fiction and fantasy, that manages to be a little romantic without being mawkish about it. The characters are all lovable and relatable, and I was heartbroken when it finally ended. I found myself unable to get work done, because that book called me every half hour, and that call was irresistible. It's not going to be everyone's cup of tea, for certain, but it was definitely mine. I have the worst book hangover ever.

Kim Zinkowski says

A

Bookmarks Magazine says

British writer Justina Robson first set forth many of the concepts explored here in the celebrated *Natural History* (2004). Critical response to *Living Next Door* tends to be a comparative sport: those that prefer her previous book find this new excursion into the future a little confusing, though all compliment Robson's writing. The slight majority in support of the new book sees the plot as complex, not confusing, and the love story not only believable but essential to Robson's deeper thematic concerns. While not as universally acclaimed as earlier books *Mappa Mundi* and *Silver Screen* (both recently reissued in the U.S.), *Living Next Door* is the work of a writer of "richness and complexity" (StrangeHorizons.com).

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Juci says

This is a tough book to review. I've certainly enjoyed reading it (or rather listening to it), but at the same time it felt flawed in major ways. The characters are likeable, I've really liked Robson's humour, the world she built was interesting (although she didn't spend too much time explaining the different entities, apparently you'd have to read *Natural History* for that - but there was nothing particularly obscure), the plot held together well for the first half of the book - but then it started to fall apart. Robson brought in a second storyline to explain the protagonist's past, which was full of new characters whom she didn't really bother to introduce, or at least it seemed difficult to me to remember who was who. I also couldn't really understand the point of this whole storyline, it didn't really tie in with the events of the book's present in my opinion. The ending also seemed muddled to me.

The audiobook is 16 hours long, and it took me a few weeks to finish (I don't have the time to listen very often), so that might also explain why I've had difficulties piecing it all together. In any case, I don't think it's the right medium for this book, I'm sure it helps if you can reread bits that seemed a bit hazy. Simon Brooks' performance is mostly enjoyable, although there were some words he pronounced funnily - I'm not a native speaker but even I know that 'meme' is not pronounced 'meemee'. There was a character named Valkyrie whose name I understood as 'Velcri' throughout the book, strictly two syllables, stress on the first - is that really how this word is pronounced?

In any case, I wouldn't talk anyone out of reading this novel. It's not perfect, but it has a lot to speak for it. However, I think it's a good idea to read a paper copy or an e-book instead of the audiobook.

Jael says

I read this book a few years back, so I might change my mind if I read it again now but seriously, I don't think I want to reread it. It's not that this book is bad or anything. It's just not my type so I didn't like it.

Paula says

It was a "difficult" book. For lack of a better adjective.

Simon says

A lot of science fiction authors indulge in what's called "world building", imagining vast, complex new realities in which to set their stories. The problem is that the reader is not necessarily familiar with this new world, leaving the author with two options: familiarise the reader with the rules via authorial "info-dumps" - bite-sized lectures on history, sociology, science, or whatever else is necessary; or try and work all this information into inevitably clumsy expository dialogue.

Justina Robson has found a third way: don't explain anything, and hope that the reader can somehow figure it out for himself. Terms like "Forged", "Stuffies" "Sidebar Universes" and "Unity" are thrown around with little or no context or explanation. This isn't just futuristic window-dressing either - these concepts are central to the plot, so if you don't get it, the whole book may as well be written in Esperanto.

Or so I thought. Imagine my surprise then when I searched goodreads for reviews of her previous book *Natural History*, only to learn that that book details a lot of the events alluded to in this one, and that if I'd read *Natural History* I'd doubtless have had a far easier time with "Living Next Door to the God of Love". Yet nothing on the book cover or in the reviews I'd read indicated that it was a sequel or that I'd need to read the earlier book if I expected to understand ONE WORD of this one.

Robson obviously has affection for her characters, who she brings vividly and memorably to life, and there are many powerful scenes. But as for what they're up to, or why...sorry, I've no idea.

Niall519 says

Eight out of ten for ideas and style, and something less than that for execution and plot... I think... Maybe.

This one seems almost impossible to review or summarise, primarily because I'm still not entirely sure what happened in the last quarter or so of the book. It was all chugging along fine until then, with a clash between the 'renegade' and 'still serving' avatars/vehicles of the mysterious Unity; abstract philosophy surrounding independence, integration, and selfhood; and a bunch of trippy SF ideas like pocket universes. There were undertones of the movie *Dark City*, and some of Iain M. Banks's *Culture* novels in there. And it was all good, even if I hadn't read the preceding *Natural History* and felt like I was on a steep learning curve for a while (although I note other reviewers saying that having read the first novel didn't really help with this one).

And then it all got weird. I can't make up my mind if that's just my reaction to it, and a result of having finished it late at night, or if there is actually a problem with the book. It could just be me, and that on a careful reread of *Living Next Door...* it will begin to make more sense. However it could be that Justina Robson's taking the tack that if the work is slightly incomprehensible and very difficult to describe then critics will praise it as a work of genius. I'd be annoyed if it turned out to be a deliberate use of the latter option.

For all the talk of sidebar (pocket) universes expanding at ridiculous rates leading to Bose-Einstein Condensates and heat death, or the subsumption or infection of identities with others, it just lost me and didn't seem to hang together. Leaving me feeling like a scatter-gun full of ideas had been shot at a wall, and that I was somehow meant to appreciate the overall effect when a lot of the details didn't quite seem to run together properly.

shrug Anyway, it was a fun and interesting enough read overall. It's made me curious enough to give her

other books a try.

Elf M. says

I've just finished reading Justina Robson's *Living Next Door to the God of Love*, which has probably one of the loveliest, most shelf-ready eye-catching titles I've ever seen in my entire life. Which is a bit of a shame because the text inside is rather weak.

Robson has created a universe in which a local light-cone controlling cosmic intelligence of undefined origin named *Unity* has apparently created a kind of cosmic crossroads with Earth, creating a whole host of "walking to another world" gates, and there are many different kinds of *things* walking around. Unity's apparent purpose is to discover the underlying *meaning of life*, and people run the risk of being "consumed" by Unity willy-nill as it looks for those who might have the answer. Some of the trans-universal stuff leaks into our space: creatures made of Stuff, and the Engines that maintain the portals and the human-friendly space between them.

Unity isn't completely in control of the universe, and sometimes there are storms within Unity itself. One such storm broke off a piece of Unity, which calls itself Jalaeka. Unity wants the fragment known as Jalaeka back.

The story is about a girl named Francine and how Jalaeka comes to understand that Unity can never succeed in its mission: that there are things that are ineffable to everyone, even the gods, and how he is the embodiment of the ineffability. From there, a massive cosmic battle ensues, Jalaeka vs. Unity, and the story... well...

Y'see, that's the problem. Jalaeka is so very human most of the time. His relationship with Francine is told from each's point of view, with neither ever being clear (or convincing to the reader) about why they should fall so completely in love. They just do. She tries to avoid romantic cliches and somehow manages to avoid cueing us into the romance at all.

Every scene in this book is completely gorgeous. Robson is a writer with a deep grasp of human nature and complete control of a lush and lyrical writing style that never gets in the way of her moving the characters from beginning to end. But the scenes never quite add up to a story. They never quite convince you; they never quite *show* you enough of the picture for you to feel satisfied with the ending.

A lot of people liked this book, reading the reviews. I liked this book. I just wish it had more conviction.

Jessica says

Reading this book was hard work. I made it through, but often wondered if it was going to be worth it. Still not sure.

Chris says

This book is tough to review as it's hard to know what was actually happening most of the time. Therefore I

apologise if any of the information I give is inaccurate or my opinions are coloured by this. I suppose it would be best to start with the basics:

Narrative structure: Robson went for the modern fashion of a fragmented first person narrative without a framing structure. For me this is the weakest style an author can choose as it simply serves to confuse the reader and shows the lack of distinctive character traits in the main cast. Given that she sometimes even swaps perspective mid-chapter for no reason other than to give a train of thought this would have been better served by a third person omniscient.

Main Characters:

Francine: Essentially acts the gateway character by running away from Earth. She has the most distinctive narrative voice but is largely just moved around by the other characters.

Greg: University professor with the personality of tissue paper. He mostly just moans about what's happening.

Jalaeka: The star of the story and romantic lead. He comes across as an asshole for most of the book but seems to develop more complex human traits as the story develops.

Damien: I honestly have trouble remembering who he was, confusing him with Greg or Jalaeka. Apart from being an Aelf he didn't seem to do much.

Valkyrie Skuld: The most descriptively interesting character but the one I found it hardest to get my head around for a long while.

Theo: The main antagonist, who often appears by taking over other people or them being part of him. He remains uninteresting as he doesn't really seem to have any shades of grey. We even get some sexual violence for no reason other than to show he is EVIL!

Rita: Theo's henchman but is she good or bad? She's artificial and a part of Theo but she also questions his choices. I felt however her conflicts were under-utilized.

The actual plot itself (that I understood) never seemed to be the real central driving force. Rather this is a book of ideas and world building:

Ideas: One thing you cannot claim Robson on is being short on ideas, in fact this is what kept me reading. She keeps throwing in questions of identity and how we connect with technology and what does that mean for our conception of reality. Whilst I would have hoped for more exploration of these themes they are what lifts the book up.

World Building: Unfortunately, this is what really drags it down. A lot of the book is wandering from place-to-place trying to discover an answers. However, these worlds areas insubstantial as smoke, so I cannot feel much connection to something or someone that will have completely changed 10 minutes later and we will never see again. At the same time we are bombarded with technobabble we have to be working out what it means and then applying it back to when we first heard people refer to in this way. It makes for a very unrewarding experience.

One final word, without spoiling it too much, I felt the ending was a cop-out. The book would have been improved without the final chapter.
