

Wounded Earth

Sharp Wit Scores a Hit with Allegorical Anthology

By Dheeraj V. Motwani

Aria Kalsan Anthology: Mysteries of the Future is an engaging and unique collection of allegorical short stories, poems, and artwork from fifteen different international authors. Pointed symbolism cuts through three hundred and fifty-two pages of entertaining reading, allowing the reader to interpret the text on multiple levels.

From the web site, “When Earth becomes uninhabitable through neglect and carelessness, the wealthy and powerful individuals of the world arrange for an exodus to the nearby Moon space station to start civilization again. The survivors successfully flee from the horrors of their past and manage to carve out a bleak existence in the immediate solar system. When the inhabitants spread to the center of the galaxy, history repeats itself, and greed, neglect, and corruption sour humanity once again. Only a small group called the Kalsan Alliance carries a message of hope for a better future.”

Although it may seem like a fantastic piece of science fiction, *Aria Kalsan* is really an allegory, which simply put, is a fictional story that tells another narrative simultaneously. The allegory sets up a careful analogy equating the environmental damage and social apathy of our modern day Earth to a dangerous and destructive galactic exploitation in the story. The galaxy as a whole represents Earth, and all of the planets and space stations represent today’s largest cities. So, for example, the political corruption of special interest groups on *Planet Hope*, actually refers to *Washington D.C.*

In the book, it is unthinkable to the newly settled inhabitants that the galaxy’s resources could be depleted or ruined—just as sixty years ago it was equally as absurd that industrialization and pollution could harm our planet. Yet, while the various sides argue about the state of galaxy, nothing is being done to

correct the inevitable depletion of those resources.

The anthology references specific events, or “historical allegories,” such as the World Wars, nuclear proliferation, and environmental deterioration, but also deep emotional characters resonate in the “humanistic allegories”—or stories based upon the elements of our daily lives. Many of the stories focus on the families of Earth’s survivors and descendents, while others illustrate the difficulties of the contemporary landscape.

One of the main characters, “Baron Gates,” is one of the leaders of an aristocratic group called the Baronage—representing the tycoons, oil barons, cattle barons, realty barons, and finance moguls of our recent history. In one short story, Baron Gates manages his personal life while evading allegations about the monopolies of the Gates Barony—the leader in galactic technology. It takes little imagination to figure out who the wealthiest figure in galaxy is, but other symbolic groups, such as the Intergalactic Council, require more careful analysis.

Although it may seem like a fantastic piece of science fiction, *Aria Kalsan* is really an allegory

Cleveland based, visual and multimedia artist Jon W. created the concept and main storyline of *Aria Kalsan*. Along with Paul O’Connell, art director, and Mathieu Diepman, technical director, the *Aria Kalsan* team seeks to enrich the world with social and environmental messages from international authors and artists.

An international focus adds to the depth of the project. Using the Internet, Jon sought out writers from around the globe to fill the pages of

his vision. Diverse contributors born or living in Australia, Canada, Holland, India, Scotland, Spain, and the United States submitted writings about globalization, the environment, family relationships, media monopolies, love, and corporate or governmental responsibility. The message is clearly one of proactive change rather than reactive responses to dramatic consequences, and the Anthology begins that dialog with clever references to contemporary life. Recently, in an email interview, Jon said, "This isn't just my story or from my perspective. This is the chronicle of the entire Earth, so, it is only fitting that the world be involved in its telling."

Divided into three sections, the stories, essays, poems, and illustrations of the Anthology can progress in a linear or thematic fashion. For a first reading, it would probably be best to read the book page by page from the beginning and just enjoy the stories. Each tale stands alone but also adds to the subsequent narrative, and once an understanding of the symbolism develops, the reader has an almost interactive choice in exploring the philosophy and social suggestions presented in the book, by selecting and reading stories in a different order. Each section relates to the next story, but more importantly the stories, as outlined in the Table of Contents, are grouped by theme.

True to its operatic namesake, the first thematic section, *The Adagio of Everyday Life*, depicts the common person dealing with the ordeals of daily life on inhospitable planets and bleak working conditions aboard isolated space stations and shuttles. The second section, *The Cantata of the Kalsan*, focuses on a group called the Kalsan Alliance, which represent a "force of change" in the galaxy. The final section, *The Rubato of the Baronage*, contextualizes the other stories and provides a multi-part story spanning and connecting several storylines.

The book opens with Catherine Grant's lucid poem "Hope." One of the main themes carried throughout the book is a core message of

hope, which is elegantly expressed in Grant's introductory offering.

Divided into three sections, the stories, essays, poems, and illustrations of the Anthology can progress in a linear or thematic fashion.

KD Larson's epic story, "The End of Myth," provides the backbone to the mythology. Larson walks a fine line between historicizing the fictional past and creating a new mythos, while weaving in complex characters and motivations. The story ends as the fleeing humanity spreads to the center of the galaxy with a new lease on life.

Jennie Kermode's existential tale, "All that Glitters," puts a different spin on the notion of justice for a poor, struggling community abandoned by industry. Appropriately, the surprise ending reveals another of the book's reoccurring themes of transformation and discovery.

Rebecca Lin McKenzie's historical allegory, "Pearls Before Swine," allegorically explores the Alaskan Independence movement of the 1990's and the social and political ramifications of Globalization.

"Adore Bettencourt: Balanced Trade," by Christopher Bowes, presents a desolate view of life aboard space shuttles, as pirates plunder a rich cargo only to discover the treasures of vanity.

Mitch Maxine's piercing story, "The Measure of Mercy," explores how justice and mercy exert upon a young boy's sense of loyalty.

Beginning the second section, D. Gail Bellenger, author of *68 AD*, details over three full chapters on the trials and tribulations of the Kalsan in "The Notification." Sensitive writing captures the subtlety of separation and unforeseen changes in a wealthy family as a young daughter of a powerful Baron decides to

join the Kalsan Alliance instead of raising a family.

David Sklar's witty poetry and limericks balances the book with a healthy dose of cynical skepticism in "Selected Works of Kaia MareImbrium". The delightful limericks are offset by the poem "Earth Day"—a curious glimpse at a life full of meaninglessness and Starbucks coffee.

"Across the Void," by Lydia Golden, is a moving tale of love and sacrifice in the desperation of space. Swashbuckling pirate adventures test loyalty and commitment among a small band of ruffians.

Shannon Muir contributes an eloquent and enthralling tale of gender roles and media. An undercover reporter tries to expose the Kalsan Alliance in "Cover Story."

Privileged backgrounds and familial ties strain under the decisions made in TJ Brillig's "Ciri's Choice."

Catherine Grant's "Lady Kalerva" shows that even the Kalsan Alliance—the greatest force in the galaxy—is not perfect. Perhaps the most esoteric of the stories, it certainly gives the reader a lot to think about.

Hamid Daie's "Essay IV" frames the third section and defines the major players and motivations of the galaxy opposing Baron Gates.

Jon's story "Gates of Mars" provides the opening threshold of events for Baron Gates and his pioneering frontier on Mars.

Scott Brinkley offers the darker side of choice as the Intergalactic Council tries to maneuver against Baron Gates in "Captain Sorbin's Requiem."

The adventure takes a twist in "Ran's Run," by Betty Randall, as the Kalsan attempt to thwart the Intergalactic Council's plans for the sake of a small watery habitat.

Jon's "Gates of Mars Part II" concludes the section with a brief finale full of power play and deceit.

Overall, it is clear that a great deal of thought and careful planning in the Anthology makes for a great read. Jon says, "I've worked on the project for three years and have plans for art shows, illustrated works, games, and a musical 'space opera'." The Anthology provides a foundation for future publications and projects, and aspiring writers can contribute to the setting via the Aria Kalsan web site.

So, if you enjoy diverse, well-written, thought provoking collections, I'll cut to the point and say check out the latest from Aria Kalsan.

Aria Kalsan Anthology: Mysteries of the Future available in October 2004.

Mr. Motwani is a freelance writer living in Bangladesh, near Barisal, with his four children and wife.