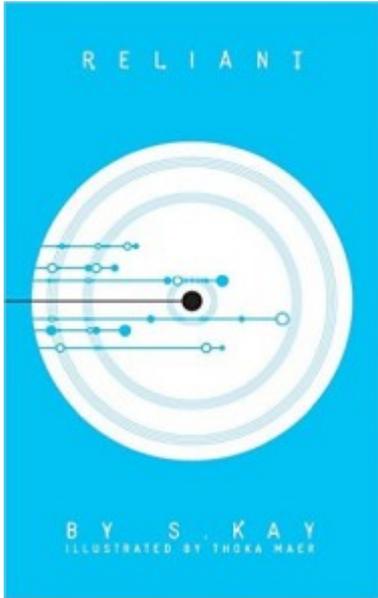


Reliant by S. Kay

written by Guest Contributor | March 23, 2016



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tNY Press, 2015

146 pages – [tNY](#) / [Amazon](#)

Since 2011, tNY Press has been trying to change the way people look at literature. The publisher, which was recently known as the Newer York until a certain magazine threatened legal action, has been keeping the flame of experimental literature alive through its online and print publications. Recently, the Santa Monica-based company released *Reliant*, the first book by S. Kay, which is being billed as “an apocalypse in tweets.”

Even though it’s labeled as “experimental,” the premise wouldn’t be out of place in any conventional science-fiction novel: In a society obsessed with technology, humans create robots with artificial intelligence to serve them and invent devices to increase their pleasure. At first, everyone and everything lives in peaceful co-existence – girls are taking selfies with robot celebrities, robots serve shaved ice with rum – but then one day, everything goes wrong. The robots turn on their inventors and wreak havoc until the only flowers left are three-headed dandelions. And while this may sound like a run-of-the-mill apocalyptic novel one can find at Barnes & Noble, it’s really not.

And it’s not just because Kay chose to tell her story using tweets. She isn’t breaking a novel length story into sections that are 140 characters or less. Instead, she’s giving us bite-sized stories that, when they are read together, give us a larger story of creation, destruction, and reconstruction. And despite the constraints of the form, Kay, who has published many microfictions and “very short stories” since 2010, knows how to make each word count in each of the stories.

And despite being a “bold examination of society’s unrequited love for technology,” according to the cover, it never comes across as didactic. Of course, there simply is no room for lengthy discussions about technology and society in a tweet. As a result, *Reliant* is a quick and fun read that manages to get its message across without moralizing. For example, in “Body Mod,” she writes, “She uses an avatar in the forum so he doesn’t know what she looks like until their first date. He’s still surprised by the unicorn implant.” The complete story is only two sentences, but the last one still manages to dazzle the reader.

As the above example shows, Kay’s tweets can be funny at times, especially in the book’s first part, “The Bubble.” In this part, Kay’s tweets expose human foibles by showing our reliance on these inventions that are supposed to improve human lives. For example, in “Famous Author,” the title character uses a “hugbot” as a “personal touch.” In other tweets, robots are used for everything from picking up groceries to reminding humans to be grateful. Of course, robots are not the only things humans have come to depend on. They use self-driving cars to go to restaurants and get drunk, and then when they get sick, the upholstery self-cleans.

The humans’ laziness, though, allows the inventions to slowly take over in the second part, “Crack in the Screen.” At first, the problems are minor: self-heating cans don’t quite work, sex bots run away, coaching droids can’t be turned off. Meanwhile, humans begin to lose a sense of reality: a man worries about getting his wife, who’s in another room, pregnant; another man who thinks he’s eating popcorn is actually eating nanobots sucking his blood; and a 38-year-old man who has never kissed a real woman spends too much time watching porn. Later, though, the problems start to get more serious, as robots replace humans at work and the inventions they created and enjoyed so much are used against them.

Of course, with so many different tweets, one may think *Reliant* can be an overwhelming read. However, tNY Press brought in Nils Davey to design the book and Thoka Maer to provide illustrations. Davey not only spaced out the tweets so readers didn’t feel overwhelmed, but each tweet is accompanied by the same kind of isotopes used on the cover. (By the way, speaking of the cover, I thought it was interesting that Davey chose to use a background color very similar to the one used in Twitter’s logo, except the bird is broken down into that series of isotopes.) Also, Maer’s illustrations are as strange and minimalist as Kay’s words. In her drawings, colors and other details are used sparingly, so faceless humans in brown one-piece body suits mingle with bucket-like robots. Yet, Davey’s and Maer’s works are connected by the use of circles and lines, showing a perfect integration of art, design, and text.

Reliant is a wonderful offering from tNY Press that proves experimental literature can be both innovative and accessible. Even those who may not normally read science-fiction books will find plenty to enjoy in Kay’s daring full-length debut. Also, while her words could certainly stand on their own, the contributions of Davey and Maer make it a visually appealing package as well. The only problem with *Reliant* is its length: at 146 pages, it may just leave you wanting more.



Christopher Iacono lives with his wife and son in Massachusetts. His poetry and fiction can be found in *Dirty Chai*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Maudlin House*, and others. When he is not writing, he edits and proofreads marketing materials.