

Title: *Stronger, Faster, and More Beautiful*

Author: Arwen Elys Dayton

Genre: Science Fiction Anthology

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Peter S., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: September 29, 2020

Stronger, Faster, and More Beautiful is a science-fiction anthology of short stories, all relating to the field of genetic engineering. Throughout the book, as time progresses, the characters in the stories suffer more as a result of genetic engineering, exploring the ethics of human self-improvement. Overall, the anthology showcases the possibilities, but also the vices of genetic engineering, and displays the double-edged nature of human modification and possible futures of the world we live in today as a result. The first story opens only in a few decades, with a pair of twins who both suffer from serious diseases. The stronger twin is going into surgery to receive multiple organs from their sibling, and they struggle with the ethics of the situation that they find themselves in. They spend the short story full of regret over the death of their sibling to supplement themselves and attempt to find consolation. The second story describes a high school girl named Ludmilla, who has to hide her medical body modifications in fear of ridicule and discrimination. This story depicts prejudice against modified humans out of fear fueled partially by a religious leader on the radio, the Reverend Tad Tadd. The third story is told from the perspective of the Reverend's daughter, Elsie Tadd. After the tragic deaths of her brother and mother, the Reverend has what he calls a revelation and has his dead family's eyes and faces attached to his and Elsie's faces. The Reverend uses his influence to spread the glory of human modification, while Elsie attempts to take his role against the practice. The fourth story is about a boy named Alexios who was the result of a failed experiment attempting to make an embryo superintelligent, which left him with an extremely large head. Alexios is the keeper of a pen of manatees used for human organ transplantation, and he contemplates his freedom in the story. The fifth story is about a boy from California who was frozen after he was discovered to have a rare form of cancer, only to wake up in Russia heavily modified for the purpose of being a slave to mine asteroids for platinum. The story follows his route running away from his slavery with a friend through futuristic Russia. The final story follows a small minority of unmodified people called Protos far in the future, set on a small reservation. When the heavily modified guards around the reservation drop dead for an unknown cause, some Protos set off to the nearest city to find out what happened, and later, to start anew for a new era of unmodified humankind.

The plot of each story kept me intrigued throughout the entire anthology. Each story begins with little context, so you play catch-up for the first part, then slowly gain context and then spend the last part of each story interpreting the message and how it relates to the topic of the book as a whole. Because all of the stories are short, the pace is fast, but not too fast, and the plot is presented in an overall appealing way. This book is appropriate for anyone. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in science fiction as a genre or genetic engineering.

I rate this book *five stars out of five*. The principle of the book was intriguing, the passage of time in the book was impeccable, and the stories were interesting and thoughtful.

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Benjamin W., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: December 29, 2020

This book is a collection of six short stories set in the near future about the field of genetic engineering. Each story is interconnected to the others and set further ahead of time than the previous. They ask how far humans are willing to go to turn themselves into the perfect body.

The first story starts with semi-identical twins Evan and Julia, who's organs never learned to grow to full size. Over time, Julia's organs begin to really lag behind, and eventually, she has to get hooked up to machines to stay alive. Evan is sent into surgery to receive multiple key organs from his sister in order to create a super body. This way, Julia is alive and can move again as part of Evan's body. Throughout the process, the family struggles with the ethics of the process which is made worse by a man called Reverend Tadd. The second story follows a high school girl by the name of Ludmilla. When she was younger, she got into a car accident where a lot of her body was destroyed. She was able to get pieced together by fake body parts but now with the prejudice against modified human beings created by Reverend Tadd, she has to hide her body. When her secret gets out, things turn dirty. The third story is told by Reverend Tadd's daughter Elsie. On a disastrous trip to Africa to protest against modified bodies, her mother and younger brother are killed by an angry mob. In a self-centered action, her father has the body parts of his loved ones merged with his own and his daughter's. Elsie gets angry at her father for changing his ways just because it suits him better and rejects him forever. The fourth story is from the point of view of Alexios, a human-dolphin hybrid who guards a pen of manatees for the Blessed Cure Consortium. When he was younger, an experiment to increase the number of neurons in his brain went wrong, resulting in him having a head twice the normal size and no empathy skills. As the story goes on, he begins to question if he is just a slave of the Blessed Cure Consortium and whether or not he is still human. The fifth story is about Jake, a modified slave designed to work on asteroids. Decades ago, he was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer that had no cure. His parents had him sent to Estonia to be frozen, with hopes that he could be woken up at a later time. Russia, however, conquers Estonia and they unfreeze everybody and turn them into their slaves. Jake and his friend Kostya escape their enslavement and make it to Russia, where they now have to survive in an anti-modified human being country. The final story features Luck and Starlok, unmodified human beings in a world where the majority of people are modified. They are forced to live on a small reservation with the small population of their kind, who are known as Protos. One day, the modified sentries guarding the reservation drop dead for unknown reasons. The Protos set off into the world to find food and discover what happened.

Now, I will answer some questions about the book:

Did the plot keep you interested? - This plot definitely kept me interested. Each short story had a lot of action and a high level of uncertainty. Additionally, each story started in the middle of things, with background information given later so it really made me want to know how each story would end.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right? - I think the pace of this book was just right. Since there are six short stories fit into this book, each story has a faster pace to contain everything. This pace made the book more exciting so the fast pace was good.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for? - I think this book is appropriate for kids in grades 8-12. There is some drinking and sexual content and a lot of death in this book so it wouldn't be appropriate for younger kids. Plus, the plot could be a little confusing at times.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to? - I would recommend this book to readers who like science fiction. But really, I would recommend this book to any reader because this book is just that good.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book - Learn the lesson from this book.

I would rate this book *5 stars*. The plot was really good and mostly easy to follow. It kept me pulled in the entire time and opened my eyes to a new topic. The plot was different from other books I have read of similar subject so it was more interesting to read.