

Fragment

Craig Russell

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Fragment is a wonderful example of climate-fiction that balances the need to hit a nerve with its readers and the hope of environmental change. From the beginning of the novel, readers know they are in store for an environmentally-charged story arc – with the destructive capabilities of “that unknown country” (111), the ocean – taking centre stage. That being said, readers would be foolish to think Craig Russell has not got some surprises in store for his readers. The first and perhaps most significant of these comes with the whale Ring’s narrative debut. Though I was not convinced at the success of this at first, the concept gained traction as the novel progressed, and his character became more believable. In hindsight, this was perhaps another clever move by Russell, as significance is given to the mutual help given by Ring to the humans in order to understand what is termed “Bluish”, the language of the Blue whales, but also *by* the humans to Ring to help him understand human language and culture. It makes sense that reading Ring’s perspective of events becomes more natural and believable as the book progresses. It is not evident from the novel’s beginnings that Ring would rise to become such a central character, but again the success of this grew as the novel progressed, making readers genuinely concerned for his safety with his fight against the Killer Whale and again when the presidential orders are given to eliminate him. He is brave, has the ability to forgive and is open to change and new ways of looking at his world – Ring is a well-formed character, despite being a whale.

Many readers would wince at the line early in the novel: “There’s no consensus global warming is real” (29), which prompts the question: what is scarier, not believing in global warming and doing nothing about it, or believing in it and still doing nothing? But *Fragment*,

to its merit, falls short of becoming didactic. The reason for this is, in my opinion, that it seamlessly blends its environmental storyline with the coming together of the humans and the whales. In this way, it never gets too heavy with environmental discourse. Essentially, the novel is about what happens when opposing forces meet: humans/whales, natural world/artificial world, science/military, land/ice (highlighted in Ring's translation of Nautilus' ID: "Humans/a Ship" (127)). Russell weaves a narrative around the tensions that exist between these dichotomies, often with particular accomplishment. It is the meeting of science and military that became the most interesting factor for me – initially at odds with one another (the scientists on the military boat are called "prisoners"), one wonderful scene takes place in the mess where off-duty crewmen have created a "Whale Study Group" and share "hi-fives and backslaps" (114) at the first transmitted whale-song to Ring. What unites these two factions is language – the joy found in communicating and experimenting with metaphor, abstractions and other linguistic devices – something Russell is keen to foreground.

Fragment is rich and diverse; dealing with large ideas despite its brevity. The quick pace gives across the urgency with which the action-oriented plot focuses, but the novel would have benefited from longer moments of reprise – for instance, the development of the Bluish language and subsequent languages of other whale species. Indeed, the final pages of the novel ended too quickly for me. Russell's imaginative future, one decade after the disaster, is unique to any cli-fi novel I have come across, and I would have liked to see this new world in more depth. Overall, though, Russell is a talented writer with true imaginative power in the field of cli-fi. *Fragment* is believable and unbelievable at the same time, frightening and exciting to read. I recommend it to anyone interested in climate-fiction, eco-thrillers or who wants to see a unique take on the future we are creating.