

REVIEW OF *WASTE TIDE*

History is the process through which events are bleached of their emotional color.¹

This island has no hope. The air, the water, the soil, and the people have been immersed in trash for too long. Sometimes you can no longer even tell what's trash and what's not in our lives. We rely on waste to feed our families, to grow rich. But the more money we make, the worse the environment becomes. It's like we are holding on to a rope looped around our necks. The harder we pull, the less we can breathe. But if we let go, we'll fall into the bottomless pit below and drown.²

A well-written and engaging novel about literal and metaphorical “waste people”. Silicon Isle’s economy is based on processing the world’s garbage; the benefits accrue to the island’s natives, while the dirty and dangerous work is done by immigrants who are treated as expendable and subhuman.

I may not have been paying close enough attention because Mimi 0’s decision to kill the other presence in her head—Mimi 1, the unintended product of an engineered virus—came as a surprise to me. Mimi 1 had seemed fairly benevolent up to that point, notwithstanding her ominous lines about being “only a beginning”³ or planning to “cure”⁴ humanity.

Technology addicts indulging in overdoses of dopamine have destroyed their synaptic connections and become ill with moral failings. In one experiment, the test subjects had to choose between saving a ship full of passengers by tossing a heavily wounded individual overboard, or doing nothing. All those with damaged moral-emotive brain regions chose to kill in order to save, while the normal subjects chose to do nothing. The diseased think of life as some zero-sum game in which there must be winners and losers, even at the expense of the interests of others, including their lives. This is a planetwide plague.⁵

One interesting dystopian idea here is the “restricted-bitrate zone”: as punishment for causing a political incident, the government limits the maximum Internet access speed (and maybe local network speed too?) of everyone living in Silicon Isle.

¹Qiufan Chen and Ken Liu, *Waste tide*, First U.S. edition (New York: Tor, 2019), 51.

²Ibid., 27.

³Ibid., 324.

⁴Ibid., 326.

⁵Ibid.