

REVIEW OF *WE WON'T BE HERE TOMORROW*

Sheer weirdness is often a feature I appreciate in fiction, and there's one story in this collection that I find highly memorable by that metric: "The Free Orcs of Cascadia", in which a music/travel blogger visits a society where the people identify as orcs.

That story is also interesting in that it's not clear how the author feels about the situation she's describing, or what (if any) message she wants to convey. Some parts seem to be poking fun, as when Golfimbul—who killed a rival onstage at a concert—tries to sanitize his actions via circumlocution:

Hellfire: Since when are murderers PC?

Golfimbul: My status as a person who has ended the life of another person carries no implications about my personal ethics other than that I clearly believe there are circumstances under which it's okay to kill someone.¹

Or this bit calling out the gap between the society's conception of itself as diverse and its actual level of diversity:

Norinda told me later that there are orc villages with substantially higher proportions of people of color. That might be true, but I got the impression she said it to convince herself or me that the Free Orcs aren't a specifically white phenomenon. No one (no one decent) likes looking around their community or scene and seeing only white faces smiling back.²

But at other times it seems more sympathetic:

An orc is a social construct we just fucking made up. ... We know it's make-believe. Make-believe is what gave my life meaning.³

Probably the story doesn't intend to prescribe any particular overall evaluation; ambiguity is often more thought-provoking than a clear message would be.

I also really liked the cosmic-horror stories in the collection, especially "Men of the Ashen Morrow", in which a group of hunters must annually appease an indifferent god.

¹Margaret Killjoy, *We won't be here tomorrow and other stories* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2023), 29.

²Ibid., 34.

³Ibid., 46.

And the sci-fi stories explore some interesting ideas, like the self-driving cars of “One Star” which will kidnap their passengers to a police station at the authorities’ request.

My main complaint is that there seems to be a very binary, us-versus-them worldview underlying many (not all) of the stories; it’s perhaps made explicit in this quote:

There’ve always been those who want power over others, there’ve always been people who don’t. The whole of our history is the history of people like you killing people like me, of people like me killing people like you.⁴

I feel like political discourse in the US right now tends toward that sort of outlook. On the left, this takes the form of blaming almost all the world’s problems on cops and capitalism (which seems to be the view of some of this book’s protagonists), and extolling the virtue of *resistance* against those forces while downplaying or deriding the value of persuasion, finding compromises, or making incremental changes. This makes people increasingly ambivalent about, or approving of, violence against their opponents; I worry this is part of a vicious cycle driving us all toward some large-scale meltdown that will make everything worse and make nothing better. I see that trend reflected and reinforced in parts of this book.

⁴Ibid., 124.