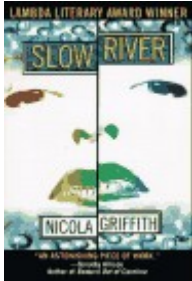




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Slow River
By Nicola Griffith
Discussed February 1999

Discussion Questions

1. Slow River's narrative is non-linear; it jumps among a fictional present and two different pasts. What effect did this have on you? How does the interaction of the three time frames help or hinder the story?
2. The bioremediation technology in Slow River is owned and patented by the van der Oest family corporation. What are the social/political/economic/technological consequences of this private ownership of genetically engineered microorganisms?
3. Why does Griffith set the novel in the near future? Could the story have been set in another time, such as the present?
4. Who or what is the antagonist? Is it Spanner? The capitalist companies? Greta? Lore's father? Is it even a character or is it something amorphous?
5. Why is corporeal control a recurring theme? Examples include the sex drug, Paolo Cruz, the monster and its reality, Stella's suicide, and the PIDA device.
6. From Nicola Griffith:

I first came to this country from the UK for a six week writing workshop. As I flew over the cumulus clouds of the midwest, it occurred to me that there was not a single person in the continental USA who knew me. The sudden sense of not being bound by people's expectations, of being somehow outside the rules, was exhilarating. For six weeks, if I chose, I could be anyone I liked. But then I realized that this hiatus in my ordinary life gave me the opportunity to play a much more dangerous and high stakes game: I could find out who I really was. Me. Not me-and-my-family, or me-and-my-background, or even me-and-my-accent, just me. Without the usual identifying cultural markers, my

fellow students and teachers would have no choice but to evaluate me on the basis of now. By doing that, and by the way they then treated me, they would form a human mirror. For the first time, I would see my essential self, stripped bare.

Is there an essential self? I don't know. It was just as hard to try to work out where an "essential self" might come from, what it might mean, whether or not it could be destroyed... There were other questions. How far outside the moral and physical boundaries of that essential self would we be willing to step in order to stay alive? And - if we stepped so far out that we became someone we hated - would we still be us?

7. Rivers and water are a motif. This is a metaphor for what? Do they come to stand for Lore as a protagonist? For her identity? Why is the title "Slow River?"

8. From Nicola Griffith: "My essay in Nebula Awards 30 was about the evolving nature of the alien in SF. And I really do think that lesbians and gay men *are* the new aliens of the genre." Are the homosexual characters in *Slow River* the aliens of Griffith's science fiction?

9. What kinds of families are represented? How do you interpret the van der Oest family being a multinational corporation?

10. What kind of hope does the novel give you? Is it more of a Utopia or a Dystopia? What other SF works does *Slow River* pay homage to?