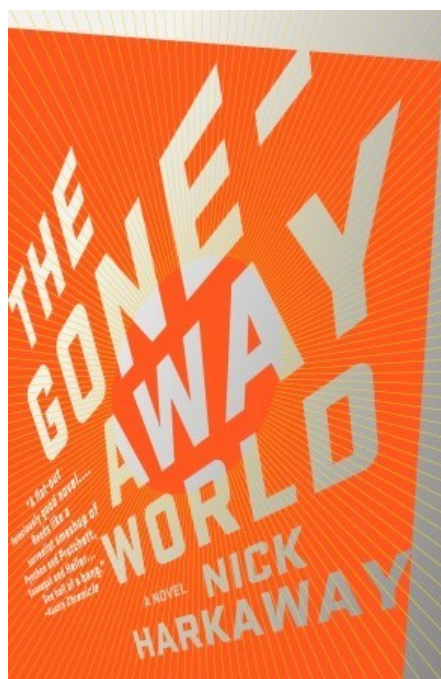




The Gone-Away World

Nick Harkaway

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The Gone-Away World Nick Harkaway

There couldn't be a fire along the Jorgmund Pipe. It was the last thing the world needed. But there it was, burning bright on national television. The Pipe was what kept the Livable Zone safe from the bandits, monsters and nightmares the Go Away War had left in its wake. The fire was a very big problem.

Enter Gonzo Lubitsch and his friends, the Haulage & HazMat Emergency Civil Freebooting Company, a team of master troubleshooters who roll into action when things get particularly hot. They helped build the Pipe. Now they have to preserve it—and save humanity yet again. But this job is not all it seems. It will touch more closely on Gonzo's life, and that of his best friend, than either of them can imagine. And it will decide the fate of the Gone-Away World.

Equal parts raucous adventure, comic odyssey, geek nirvana and ultracool epic, The Gone-Away World is a story of—among other things—pirates, war, mimes, greed and ninjas. But it is also the story of a world, not unlike our own, in desperate need of heroes—however unlikely they may seem.

The Gone-Away World Details

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ISBN : 9780307389077

Author : Nick Harkaway

Format : Paperback 576 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Fantasy, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, Dystopia

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From Reader Review The Gone-Away World for online ebook

Jason says

What a pleasant surprise this novel was. This is a post apocalyptic novel that takes place after the world has been rebuilt up partially. The unWar pretty much has unmade most of our planet and has resulted in uninhabitable areas, and gas pockets that can kill you, turn you into a monster, and simply unmake you. The story is about two men that end up like brothers at heart. There is a lot of Martial arts, ninjas, gun play and fistfights. The writing style is very high and the vocabulary is challenging at times. The story moved me. The characters are very likable. Some major twists and turns. And oh what a great ending.....I loved this book!!!

nostalgebraist says

How to describe this book?

Well, first, the style is *amazing*. Abigail Nussbaum called it "a relentless barrage of Neal-Stephenson-on-acid style verbiage," which is pretty much it. I haven't enjoyed anything Stephenson has written since *Cryptonomicon*, but *The Gone-Away World* reads like what you'd get if you took the old Stephenson (the one who wrote *Snow Crash* and *The Diamond Age*) and cybernetically enhanced him -- made him better, stronger, faster, weirder, funnier, British, etc. (Though Harkaway lacks Stephenson's trademark techno-didacticism.) It's possibly the most *enthusiastic* novel I've ever read -- not enthusiastic in a obnoxious or pollyanna way, but rather possessed of a true ability to charm, an intoxication with itself that is remarkably infectious.

Despite that, and despite the fact that the book is packed with big action setpieces and colorful characters, it's often remarkably boring and tedious. Why? Because of a basic tension between the tone and the content -- a tension that is apparently deliberate and kind of interesting, but nonetheless problematic. The basic mood of the book is a kind of youthful, gung-ho exuberance, a complete involvement in whatever crazy (mis)adventure the protagonist and his chums have most recently gotten themselves into. The book strives to make every such experience feel real, even hyper-real, using its showy prose not to create distance but to remove it. Again and again Harkaway's narrator describes things in the following terms: in *movies* (or in *fictional stories*) this sort of event usually feels like *this*, but it's happening to me *right now in real life* and instead of feeling like that, it feels *this other way* instead. It's a book that wants to distill the experience of thrilling, bracing *impact* -- downing a shot, taking a punch -- to its essence and then stretch out that essence to 500 pages of purely impactful narrative.

One problem with this approach is simply that impact is fundamentally a localized rather than extended sort of experience. There's only so many times a book can tell you to *get off your ass solidier because the shit is hitting the fan RIGHT NOW and this is fucking REAL* before it begins to seem like the boy who cried wolf -- before you start to wonder why all of this fan-hitting hasn't dealt more damage to the narrative status quo. A story in which the shit is always hitting the fan should be a chaotic, entropic one, one in which the usual rules of storytelling fall by the wayside as they, like everything else, become FUBAR. But Harkaway's story, though thematically concerned with chaos (and with the end of the world), is defiantly orderly. In many ways, it's a conventional and traditional adventure story -- Harkaway names Dumas and Conan Doyle in his acknowledgements -- and a proudly cheesy one, filled with ninjas and kung fu and creatively onomatopoeia'd explosions and hidden identities and lovable wise old senseis and crazy Shyamalan twists and romantic episodes that read like teen boy wish fulfillment and video-game-ish chimeric monsters and even-more-video-game-ish fight sequences. And that's the basic contradiction of the book. The narrative voice is the

constant patter of a drill sergeant telling you how *real* everything is and how *this isn't like a movie* and how the book *isn't pulling any punches*, which sounds tedious but is actually wonderful because this particular drill sergeant is a hypereducated mad genius of charm and rhetoric. But before long you realize that the narrative is in fact not real but cartoonish, that a Hollywood movie is *exactly* what it's like (Harkaway worked as a screenwriter for many years before writing this, his first novel), that the book *always* pulls its punches and that in fact the relentless entertainingness of the drill sergeant voice is a fundamental part of the way it pulls them.

Harkaway, it seems, wants to make cheesy adventure stories new again by writing them better than anyone has before, by applying more virtuosity and subtlety to them than anyone has ever thought warranted. And the virtuosity and subtlety really *are* there, but try as they might they can't cover up the fundamental fact that the story is a unsubtle one, high in sugar and low in nutrition, whose teen-boy Awesomeness may simply not deserve Harkaway's literary flourishes. The thinness of the content is only made more clear by its contrast with the brilliance of the presentation. Harkaway is the writerly equivalent of a chef who tries to "reinvent" macaroni and cheese by preparing and presenting it in the most gourmet way possible. In the end, it's still mac and cheese, and you end up liking the noble silliness of the endeavour more than you like the actual food, feeling more fond of the chef than you do of his creation. After finishing *The Gone-Away World*, I felt like I loved Nick Harkaway a lot more than I loved his book, and I eagerly look forward to the day he writes something that fully lives up to his talent.

(Despite all the carping above, I rated the book five stars, because really, how could I not? Imperfect as it may be, it deserves nothing less.)

Carmen says

Everyone should read this book. It is extremely enjoyable and amazing. Harkaway writes the heck out of this book.

I can't really explain to you what this is about. That would be very difficult. It is a combination of the movies:

The Expendables (franchise)
Shogun Assassin
V for Vendetta
Real Genius
Fast and Furious (franchise)
The Karate Kid
The English Patient
Apocalypse Now
Pitch Black
Chronicles of Riddick
We Are What We Are (2013)

Along with the books:

Catch-22, Vertical Run, and, most strongly, Reamde. This book reminded me a lot of Reamde, while still being COMPLETELY different. Which is amazing, Reamde is one of my all-time favorite books.

Add Harkaway's own bright, unique talent and you've got a definite winner.

Harkaway ruthlessly strips away all veneers and performs a brutal yet funny exposure of human nature. This book is filled with truth, but gentled by humor, so it is bearable.

He also has a savage mistrust of government and corporations and this subtle, manipulative thread is woven throughout the whole story.

It's a glorious mishmash of violence, love, tenderness, family, war, and genocide.

You're not being very clear.

It's super-hard to be clear about this insanely twisting and turning 576-page novel. Its light, it's dark, it's funny, it's brutally honest. People fall in love, people die, war is waged, babies are born.

Alright, here's some helpful advice for you.

Harkaway's writing style is the style of old-man-sitting-at-the-bar-telling-you-his-life-story. This is very tedious and hard to get through. Don't expect a lot of dialogue. In fact, it is pretty much one long, continuous monologue which is unbroken.

The book is amazing, excellent, stunning, brutal, and funny - but you are going to need frequent breaks. 576 pages, I could have gobbled this amount in one day. However, you just cannot do that with this book. You are going to need a rest.

Because of all the truth Harkaway is laying down?

NO! Because his writing style is relentless and merciless, and not in a good way. o.O

What else?

Well,... I might as well give you a few tastes.

Some memories are greyscale; paint-by-numbers. If you examine them in your head, your mind hurriedly glosses everything, fills in the spaces with tints and shades. If you turn your head too quickly, you catch yourself daubing the walls to match what you know was there but cannot actually recall. Others are all sensation, all colour and no detail. The living room of my parents' house - in memory - is a cool airy blue, with a dark oak fireplace and modern oil paintings in driftwood frames. It's like a living room cut into a glacier. In the same memories my father is a deep voice from an upward direction, a moving wall of woollen trouser and leather brogues. He is a source of unexpected swoops and presents wrapped inexpertly in newspaper. My mother is brown corduroy and a nurturing spoon. Her hands are cool upon my forehead, soothing my fevers, making magic on bruises and knocks.

How about this, here's an example of Harkaway's humor:

I spend five minutes pottering around admiring Royce Allen's off-the-peg stuff while his nervous assistant follows me to and fro, nodding when I make little noises of discontent and explaining that (while everything I see is of highest quality in all respects) the bespoke work is vastly superior. I try on a shirt. It makes me look like a god. I suggest that it's a little tight under the arms. Yes. Definitely pulling... what sort of thread does Royce Allen use in his seams? It feels coarse. The assistant assures me that the thread is the finest baby hair and angora rabbit, the softest known to man. I sigh. It must be the fabric then. A pity. No, no, the fabric is a cotton picked by child slave labourers who wash and moisturize their hands every hour so as to prevent their

fingers from roughing the fibres. They bleed, of course, but their blood contains chemicals (owing to a strictly controlled diet) which actually add to the luxuriant mellowness of the weave. The blood is as a matter of course hygienically bleached out with a mineral cleansing agent made from crushed diamond and virgin's saliva, which adds lustre and radiance, and also gives the finished shirt the toughness of ballistic nylon.

Notice how Harkaway neatly sidesteps any dialogue in this scene where our MC is interacting with a sales clerk. This is the whole book. This is why you'll need frequent breaks. Brilliant, funny, fascinating - great writing. Exhausting writing style, you have been warned.

Last one:

Fear is an emotion with many shapes. It can be a thing of jolts and shudders, like an electric shock, or it can be like the tendril of cold night air which reaches you in your bed when all your door and windows should be closed. It can come in the shape of a well-known footstep in the wrong place at the wrong time, or a foreign one in a familiar room. But all fear is connected, a susurrus which plays around you in the dark and brushes against your skin, pushes the hair back from your face like an uninvited guest, and slips away before you dare to open your eyes. Also, fear is SNEAKY. It establishes a foothold and sits, content. While you confront it, it is small and weak, and looks back at you with timorous eyes, so that you wonder how it could ever stir you for more than a moment. Turn you back, and it waxes, casting giant shadows and flickering in the corner of your eye, leaning lingeringly on the creaky floorboard. It inflates and bursts, propelling fragments of itself to the far corners of your mind, where they grow again until you are inundated, and you drown.

Highly accurate.

Now, let's talk about surprises. I rather unkindly posted a status update at page 273, saying, "I'm not surprised. You keep trying to surprise me, author (this is the second time), and I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I can see your "shocking twists" coming from a mile away. Two miles. I mean, the book is excellent. EXCELLENT, but twists aren't exactly your strong suit. Stop trying so hard, okay? Thanks."

Actually, this was not unkind. It was true. Harkaway's first two attempts at SHOCKING TWISTS left me mildly annoyed. I saw them coming from a mile away. I didn't MIND the twists, I liked where the story was going and thought Harkaway was writing superbly well - what annoyed me was his kind of "whoosh! I have taken off the cloth! Aren't you SHOCKED by what's underneath?!?!?" and I was like, "No, no, I'm not. Actually I predicted that would happen. So would you calm down, please."

HOWEVER. This is a big however. Harkaway delivers some huge, truly shocking, amazing twists at the end of the book. I think he was looking to deliver three, but (I'm sorry, Harkaway) I saw the third one coming. But the two twists that 'got' me were, in fact, shocking and brilliant. The kind where you gasp out loud in a public place and everyone turns to look at you and you don't even care because you're like, "Holy shit!!!!!!!"

These are the best kind of twists. So I forgive him for the three that fell flat for me. Perhaps they will work on other readers, I may be too jaded and too well-read for some things.

Um... what else. Don't be afraid of this because "it's science fiction and I don't read science fiction." It's completely an amazing read, I wish we'd stop genre-ing everything because I think it's counter-productive.

If you are a hetero woman or anyone who has any sexuality that finds men attractive, this MC is highly yummy exhibiting many mensch-like traits. And there is a tiny bit of kissing and also snuggling (SNUGGLING) in this book which is highly swoon-worthy. Nothing explicit, no on-page sex, but if you

enjoy reading about HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE MEN in the sense that they are a mensch of the highest order, who also treat women right and have snuggling, then this is heaven. Highly recommend if you want a new literary crush. A whole book of a mensch going around doing mensch-like things and having occasional kissing and snuggling is like heaven to me, I was in heaven. YUM.

Perhaps Professor Derek - accursed be his name and his seed in eternity, and may giant badgers pursue him for ever through the Bewildering Hell of Fire Ants, Soap Opera and Urethral Infections - is still alive and trying to clean up his mess.

^^Random funny quote.

Another rather annoying thing is (perhaps because Harkaway is ignorant of pop culture??!!) that he chooses to name one of his MCs "Bey." Now, I may not be on Twitter, but even I can't help instantly thinking of Beyonce every single time this character Bey was mentioned. Since Bey, is, in fact, a rather elderly pirate man, this was highly unhelpful. Phrases like "house of Bey" and "bring me Bey!" had me cracking up hysterically (for once, not Harkaway's goal) as I was picturing either Beyonce or the term everyone uses now called "bae." It was a bad choice, IMO.

But besides Harkaway's relentless writing style, any quibbles with this book are minor. I was highly peeved by his decision to include mimes (MIMES!) and at one point a circus - UGH. So many shudders. I have to deal with mimes AND a circus in this book!?!?!? ANGER.

But given the general amazing-ness of this book I think it's forgivable.

Tl;dr - It is a winner. It blew me out of the water. It surprised me, educated me, made me laugh, and engrossed me. It was smart and funny and kind. It was brutally true but also surprisingly gentle. It was wonderful. I highly recommend to anyone who lives on the planet Earth, or anyone who breathes oxygen. Men will love it, women will love it, older people will love it, younger people will love it. There's no boundary here. Even people who "don't read science fiction" might find this book strangely readable. (I'd say that about Reamde, too.) A+. Highest marks.

Phrynnne says

What an enjoyable book. There is no way I can even begin to describe what it is about. In fact the main story takes second place to the wonderful characterisations and the little interludes when the author takes time off to write almost irrelevant but still entertaining back stories. It is a book where the reader has to concentrate the whole time or risk missing something vitally important. And then when the major twist occurs towards the end it makes you feel like going back and reading the whole thing again with the new information which has just been made available to you. Clever and amazing and definitely an author I will read again.

Emily says

If I had asked someone to write a book tailored specifically to my interests, attention patterns, sense of humor, and favorite writing style, while including a unique plot, unpredictable and engaging characters, and

a post-apocalyptic setting unlike one I've ever seen before, they might have come up with Nick Harkaway's *The Gone-Away World*. Certainly, they could do no better. *The Gone-Away World* falls exactly into a certain category of novels that is impossible to describe. I could try: It's about a gang of soldiers-cum-truckers who are called on to put out a fire in the real-world-sustaining Pipe, assisted by a troupe of mimes and also some Indian runner ducks. It's about Harkaway's protagonist and his best friend, Gonzo, who grow up in a tiny town called Cricklewood Cove under the protection of the School of the Voiceless Dragon and a surprisingly clever headmistress, and get into hijinks that occasionally involve pyrotechnics and college, and accidentally going to war. It could also be about what happens when the world is made to Go Away by dint of a new and untested anti-bomb, and the strange circumstances that the survivors need to navigate, using pigs, some very nasty *gong-fu*, and the disturbingly odd and possibly anagrammatical Dr. Andromas. And that's not even mentioning the strangest love quadrangle in fiction or the tribulations of wartime sheep.

Amid all of the ridiculousness, Harkaway manages to pick out a compelling storyline that is strangely believable. More than that, he is downright *insightful* - not in the profound, "dust unto dust" way, but in a more relatable, everyday sense. Describing horror and disgust: "I feel as if I have overturned a stone, expecting insects, and discovered that the stone itself is nothing but a vast mass of bugs." It's impossible not to know what he means. The whole book is like that - descriptions that are somehow exactly right, but have never been named before.

A review of this book is probably not complete without mention of the twist, but I won't say more than that it's clever and brilliantly executed, and it makes reading it a second time absolutely necessary.

I really can't put enough accolades here. I know that lots of people won't like *The Gone-Away World* (too roundabout, not standard, utterly ridiculous), but like I said at the start, it feels like this was written for people with my standards, and I loved all of it. It's original, laugh-out-loud funny, multi-dimensional, and engrossing. Absolutely recommended.

Good lines: (side note: this book is eminently quotable. Maybe 50% of it would look good on a facebook page, so I'm not even going to try to pull up my favorites.)

"Spring becomes summer, summer becomes autumn, and Gonzo and his beloved part company over her inability to comprehend the importance of muddy walks and frantic leaf kicking."

"Just hearing Master Wu say 'ninja' is like hearing a concert cellist play 'Mama Mia' on the ukelele. Ninjas are silly. They are the flower fairies of *gong-fu* and karate. they can jump higher than a house and burrow through the ground. They know how to turn invisible...and that, surely, is Master Wu's point. He is making with the funny."

"It's like crying, the way wine is like water."

"It takes persons of courage and unusual skill to make flapjacks at a time like this."

"Perhaps Professor Derek - accursed be his name and his seed in eternity, and may giant badgers pursue him for ever through the Bewildering Hell of Fire Ants, Soap Opera and Urethral Infections - is still alive and trying to clean up his mess."

I would love to quote the shrew passage here, but I might run into copyright infringement if I type out as much as I want to. Or bore people.

karen says

dear jasmine,

you and i are so diametrically opposed in all things literary. i swear i am not rating this on the lower side just to retaliate for your not loving *winshaw legacy*. if the truth be told, it's higher than a three, but i feel like i give out a lot of fours, and i think i may have failed this book rather than this book failing me. failing like the way i am going to fail this computer class - i.e. - spectacularly. it had a lot of things to make me respond positively - there were some truly memorable scenes: the showdown between master wu and the ninjas was really beautifully done, the found thousand was another gorgeous part, ike thermite is incredibly lovable and badass - there are a lot of lovable characters, come to think of it. there was just so... much. i'm still not clear about what FOX does to stuff, or how the pipe actually functioned... there was a lot happening in the middle that made for great scenes and images, almost short-stories-within the book that i would hate to not have read, but which muddled the shape of the narrative a little for me. plus i have been drowning in school and stress and mess in my head... there were days when i would go to read it on break and end up sleeping the whole hour on the stoop. sigh, i am so utterly classy. and days where i had to read my computer textbook which means no time for fun reading (fat lot of good it did me, i say) but you know what - the more i am thinking about this and writing through it - the more i am liking isolated elements of it. i think i will give it a four anyway - its not like i am on the nobel panel or anything - i liked this book. there. now i am closer in taste to you, and i can continue my month of dystopian, apocalyptic and other world disaster-reading.

sincerely,

karen t. brissette

oh, and i forgot - to all the people who aren't jasmime - the book is fuzzy!! not fuzzy like my cat, but like the "poochie and slomo" book. so even if you dont like mimes and ninjas and aftermath of technologically advanced weaponry then you can carry it around like a pet. its an example of worst transition to paperback ever because the tp is such a boring cover, comparatively. get your fuzz on!

Jeff says

I read about 35% of this last fall and had to take a break. The writing is extremely overwrought and the story (if there is one) meanders so much, I just never got into it. But most of the reviews on here are raves, and it felt like just maybe there's a payoff somewhere, like at some point the story clicks into gear and it gets good, so I never gave up on it entirely. Since then, it has been the book I pick up in between other books and I must've tried about 10 times now to get into it. But nope, I'm done. I fucking hate this book.

HAAAAAAAATE. It is so obnoxiously written, with such a smarmy 'oh look at me aren't I so fucking clever' tone to it. Every sentence is pushed the the breaking point with clunky asides, digressions, and backwards construction. It's insufferable. There is nothing, and I mean NOTHING, to this book but meaningless digressions and pretentious wankery. It's a bottomless rabbit hole of digressions with no thread to follow, nothing to care about, and no one to root for. Mr. Harkaway is so clearly in love with his prose it's really irritating. To call it masturbatory would be an insult to masturbation.

Amy says

I was initially excited to read this book because I love post-apocalyptic fiction and because the first reviewers of the book seemed to think it was a wonderful work of fiction. The publishers gave Harkaway a little over \$535,000 to write the book, so I was hoping that there was a reason for it other than that Harkaway

is the son of famous author John le Carre.

Unfortunately, I found myself thinking the publishers got a raw deal since the problems I had with the first 2 pages continued throughout the book. I handed the book to my husband, also a prolific reader, and he thought it was as awful as I did. The grammar breaks all the rules. Misplaced modifiers abound. The author turns everything into a metaphor and then rambles on for several paragraphs concerning that metaphor. And the majority of the book exists only because the author is unable to keep himself from going off on wild tangents that may or may not relate to the story at large.

However, I was willing to suspend the technical problems of the book as artistic license since so many ecstatic reviewers seemed to think Harkaway's writing style is groundbreaking. Unfortunately, as I read on, I found myself dreading picking up the book every day. I'd find myself nodding off to sleep after 2 pages and find myself forcing myself to plod through more. After 147 pages, I just can't bring myself to read 351 more pages.

I have a feeling that this is a book that either you like or you hate. I didn't want to be a hater, but I just can't go on. My congratulations to those of you who could.

Note: While I critique both purchased and free books in the same way, I'm legally obligated to tell you I received this book free through the Amazon Vine program in return for my review. Blah blah blah.

Megan Baxter says

The Gone-Away World is a book that I enjoyed thoroughly, yet wasn't excited by. I'm not sure why - it had many of the attributes that I usually love. A certain sense of surrealism, of humour, of a meandering storyline, and threatening things just out of the edges of my vision. Yet I finished it feeling satisfied, but not thrilled. What did it need to take it to the next level? Or am I being too demanding? Is this feeling of deep-down satisfaction, in itself, testament to what I've read?

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Nick says

One of the most bizarre and uncomfortable things in the world: being asked to rate one's own book. I'm giving it five stars out of love. I accept that you might differ :)

? Sh3lly - Grumpy Name-Changing Wanderer ? says

I think this book may be too smart for me right now. This is the kind of book you can't be distracted by. It's very intelligent and each sentence feels dense with humor and world-building and other information about the characters. I'm going to come back to this, though, because it seems awesome. I'm just not really in the mood for a 500 page epic, quirky and chaotic sci-fi buddy adventure. Gee, I sound stupid when it's put that

way because that sounds like an awesome book that I should be reading.

Tattered Cover Book Store says

(FOR THE SHORT REVIEW SKIP TO THE BOTTOM)

Not since "Catcher in the Rye" have I felt that a book was written specifically for me. Not that much is really shared between them, except they are those rare books that brim with complete and utter awesomeness. They were also that exact book I needed to read at that exact point in life.

Upon reading the cover flap I thought I was in store for something a bit pulpy and moderately derivative. This is something I usually don't mind since I am very fond of genre fiction. However, I was pleasantly surprised to find that while getting the gist of the story absolutely right the flap-writers also got it wrong. Rarely have I been happier.

Why read this book?

Why not?

The writing style is fun, yet serious. The characters are multi-dimensional and well utilized. The plotting perfectly navigates that dangerous ground between the fields of literary and (believable? understandable?) science fiction. Unfortunately, this may be a flaw, as unimaginative readers of both stripes may just give this one a skip.

What else, Ryan? Tell us.

Sure thing, no problem.

Perfectly placed comedic gems are liberally scattered through the book, even as horrific events unfold. There is love and war and kung fu scenes never before found between such day-glo covers. More importantly there is terrible sadness and friendship and that wonderful all-that-matters-at-the-end-of-the-day trait called loyalty.

Now, I don't like to beg (not true), but I implore you to give this one a chance. Step out of your comfort zone, grab this pink, fuzzy book and hold on for dear life. When you are finished reading you will approach me. I will nod calmly and knowingly as you offer your neverending thanks for making you read "The Gone Away World".

SHORT REVIEW:

If you didn't have a pulse this book would give you one.

Clay Kallam says

"The Gone-Away World" (Knopf, \$24.95, there no page numbers: too long) has a confusing hero and plenty

of wheels within wheels, but Nick Harkaway is simply too in love with his own cleverness in this wordy, overlong work that has mile-wide holes in the plot.

Harkaway is amusing for a while, and his premise that the world has been unalterably changed by a war that has divided the planet into “safe” and “unsafe” is interesting – but his grasp of geography seems no firmer than his grasp of incidents that clearly involve two people but later are determined to have involved one. The end-of-the-book revelations about mimes and other odd characters also come out of nowhere, but much could have been improved by merely trimming the book by a hundred pages or so.

mark monday says

Kurt Vonnegut Jr! T. Coraghessan Boyle! Joseph Heller (maybe)! Tom Robbins! and now it appears that Nick Harkaway can be added to the list of humanistic, cynical, insanely creative authors who truck in wild & woolly tales that blur the boundaries between reality & fantasy and are filled with enormous digressions, bizarre conundrums, slippery plot twists, and the kind of dark irony that feels like a surprise smack to the head.

>the following review contains the occasional spoiler, sorry<

The Gone-Away World is about a terrible war that destroys most of the world. It is about the weapons used in the war and that changed the world; it is about the psychosis behind what caused the war. It has two heroes - a brave & thoughtless alpha type and his quiet & thoughtful beta best friend - and their past lives (a lot of their past lives), growing up & going to school & joining the military & falling in love. It is about the nature of friendship. It is about identity. It is about conformism & corporatization and the relationship between those two things. It has ninjas & mimes & dreams made real. It has an absolutely stunning twist that comes about two-thirds of the way through the book, the kind of wonderfully mind-boggling twist that forces the reader to re-evaluate everything that has come before. It is a book that often flirts with brilliance - when it is not too busy being remarkably tangential and self-indulgent.

The book is not for everyone. Well, what book is? If you are familiar with the authors I mentioned above, then you will be familiar with its particular sort of tone. The voice is *jokey*. Aggressively loopy and lighthearted, even during brutal scenes. It can be somewhat hard to take over an extended period of time - and this is a long book. And then there are the digressions.

- I'm a digressive person. I think it is a part of my charm (oh and I got lots of that) but I also know that it is something that confounds and sometimes annoys people. Me and my tangents and my little jokes. I see that glassy look in the eye that some people get when I go off and into the blue. Most people just don't even get what I'm talking about, they just wait til I'm finished and then get back to what we were talking about because who has the time to figure out all of my references? One night during a council meeting break I was talking to a fellow council member about Doctor Who and how much we love that show. When I reconvened the meeting there was a motion to eliminate some funding for a program deemed redundant; I responded by saying "Exterminate! Exterminate!" in a robotic voice. Clearly this was a tribute to Doctor Who's robotic villains the Daleks as well as a subtle critique of the council's bloodthirsty need to eliminate funding. But everyone had that glassy look in their eyes as I tried to explain, including - horribly - that one council member who was a fellow Doctor Who fan. Sigh.

But back to the book. The Gone-Away World: not for everyone. Readers who are automatically attracted to

the plot synopsis (futuristic society, futuristic war, futuristic weapons... dreams made real, bizarre monsters, ninjas...) may find themselves trapped in a book that is distinctly *not* a genre novel and probably should not be considered as straight-up science fiction or fantasy. So, genre readers, beware. You may not find what you are looking for and you may end up being frustrated, bored, and wishing you had embarked on a different journey. Trust me, I've seen the aggravated reviews! So consider yourself warned. This is not a scifi novel filled with robots, speculative science, etc. And then of course, to potentially frustrate you further, there are the digressions.

- There have been quite a few people in my life who have named me Best Friend. There was Marc in South Bend; hey, he was also my first love. There was John and Michelle in Virginia Beach; fortunately there was no rivalry because we were all best friends together. There's Marcy in Orange County; we shared a love of acerbic put-downs & arguing & of course our inherently queer nature. There was J-P and Ian in San Diego; unfortunately in this case there was a rivalry and the two detested each other - which was awkward because we all lived together in one tiny apartment. Sorta funny to contemplate because J-P is rather *flaming* while Ian is resolutely straight. Were they competing for my bisexual soul? Since then there's Brian, Steve, Scott, Jill, and Graham. Is there a common thread to all these close friends? I suppose one thread may be that those friends were both similar to me yet completely different. We complemented each other in important ways. I was assertive to John's inwardness, calm to Marcy's anger, an anchor to J-P's flights of fancy, John Waters to Ian's Barry Levinson (hello, Baltimore), a balance to Steve's chaos, and now a terminal nerd to Graham's timeless cool guy. Oh, Graham. Will Rachel read this review and report back? I sure hope not. Skip this review, Rachel.

But back to the book. I'm reminded that one of the things that really appealed to me was its contemplation of friendship. This is a truly sweet-natured novel and its thoughts on the nature of 'best friends' are likewise sweet. I don't know if Harkaway is exactly saying that best pals complement each other in a yin & yang way - and the crazy twist of the book actually rather undercuts that idea. But it is a fetching concept and I really responded to it on a personal level. I also responded to its ongoing take on How to Avoid Being a Part of the Machine.

- I was a part of the Machine! I worked for AIG! I fooled myself into thinking that it didn't really matter due to the fact that I also lived in a really counterculture world and had crazy anarchist thoughts and demonstrated and went to jail for my beliefs and was a queer radical and etc etc etc. I fooled myself into thinking that as long as I thought differently from my AIG cohorts that I wasn't really like them, not at all, no way. But that was nonsense. I may have thought differently but I was still a cog in the machine. Actions are what count and my actions were those of a cog. Happily, I grew up and got the fuck out of Dodge, goodbye AIG, fuck you corporate culture.

The Gone-Away World's contempt for conformist thought and corporate culture is beyond withering. The whole novel acts as a ferocious assault on both. That ferocity and the constancy of Harkaway's critiques - filtered through the novel's resolutely cheery, goofy absurdism, so don't think this is some kind of angry political tract - are both a strength and a weakness. The weakness: Harkaway has picked such an exceedingly *easy* target that at times it gets a bit much. A bit drop-out-of-society/hippy dippy/Fuck The Man/etc. A bit eye-rolling. Or maybe I just have a knee-jerk reaction to easy targets.

But it is also a real strength. Harkaway is super clever and his frontal assault on conformism goes in many surprising and thought-provoking directions. At one point the terrible changes that can happen when being exposed to Gone-Away weapons are paralleled to the gradual change a cog in the machine can go through as they slowly lose their individuality and empathy to the bottom line and to being safe in the company of like-minded people. People can turn into monsters in different kinds of ways, in books and out of them. I really feel that idea. Also, ninjas are inherently conformist! At some level, I always knew that. Stupid conformist ninjas, ugh, they're the worst.

Anyway, fun book! It's a head trip and an adventure and it also hates conformism, so what's not to like? It is also hella digressive but hey I'm not the sort who really minds that.

Plus a plush pink cover that is really cool and original and velvety to the touch! Not sure the texture of the cover has anything to do with the novel but maybe I'm missing something. I really like the feeling of that cover. It would be sorta neat to have a bed cover made of that material. Except not pink. And maybe not for my bed. I'm not sure if that would make my cat very happy as it's not a very cat-friendly texture. But what is a cat-friendly texture? I suppose something that feels like a cat post. Ah, cats. I love cats! I wonder what my cat is doing now. Digsy, where are you? I love Digsy. Such a sweet cat.

Nancy says

Way back in 2008, Nick Harkaway published his first novel, *The Gone-Away World*. This coming January his newest novel, *Gnomon*, will be available in the U.S., although it'll be available in Great Britain in November and I'm seriously considering ordering it from there, since I don't think I can wait until January. Until then, though, I'm thinking I might reread all three of his previous novels, all of which I loved. But my favorite remains *The Gone-Away World*.

There are some books that are relatively easy for me to review: I offer a sentence or two of the plot, describe, in more detail, a character or two, talk about what it was about the book that kept me reading, maybe compare it to another book, and voila! there you have it. With *The Gone-Away World*, I can't do any of those things because I want each reader to discover the joys of this outstanding first novel for themselves, without prejudice, as it were. I don't want to reveal any plot details because they're so cleverly laid out; except to say that you'll probably find the book in the science fiction section of the library; I don't want to mention the characters in anything but the most general way, so I'll just say that they're mostly sympathetic and always three-dimensional. The setting is a post-apocalyptic world – it's okay to tell you that. And I can tell you that there's a spectacular plot twist that totally changes the way you read the book. (As a result, I suspect that you'll want to go back to the beginning and reread it, just as I did, looking for the clues that Harkaway helpfully planted for us but that we didn't understand were clues at the time.) Reading *The Gone-Away World*, I was reminded of the narratively complex fiction by his father, John Le Carré, Neal Stephenson; a lot of military science fiction, including Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War*; Sylvia Nasaw's *A Beautiful Mind* (or perhaps the movie made from it); Robert Heinlein; Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*; and Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*. (I'm sure there were other influences I simply didn't catch.) Now, I've never met Nick Harkaway (though we are friends on Facebook), so I don't know if in fact he's read (or enjoyed) any of these, but as I was reading *The Gone-Away World*, echoes of all of them came to mind. What I can say is that if you're looking for an inventive, intelligent, rousing, and simply all-around terrific novel, read Nick Harkaway's *The Gone-Away World*.

Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com:]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

When I first heard about Nick Harkaway's rambunctious new novel *The Gone-Away World*, I was so excited that I put a special reserve on it at my local library, something I rarely ever do (I instead like having the randomness of my library's "new release" shelf partly decide what books I review here, which I feel is closer

to the way that most of CCLaP's readers discover new books too); and the reason I was so excited was that the book sounded like it was right up my alley, a smart and lengthy black comedy about a teabagger-caused apocalypse and its Mad Max aftermath, from an academically respected writer my age who has been called "breathtakingly original" by no less than William Gibson. Ah, but then I started reading it, and realized that the book is a classic example of the ol' academe bait-and-switch scam, where a novel is sold as a genre actioner but then ends up being talky and pointless; you know, kind of like if you picked up a crime novel that in its first few chapters establishes a horrific serial killer, but then spends the rest of the book watching the serial killer take a cross-country trip on a Greyhound bus while pensively staring out the window thinking about his complicated relationship with his father. That might turn out to be a fine book, don't get me wrong, but if I deliberately pick up a novel about serial killers, *there better f-cking well be some serial killing*; and that's exactly how I felt about this disappointing "science-fiction" book as well, one that starts out great but then quickly devolves into endless overwritten digressions about kung-fu moral lessons and childhood friendships and the like. A profound letdown, and not recommended at all.

Out of 10: 4.3

Katy says

Disclosure: I received this book through the Amazon Vine program in exchange for an honest review. I read and reviewed this book in September of 2008.

My synopsis: The narrator of *The Gone-Away World* - whose name we are never told - takes us on a wildly entertaining trip through his life and how it intersects with the rest of the world when a new weapon has unspeakable consequences. Often laugh-out-loud hilarious we are taken on a tour of his past until, a bit over half-way through the book, a strange twist takes place and the story becomes a good bit darker. I can't even give a hint about this twist or I'll ruin it for you, so I won't go any further into that. There is also a sub-plot having to do with ninjas and mimes that I never even saw coming.

My Thoughts: I have noted this as a work of military science fiction, since a good bit of the story takes place while the narrator is in the military. This should not turn off people who aren't necessarily fans of military science fiction - this is an astonishingly good book and I can recommend it to anyone who enjoys off-beat humour (a la *Good Omens*) and a good story. Don't miss this one!

paula says

DAG. Nick Harkaway is well into his third pint and his eleventh story when he looks around and realizes he's got half the bar hanging on his every word, and THAT's when he leans back a little, stretches his legs, and gives you a three-page backstory on a minor idiot whose chief role in the book is getting punched in the head. Because, and this is a rule, so pay attention: punching an idiot in the head is funny, not to mention satisfying, but the road that an idiot travels on his way to getting punched is Pure Comic Gold.

If *The Gone-Away World* were "merely" funny, it would be worth reading. But, oh, it's not. There is good stuff here about humanity, identity, and friendship. Jiminy Cricket is invoked. And there's a vividly imagined world, two, really, a Before and an After. There are characters that will put you in mind of Heinlein, Terry Pratchett, and various (good) comic books.

I read this book so hard that my arm cramped up, and it is still sore.

Ben Babcock says

The genius of *The Gone-Away World* sneaks up on you in a loud and bombastic way. Nick Harkaway's writing reminds me two Douglasses who are masters of the absurd and apocalyptic: Douglas Coupland and Douglas Adams. Sardonic and observant, Harkaway tosses off scene after scene of unrelenting zany fun. Yet when the smoke clears and the score is tallied, *The Gone-Away World* is ultimately, like JPod or The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, about what it means to be human.

The title of the book comes from the most terrible superweapon ever invented, the "Go-Away Bomb." When deployed, the bomb makes *information* instantly cease to exist. Unfortunately, a side-effect of going away is the creation of nebulous "Stuff", which responds to random thoughts and memories in a person's mind and makes those thoughts real. The result: mutants, monsters, and even entirely "new" people made real by Stuff. When multiple countries deploy Go-Away bombs in a fantastic feat of mutually-assured destruction, the Gone-Away World begins.

After a brief opening chapter set in the book's present, the story jumps into the past and covers events from the narrator's childhood up until the beginning of the book. While this narrative tactic results in almost exclusively entertaining events, it really only makes sense after the massive mind-screw plot twist toward the end of the book. About halfway through this section of the book, I started getting bored, because I was wondering when the first chapter would become relevant again. Then the plot twist made it all worth it.

It's the sort of plot twist that would ordinarily be a horrible device; Harkaway manages to pull it off because it actually makes the book make *more* sense. What was, up until that point, seemingly an exercise in random autobiographical anarchy becomes relevant to both the plot and *The Gone-Away World*'s chilling themes about dehumanization in the face of bureaucracy. And here Harkaway shows why he's on the level of Douglas Adams. Adams was an extremely funny writer who managed to produce scathing satires of British bureaucracy (think Vogons). Harkaway does the same with his massive Jorgamund Corporation, and he also manages to throw in ninjas and mimes for good measure! Like Adams, his humour subtly reinforces the book's themes.

What themes? As mentioned above, much of *The Gone-Away World* attacks bureaucracy. The major antagonist is what the protagonist terms a "type A pencil-neck": "a person so entirely consumed by the mechanism in which he or she is employed that they had ceased to exist as a separate entity". The book goes on to explore how some people use cognitive dissonance to keep their humanity intact in dehumanizing lines of work, whether they are appallingly destructive or just mindlessly tedious. *The Gone-Away World* isn't merely about retaining one's humanity in the face of external threats like Stuff; it's a cautionary tale about unintentionally sacrificing one's humanity in the name of doing good.

I *like* it when I read a book that's obviously well planned, where each piece of the narrative supports the others. I *love* it when I don't realize how well-planned a book is until a sudden reveal near the end. As long as the journey along the way is enjoyable, it's a much more rewarding experience. *The Gone-Away World* is unquestionably a long, rambling story. But it all comes together in the end. There are Crowning Moments of Awesome and genuine moments of peril for the protagonist, moments when you wonder how he could possibly win against the odds.

Carol. says

It is probably good for both of us that GR reviews have a character limit. For me, so there is a limit on my copyright violations. For you, so you won't have to read every line that I found amazing, remarkable, thoughtful, or funny. It took me two reads to compile my thoughts on The Gone-Away World, and I'm not sure we're done with each other yet. It's one of those kinds of books that offers more each time through. Not the lull of a comforting, familiar read, but the folds of the "ah-ha!" kind of plotting, the thoughtful "oh yes!" of appreciation, and the generating of fanciful ideas.

Harkaway's ability with word choice, not quite absurdist, but at the far limits of possibility, knocks me out. It's silly and irreverent: **"It will be a useful study aid in my newly chosen specialist field of getting-the-fuck-out-of-here-olgy"** (p.229)

Then, just when it reaches the limits, the reader/narrator realizes the situation is serious and the irony is washed away, resulting in a powerful emotional exposure and, sometimes, a sad transition to disaster. For instance, there's an ongoing bit about the narrator's girlfriend in college who was physically *stimulated* by their rebellion. It was funny (**"we all but wear out the oppressive manacles of the state oppressor and it's getting to the point where we'll have to pinch some new ones"**) right until it's brought back home in a way that illuminates the self-delusion (in this case, with real oppression): **"This place does not feel like my country. It feels like countries I have read about where things are very bad. It feels, in fact, like exactly the kind of thing we were protesting against, but we thought it was elsewhere. It is not heartening to find that it has come to us"** (p.105)

Harkaway's metaphors come through in the strangest places, but are all the more delightful for the oddity. There's a prolonged hot spell and Gonzo's father's bees are keeping the hive cool by fanning their wings and laboriously flying in water droplets: **"Air conditioning by slave labour, if you believe that a hive is run by an autocrat, but Old Man Lubitsch has long ago explained that the Queen is an asset, cherished and nurtured but not obeyed, and that the hives are a functioning biological machine. He cannot decide if they represent an eerie social harmony or a grim nightmare of mechanistic subservience to a purposeless and endlessly repeating pattern"** (p.54).

Or thoughts on fighting an endless war:

"We were, in other words, screwed. But we were on top of the situation. We knew we were screwed, and we had chosen the manner of our screwedness. We understood it and to that extent we controlled it. It was like the Nuclear Threat--while it was going on, we didn't have to think about any other kinds of screwed we might be" (p.257)

He does this over and over again, and then when you feel you might be hitting some sort of ironic, comedic overload (think three or four hours of The Daily Show), he throws in an emotional connection that reminds us these characters are also *human*.

For instance, in the middle of an escape with the Special Forces crew and a few ancillary staff, the team takes a moment: **"A brief council of war is convened, during which everyone takes turns to hold Egon, because he is shaking and needs to be loved, and we are leaving no one behind, not physically and not spiritually, because we are who we are and that is how we're going to stay"** (p.231).

There is a powerful motif of identity running through, and the identity we have as *people* versus the identity we have in *roles*, whether chosen or foisted upon us. One of the most moving and ambivalent sections of this dealt with George Copsen, the father of one of Gonzo's admirers, and a member of the military:

"He lifts the red telephone and says: 'Copsen.' Someone on the other end speaks, firmly and simply. General George either grows older or grows colder; it happens to him from within like a tall building being demolished or flowers growing in fast motion, and I realise he is making himself into the cog, rather than the man" (p.188). The ultimate outcome of this theme via the mechanism of the Stuff, was downright amazing. I was astonished.

What elevates it beyond a discourse on human nature/civilization is the astonishing concept of the Go-Away Bomb, and it's fallout, the Stuff. (view spoiler) And there is for me, the moral of the story, the philosophical underpinning; the idea of forming and creation from ideas, for what else happens when people meet Stuff, but ideas become almost-real? And what is reality, except our perception of things, our assumptions? And if the nightmares and dreams aren't *quite* real, well they do exist in our heads, and in our emotions, our perceptions and our reactions, so that they are, in some ways, real *enough*.

As I said, it's that kind of a book.

Everything in this book is so very quotable--I have a sticky note filled with partial quotes and page references. It's slightly blurry, of course, from dropping it in the bath, but still legible. Mostly. But I love Harkaway's social commentary. It's funny in that wry way, when something is unfortunately true (the corporate Pencilneck), funny in that gross way (a derriere shaped stain on the pool table that implies unauthorized activities), and funny in that oddball way such as exploring identity issues through a troupe of mimes, and a group of circus travelers named 'K.'

It misses five stars because some significant editing could have tightened it up and broadened its appeal (much like this review). The second time through I can appreciate foreshadowing (view spoiler) I can see where it got lost before; I was distracted and enjoying the Pencilneck B through M metaphor, and lost the actual plot point. But it was there. It's the type of thing that editing around it could have given it a little more importance, and likely made the impact a little more profound.

One of the book groups I'm in read it for a monthly read, and it was rather disappointing how many readers felt they were forcing themselves to through it, even as they appreciated sections. No need to throw every thought into your book, Harkaway; save some for the next time. On re-read, a mere forty pages in I can see where it could have been trimmed already. A paragraph here, a paragraph there, sections musing on someone's life/death that the narrator is only speculating on. Less can be more; it could have given more prominence to the plot and world-building and evened the pace. After a leisurely pace through childhood, adolescence and college, the grande finale and confrontation seemed rather tacked on.

That said, I found myself alternatively smiling, snickering, tense and moved when reading. In the final Carol-mark of greatness, I believe it deserves a spot in my physical library, and I'm looking forward to giving Angelmaker a try. Four-and-a-half imaginary stars.

Cross posted at my blog: <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2013/0...>