



Impersonations

Walter Jon Williams

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Nebula Award-winning author Walter Jon Williams returns to the sweeping space opera adventure of his Praxis universe with an exciting new novel featuring the hero of *Dread Empire's Fall*!

Having offended her superiors by winning a battle without permission, Caroline Sula has been posted to the planet Earth, a dismal backwater where careers go to die. But Sula has always been fascinated by Earth history, and she plans to reward herself with a long, happy vacation amid the ancient monuments of humanity's home world.

Sula may be an Earth history buff, but there are aspects of her own history she doesn't want known. Exposure is threatened when an old acquaintance turns up unexpectedly. Someone seems to be forging evidence that would send her to prison. And all that is before someone tries to kill her.

If she's going to survive, Sula has no choice but to make some history of her own.

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Impersonations Details

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From Reader Review Impersonations for online ebook

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

First off, I have to just mention how amazing these Tor.com novellas are. Obviously, some I have enjoyed more than others, but every one of those I have had the pleasure to read have been excellent introductions to the authors, and I, for one, am so glad these novellas are available for those of us who have limited reading time. Hopefully, the people at Tor.com will keep them coming.

Okay, with that gushing out of the way, I have to admit never having experienced any of the *Dread Empire's Fall* novels or any other work penned by Walter Jon Williams. That meant I went into this read of the returning character Caroline Sula with no preconceived notions one way or another. But after finishing it, I have to say that *Impersonations* was among the best novellas I have read; Walter Jon Williams crafting an amazing narrative with an intriguing plot, which is detailed, engaging, and intriguing, while also spending time molding mesmerizing characters, who are complex and unique. All in all, this was a sci-fi space opera tale which succeeded in every way.

The story revolves around war hero, Caroline Sula, who finds herself sent to a dead end military post on a backwater world called Earth. Usually, this assignment is reserved for those who have done something very embarrassing, not the typical reward a war hero expects after saving the Shaa civilization from destruction by the Naxid.

But Sula takes it all in stride. She knows she has been sent to Earth for one reason: Her success upset some important people, and so they have gotten her out of the way to hide their failures. Her natural desire to do her best in any situation outweighing any slight she feels by her banishment. (The fact that Sula's ancestors originated on Earth and that she herself is passionate about ancient Terran History does help ease her pain somewhat.) Quickly, though, she finds her active governance causing her to butt heads with a powerful company engaged in some mysterious and quasi-illegal activities. This conflict turning ugly rapidly.

If that isn't enough, the story adds yet another distinct flavor: Sula being revealed as a very paranoid individual, who is desperately afraid a secret from her past will be uncovered. This information so devastating that it would ruin her whole life, causing even her heroics in the war to cease to matter. And when an old friend from school wants to reconnect to Sula, her paranoia increases exponentially — especially since another Caroline Sula has appeared on Earth making backroom deals and promising favors in return for credits.

Short but complex, *Impersonations* is a suspenseful story full of political machinations, personal drama, and loads of intrigue. Nope, it isn't filled with action scenes, but the personal journey of Caroline Sula quickly draws you into this world, wins you over to her side, and makes you eager to follow along behind her, as she attempts to make her way through a proverbial minefield. The whole narrative passing by so quickly yet effortlessly that you wish there was more to read. And I suppose there is — at least for me anyway — since I can now add Walter Jon Williams' *Dread Empire's Fall* series to my ever growing to-be-read list.

I received an advanced reading copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.

Lucille says

(Full review with more quotes on the blog! <https://adragoninspace.wordpress.com/...>)

I will begin by saying I've never read the Dread Empire's Fall series (yet) nor any other book by Walter Jon Williams. I got this novel as an eARC/e-galley and as I liked the cover and the description I decided to go ahead and simply not review it if I didn't like it, it wouldn't have been fair. After a few pages, intrigued, I went and read the description of the first book to know if I was simply reading another story set in the same world or if the main character of Impersonations was also a character there. I was at the same time glad and worried to see that she was! Glad because I loved Caroline Sula, and wanted to spend more time with her, which mean now I want to read the Dread Empire's Fall series: another one on my to-be-read pile! Worried because I was afraid to miss on things as I hadn't read the original trilogy first and I didn't know if maybe this novel was specifically for the fans and that's it. Thankfully, I enjoyed it a lot.

As I said, I went into this story tiptoeing because I had no knowledge whatsoever of this world. I guess it spoils a lot of what happens in the trilogy since there are talks about some battles, how they were won/lost, who died and so on. I was afraid to not understand some things but the author actually reminds (or, in my case, « informs ») the reader of the aliens specificities such as their appearance, their culture and other facts that are of importance. Some historical facts about planets are also mentioned. I'm pretty sure it wouldn't bother even the reader that knows and loves this world since it is done quite swiftly, not lingering over descriptions, facts and explanations.

I actually loved the diversity of the alien species present. They were not just alien with four arms four legs being blue or so on; they were insectoids (I know this is also common in SF, but in my opinion: it was well done) or mammals resembling cats and walking like humans. I'm not going to list them all, it's way more fun to come across them when reading! I was a little lost at the mention of the different planets and of the historical background but it was explained quickly and didn't lost me on the way, thumbs up for that!

What made me stick with this book was the main character: Caroline Sula, war hero. But as the war is over, she is no longer needed for her warrior, commandment or pilot skills and is relocated to an easy job at the fleet dockyard that she doesn't really like but that she tries to do well anyway because that's how she is! She's send to Earth, which is so not the more important planet in the galaxy, the central point of the system like you find in some space opera. Earth is actually that place you go if you don't want your career to evolve, a dead-end you're send to if you've done something wrong or upset someone else higher up the ladder and you're send there as a punishment. But Sula is not like everyone else and is actually really into planet Earth (or Terra), she is passionate about Terran History before its conquest by the Shaa. You could see her as a History geek, there were times when she was discussing it that were really interesting. Just imagine this fierce warrior woman being overly enthusiastic about pyramids and temples!

We quickly learn that there are more to her than just that. The fact that she is quite paranoid could put us on the trail but the fact that she was at war not so long ago made me overlook this part of her, it could easily have been a part of her experience to feel that way constantly or a simple habits. If you don't want to know why, I guess I should warn you to stop right there, but it's revealed quite rapidly in the story and is actually the title so that's not really a spoiler?? So, why is Sula so paranoid, especially when an old friend (cousin/best friend from school) contacts her to reconnect and meet on Earth? Well because Caroline Sula is not really Caroline Sula! As we learn soon enough in the novel, she actually is from another planet where she met the real Caroline Sula and befriended her. They looked almost alike and to escape her miserable life she decided to take possession of Caroline's identity, and killed her in the process. All of this happened when they were around 17 years old, harsh! I thought there was a little Mad Men feel to this story because even though there is this matter of identity theft, or impersonation (WINK WINK), it's not really the main plot.

Now that the war is over, Sula has to untie herself from her formation and weapon status. More importantly, she has to find who she is deep down beneath her disguise. Additionally to the plot explained in the description, this is a story about finding oneself, as you often find in literature. It's really engaging and made me want to know even more about Sula and about the characters that are mentioned. There are not that much action scenes, this is not an action packed story, but I found myself absorbed by the mystery, the plot, what would happen to the characters and Sula's train of thought.

To add to how much I liked this world and why I definitely will read more about it: sexism is no more! Or so it seems? See the quote bellow! This part made me smile from ear to ear. To add some context, while on a tourist visit they stop in front of several statues of famous leaders of the ancient world (that is, the one we live in) and there is only one female among several men.

"Goojie shivered in the cold. "Why is there only one female?" she asked, completely innocent of the complex, rather appalling answer that was then revealed to her. "Well, I'm glad we're civilized now," she said."

So I definitely would recommend this novel. It's not too long, I read it in an afternoon and is 131 pages on my Kobo e-reader, while it seems to be 256 pages for the paperback and kindle according to the infos on the publisher website. So if you're looking for a new space opera to jump into and are not so sure about Dread Empire's Fall, this novel is a good way to get to know the author, the world and the characters. It made me want to read the trilogy; but even if in the end I don't like it as much as this short novel, I'm glad I got to read Impersonations!

Darrell says

In the far future, Earth has been conquered by an alien race known as the Shaa and most buildings are in an alien style. Some of Earth's ancient landmarks are still intact despite centuries of neglect and earthquakes, but Earth has largely become an amusement park version of itself. Earth history isn't even interesting to most humans since they grew up on other planets. We're shown a future in which humans have largely forgotten humanity.

What little history there is is more like propaganda. It's a bit depressing to realize that the future will most likely forget not only us, but also most famous humans throughout history. There's a group called democracy club which reenacts city council debates like civil war reenactors, but democracy is largely a forgotten footnote of history.

The book starts slow with our protagonist traveling around Earth, taking in its history. The action doesn't really start until about halfway through, but despite that, the book held my interest throughout, and it turns out many of the seemingly throw away details in the first half of the book become important later.

I liked that most of the aliens are truly alien. They aren't just slightly different from humans. The action gets quite intense towards the end. Well worth your time.

Sonja says

It's been a while since I've read science fiction so this was refreshing, though it read as more of a crime-political-thriller than typical sci-fi novel, but that was OK.

The story revolves around Sula, a war hero in forced retirement on a remote, somewhat godforsaken planet of Earth. While spending some time wondering what her life amounts to now that the intergalactic war that has made her a hero is over, Sula gets involved in some political, corporate intrigue, murder attempts, revenge plots and the like, which give her life something that she had lacked - purpose.

I liked the writing style though it was missing something that would really make it stand out, something to remember it by. Still, a nice enough diversion and a solid novel.

Brian Palmer says

The trilogy of the Dread Empire's Fall was a phenomenal space opera story set against a fascinating stratified society (albeit one requiring a substantial suspension of disbelief). It was one of the series of books that cemented Walter Jon Williams's reputation to a read-or-buy on sight author for me.

This is set in the same universe, and featured one half of the star-crossed pair in that trilogy. The lady Caro Sula, ferocious hero of the Naxid wars in the wake of the aforementioned "dread empire's fall," having disappointed her superiors by surviving a battle she was supposed to die in, has been sent to the backwater of Earth to deal with peacetime. But although she's no longer leading a rebellion, there are mysteries to explore on Earth that may prove just as deadly as the military.

Lacking Gareth Martinez, the novel feels a little thin (I've seen it described elsewhere as a novella, but my copy is 250 pages); it's certainly jam-packed with events as Caro is trying to take a vacation on her much considered species homeworld, dealing with a cousin's visit (particularly stressful given (view spoiler)), and even dealing with natural disaster. But there are no solid characters for her to bounce off of ; the mystery is not that mysterious, and although there was a psychological breakthrough and some inner growth, it didn't have the magnetic sheen of the earlier, longer novels.

It's definitely good, but read after you've read the other Praxis books. (This let me know, though, that there is another book in the series, featuring Martinez without Sula).

Peter Tillman says

Captain Lady Sula visits Earth, and the tired old planet is never quite the same again. A smoothly written SF thriller set in WJW's Praxis universe. Lady Sula's competence is exceeded only by her ruthless attention to detail. I read it in one sitting and thoroughly enjoyed it. I particularly liked the cover art, by Jaime Jones. 3.7 stars

James Ellis says

I enjoyed this book, but figure my enjoyment of it was partially spoiled by my own expectations.

You have a highly-placed (yet vulnerable) impersonator, trying to uncover someone impersonating her. I was expecting a taut thriller ala "No Way Out" with the protagonist attempting to unravel the plot while maintaining her own cover, heading off the type of investigation that will expose her.

What we got instead wasn't bad by any means, but seemed a waste of an incredible setup.

Amy says

An engrossing yarn. I'll probably read more in this series.

Odo says

3.5/5.0

Jorg says

Well, it is Williams, and it takes place in the rich universe of the Dread Empire, and it is a space opera and great fun, but at the same time, it is rather slight and lightweight, reads like a Spacemaster adventure (not that THAT is a terrible thing in itself), some of the plot twists are so untwisty that one can see them for miles ahead, and Sula, of course, is still almost-impossibly competent (and that is not really such a bad thing either). So all my complaints are really cosmetic.

Liviu says

A new Dread empire story was excellent news when announced since i loved that series and would like to see it continued - the ending while closing the 3 novel arc left the overall arc in limbo and the follow up novella Investments was a nice side story taking place 3 years after the end of Conventions of war

I actually reread all 3 novels now (1st 4th time, 2nd 3rd time and 3rd second time) and they held up well and I really enjoyed them (I started remembering many details as i went on) so the above is even more accurate as it was not only nostalgia...

Coming back to Impersonations, the same feeling as with Investments, a nice side story which takes place even sooner after the war than Investments and does a grand tour of series universe Earth and its peculiarities (not to speak that the main event relating with the large picture is conveniently postponed for a few years in the future hence no surprise it was not known in Investments which takes place later than impersonations but earlier than the time frame of said event); there is a mystery, a catastrophe story and adventure as Lady Sula must deal with paid killers who are after her (even the motive is cool-ish, not one what expects, but again not particularly relevant as the big picture goes) so overall a very entertaining story but one that doesn't do much for what really interests me about the series (eg the mysteries of the Shaa, the rumored war to come etc)

Still having a new Dread Empire story out after 10+ years is better than complete abandonment of the series and I hope more people will give the (always entertaining and often superb) novels a chance to make it viable for the author to follow with his announced long term plans for the series which were sadly cut short when it was originally cancelled after just 3 volumes...

overall, highly recommended for series fans (and for readers wanting to try the novels though obviously it

will spoil lots of things about those)

Kaushik Iyer says

WJW's *Dead Empire's Fall* was one of the great trilogies of military science fiction -- incredibly tightly plotted, and with protagonists you couldn't resist cheering for.

Impersonations is a strange little book, published many years after the initial trilogy, but one that continues the story as if it had never been left off. It's an introspective book, it feels almost like Sula's taking a deep breath, processing the events of the previous trilogy and choosing how to live her life moving forward.

Still worth a read of course, but really only recommended if you've already been following the series. I do hope this implies that WJW will tell more stories in the world of the Praxis.

Jasmine says

Don't try to con a con artist. And especially don't con a con artist who's a decorated military hero.

Jo (Mixed Book Bag) says

Caroline Sula is back. She played a part in the *Dread Empire's Fall* winning an important battle, one that did not make her superiors happy so she has been sent to a dead end assignment on Earth. Looking forward to seeing Earth history instead she finds herself in danger from both the past and the present. This is tension filled with action and interesting characters. Sula is not that nice a character but she really keeps the story going. I enjoyed seeing her again and watching her outsmart the opposition. Look for a surprise ending. She came out ahead on more than one count.

Clyde says

Some years back Walter Jon Williams gave us his engrossing *Dread Empire's Fall* trilogy. It was about a despotic, hierarchical, multi-species star empire that fell into a very nasty civil war. One of the main characters in that trilogy was one Captain the Lady Caroline Sula -- a very tough-minded hero with a dark past.

Impersonations: A Story of the Praxis follows Lady Sula's story after the end of the war. She has been rewarded for achieving victory by being posted to a backwater planet called Earth. (Best not to win a battle against orders, you know.) That doesn't bother her because she has always been fascinated by the histories of her species' birth planet. For her, it is almost a vacation posting.

Of course things don't go smoothly. Multiple problems soon raise their nasty heads. A local company is doing something mysterious. An old "friend" from a forgotten past makes an appearance. And, it seems that Sula herself is being targeted by by person or persons unknown. Toss in some active geology, and you have the ingredients for an exciting action-filled tale.

A short but quite good read.

(Note: Walter Jon Williams gives sufficient background; so, you don't need to have read the *Dread Empire's*

Fall trilogy to enjoy this story.)
