



The Waking Engine

David Edison

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Welcome to the City Unspoken, where Gods and Mortals come to die.

Contrary to popular wisdom, death is not the end, nor is it a passage to some transcendent afterlife. Those who die merely awake as themselves on one of a million worlds, where they are fated to live until they die again, and wake up somewhere new. All are born only once, but die many times . . . until they come at last to the City Unspoken, where the gateway to True Death can be found.

Wayfarers and pilgrims are drawn to the City, which is home to murderous aristocrats, disguised gods and goddesses, a sadistic faerie princess, immortal prostitutes and queens, a captive angel, gangs of feral Death Boys and Charnel Girls . . . and one very confused New Yorker.

Late of Manhattan, Cooper finds himself in a City that is not what it once was. The gateway to True Death is failing, so that the City is becoming overrun by the Dying, who clot its byzantine streets and alleys . . . and a spreading madness threatens to engulf the entire metaverse.

The Waking Engine Details

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Author : David Edison

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From Reader Review The Waking Engine for online ebook

Ruby Tombstone [With A Vengeance] says

I keep finding that the more eloquent the writer of a book is, the harder it is to adequately review said book. None the less, it's worth giving this one a shot..

This is a book which somehow manages to combine: vile bloodthirsty faerie princesses, a fox-faced Anglo-Celtic nursery rhyme character, immortal prostitutes who die for a living, a brothel-keeper who also happens to be a famous historical figure, gangs of sexy death boys and charnel girls, elemental creatures bigger and older than gods, fashionable lich lords straight out of Harper's Bazaar, a cybernetic faerie queen snake monster, a beluga whale who's also a psychiatrist, giant glowing ancient one-eyed bird god thingies and...oh, Richard Nixon. Not only does the book bring all of these elements together, it brings them together in a totally credible, readable, thought-provoking and enjoyable way.

Somehow, a book with all of the aforementioned elements also manages to be intelligent, prompting the reader to contemplate the true meaning of life and death.

What may be even better than all of these things combined though, is the central character - Cooper. A sarcastic New Yorker in jeans and a Danzig tee (I loved this detail), who also happens to be gay. It is beyond refreshing to see a gay lead, without this becoming a major plot-point in itself. All too often, a gay main character means that the book becomes a treatise on gender and sexuality, however that detail really is treated as being beside the point in *The Waking Engine*.

If I had one minor quibble, it would be that the story was a teensy bit lacking in emotion for me. It's not that this was something I was looking for in a book at the time, but it's the only thing lacking which prevented *The Waking Engine* from being a **perfect** reading experience. I didn't have many moments of pure epiphany, joy or sorrow. Otherwise this would have made it to my elusive "Favourites" shelf, as well as garnering five stars.

I do think the book came close though, particularly in its examination of (view spoiler). Considering that I picked this up in an airport, expecting a pretty standard fantasy genre-piece, I was extremely happy to be proven wrong.

All up: I loved the complex, intelligent story. I loved the wry, gritty humour. I loved the beautiful writing.

4.75 Stars

Stephanie G says

Cooper wakes up in the City Unspoken. It's the city where the dead come to die—only no one is dying. This

is why Asher and Sesstri picked Cooper up and show him around. Asher believes he can save the city because he has shamanic properties. Sesstri declares this as false and they send him on his way. Only after this does she share the fact he has a belly button, something only first birth can produce. They go to rescue him, only to discover he is neck deep in plot. There is also the Dome, inside of it are the aristocrats of the City Unspoken, trapped in a dome with a weapon. Purity Kloo starts to put two and two together. She ends up figuring more out of the city than expected. There is also a faerie queen, strung out on body mods, and ready to take over the whole metaverse.

The Waking Engine is both sci-fi and fantasy, mixed together in an adult Alice in Wonderland type of world. It is David Edison's debut, in which he shows a stunning range in prose style and imagination. There are worlds you are born on, but when you die, you travel to a different world keeping all of your memories. On and on this cycle goes until you reach the City Unspoken.

The story bounces from different characters as their plot lines start to tie into one another. Cooper is the main focus, the chosen one, and the novel really becomes stunning for me when he meets Cleopatra, who is a kind of psychedelic/poison/mind-reader dealer/prostitute. From there he is taken by a Death Boy, whose touch sends his body and mind into sexual compliance. The Death Boy takes him to the skies, and the writing in these scenes, hell all of it in this section blew me away. This is also where Cooper comes into his own, developing his senses and discovering the evil faerie Queen.

Lallowë is married to one of the only aristocrats not inside of the dome. She works for her mother, Cicatrix, who wants to throw the worlds into agony, but namely she wants the City Unspoken. Lallowë wants her mother's throne, and spends her time leisurely torturing and killing her father every day, in other words she's a nut case (in the best kind of way).

Purity Kloo sparked my imagination. Along with her aristocratic friends, she is stuck inside the dome. They are the council's demented daughters, who when we first meet them, leave to cut up a girl for not wearing the right thing. Purity isn't an evil character, despite how it might seem. She's rebellious. Because she is body bound and stuck in the dome. There is recklessness in her, but also she was by far my favorite character.

The Waking Engine isn't going to be for everyone. It took me a long time to get through it, and I sometimes felt lost among the pages, but it was worth it. The world is stunning!! The prose is also just as stunning!! There is a quote I didn't write down, and now I'm kicking myself for not- it was about the sky. In the City Unspoken the sky always looks different, sometimes red, blue, any and all colors as are the suns in hundreds of combinations. The quote was about the City Unspoken stealing the skies of other worlds, something about that resonated deep.

Why not a perfect score? Cooper was lacking for me, and while I did enjoy his journey, I wanted to feel closer to him. There were also a couple things I never fully grasped about being birthed, and how family worked out in the city. While this shouldn't have thrown me I couldn't get it out of my head. That doesn't mean I don't still love it! The actual little engines, the skies, the songs of death, all of it sparked my imagination and will stay with me for a very long time to come.

- Beth

Jasmine says

I was excited about reading this book based on the premise and cover art. I love science fiction and I feel like

it's rare to find a non super-cheesy one.

I got the ARC (Advanced Reading Copy) of *Waking Engine* and dug in. But once I started I just wanted to stop. I kept asking questions out loud while reading about various courses of action or characters that were popping up with little explanation.

The book begins with Cooper, a young man from our Earth waking up in a strange land with a green sun after he fell asleep like usual in his bed, texting his friends. He wakes up to find himself feeling awful and being prodded by two strange looking characters with fantastical qualities of appearance. The two quibbling strangers - Asher and Sesstri take Cooper under their wing for a brief span while they think he may be some kind of savior. (view spoiler)

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

2 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.blogspot.com/201...>

Not for the first time, I wish I had a system in place for giving two ratings to a book: 1) An objective rating in which I give a book stars based on its own merits, uninfluenced by my personal feelings, and 2) A subjective rating which is based on how a book worked for me personally, or how well it meshed with my personal tastes. This is going to be a very tough review for me to write, simply because I've never read a book like this, where those two ratings could not be any more different, but I'm also glad I have the chance to explain why.

The book begins with a young man named Cooper waking up in an unfamiliar place to two strangers fussing over his sudden appearance, and the answers he gets are decidedly not reassuring. Apparently, he is dead. Contrary to what we know about death, when someone dies they merely wake up as themselves somewhere else, appearing on one of a possible million universes where they will once again live out their lives and the whole process repeats itself. That is, until you reach the end and wind up at the City Unspoken, also known as the City of the Dead, because only on this world a person can find true death.

This is where Cooper wakes up. But he has also come at a very unsettling time, where something seems to be preventing True Death from happening, leading to widespread frustration and panic among the denizens of the city. There are some who believe Cooper may be the solution to the problem, as he is different. For one thing, he has a belly button. A navel is really nothing but a scar left over from the attachment of the umbilical cord, and because all are born only once but die many times, waking up on new worlds with their bodies whole and unmarred, the fact Cooper has one holds great significance. He may not be really dead.

And from here on out, it gets even stranger. But hey, you'd too if you were Cooper, dragged across the metaverse by a goddess, kidnapped by faeries, drugged by Cleopatra, engulfed by a machine-flesh creature, and pursued by undead monsters and evil elf beings. I love it when I find a unique book with very different, offbeat ideas, but *The Waking Engine* treads into seriously bizarre territory. More bizarre than I could handle, perhaps. It's the kind of book I can't tackle at night right before bed, because I wake up in the morning and can't remember if I actually dreamed or read these weird images. I tried really hard to embrace the weirdness, but it soon became clear that I was in way over my head.

And that's a real shame, too. It almost breaks my heart to say I didn't like this one as much as I thought I would. The ideas in this story are some of the most original ones I've ever encountered in science fiction and fantasy, and the characters are unconventional and diverse as well. Unfortunately, the strangeness was a barrier for me, preventing me from appreciating all of the positive aspects of this book to its fullness. It's difficult to connect to a character, for instance, when instead I'm putting all my effort into trying to make sense of everything that's happening. The world is also wildly imaginative, which is another huge plus to this book, but words cannot describe just how amazing and fantastical it is. I mean that literally in this case; I get the sense from Edison's writing that the environments he pictures in his mind are so vast and visionary that they transcend mere language.

I wanted to like *The Waking Engine* so much because objectively, it is a great book, deftly and beautifully written with ground breaking ideas, interesting characters, and incredible world building. But I have to be honest, it was just not my style. There's lots to love about this book, but it just has to find its intended audience, which unfortunately is not me. On the other hand, I think fans of "un-reality" or the metaphysical or more abstract elements in their speculative fiction will be very well pleased with this one. Give it a shot if that's the type of stories you like, I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

Milo (BOK) says

A very strong and unorthodox science fiction novel. Pretty good indeed - full review closer to publication date, and it's a book that I was sold on because of the cover. 2014 is already off to a strong start and I haven't read a bad book from next year (even if I've only read three) so far.

Hanne says

In just a few days this book will be decorating the Fantasy/Sci-Fi shelves of many bookstores. Whoever made this cover did a terrific job of creating something gorgeous and interesting, but also matching the marvellous world-building showcased in the book. Hats off to the designer, but also to the imagination of this author.

In *Waking Engine*, we find ourselves confronted with the idea that death isn't quite that final. In most cases it just means you wake up in another world. Only a few places can grant you final Death, and one of them the City Unspoken. The descriptions of this city were really amazing, and I kept trying to make these mental pictures of what it would look like.

"The day had corrupted the blue sky, and the promising morning had already miscarried into a sickly yellow noonday – the twin suns fused into a kind of angry mating, their orbs gone orange, streams of red-black plasma arcing between them as they grew steadily closer together. Another costume change for the sky above the City Unspoken."

Despite all the potential, it wasn't a slam dunk for me. First of all, I kept wishing I had some buddies to read this book together with. People like we have in our Malazan Fallen group for instance, to help each other discovering the elements, because parts of this book were just so complicated and confusing. I kept reading

on, hoping it would all come together eventually, but for a long time it was just fog in my head. I think this book will be better on a re-read.

The second thing is that the characters were a bit flat. Especially the main protagonist Cooper: he is our unexpected hero and saviour and yet we get very little out of him. He seems as lost in this world as I was. Perhaps that was the point, but I find it hard to read a story if I cannot connect to the majority of the characters.

Without a doubt, the best part of the book is the storyline inside the dome, not surprisingly because it's the least confusing part and has characters that are really fleshed out. I also liked all the little jokes that are woven through the scenes: A character called Nixon for instance, who claimed he learned to land on his feet from Olga Korbut.

Net, a really promising story, but I wished it was at least 100 pages longer. That would have slowed down the pace, decrease the level of complication and add more time for character building. I would have loved Edison to do what he did in the inside-the-dome-storyline for the entire book, so the light bulb inside my head would have lit and chased the fog away for the entire story. (Aye, I just had to make an Edison joke in here somewhere, right?)

Disclaimer: This book has been provided by the publisher. This review reflects my own experience and opinion with this book. All quotes are taken from the pre-published copy and may be altered or omitted from the final copy.

Sarah says

So, what are my final thoughts?

The Waking Engine is incredibly untraditional. It is a beautifully written book with a shocking amount of depth. While some readers might feel like the depth and philosophy behind it all can be a bit too much, readers who aren't turned off by that are really in for a treat. Edison's first novel is brave. He strays from the popular path, from genre tropes and common fantasies, and blazes his own trail. The Waking Engine makes you work, and that's half the charm. The other half of the charm lies in Edison's prose, and the City Unspoken, which is one of the most vibrant, alive, and thought provoking places I've read about recently. If this is the starting point for Edison's career as an author then truly the stars are the limit.

Bravo, Edison. I can't wait to see what you churn out next.

Read my full review here:

<http://www.bookwormblues.net/2014/02/...>

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: A book with very big ideas that ultimately just didn't deliver for me.

Opening Sentence: The room was empty except for the smell of disuse and a small woman with a heart-shaped face and a cloud of flaming red hair.

Excerpt: Yes

The Review:

This review is going to be a little different than my usual ones. Normally, I open with a bit of a synopsis of the plot of the book. I can't really do that in this case because even after 400+ pages, I have absolutely no idea what just happened. The main concept is great. A man (Cooper) wakes up to find himself in a strange place. He discovers that when you die, you don't move onto any sort of afterlife. Instead, you wake up somewhere else and live another life. This cycle continues until you reach the end of the road: The City Unspoken. Here, you can reach True Death. Except, True Death isn't happening anymore, and that's a problem. Why it's a problem is one of those things I'm not so clear on. Add in a whole bunch of interesting creatures – including cyborg fae, which are an awesome concept, but I'm once again not clear on what they had to do with the overall story – and you get a book that had wonderful potential but just failed to deliver.

I'll be honest, I started reading this back in November. It is now the beginning March. It was like pulling teeth to get me to pick this book up. I considered DNFing it many times, but just couldn't bring myself to not finish a book. So I finally managed to finish it and now find myself speechless when trying to come up with words for this review. That more than anything might express my overall feelings.

The truly painful part of it is that this book is beautifully written. There were some times when I would find myself completely captivated by how he can turn a phrase. But then, there were other times where I would find myself spacing out because I just could not grasp what was going on. It's clear that Edison put a lot of thought into creating this world, but I think, in the end, Edison maybe had too many ideas and couldn't find a way to bring them all into a cohesive whole. There is just too much going on, too many characters, too many point of view changes, and it ends up feeling very jumbled.

I wish I could write as well as Edison does and give a cohesive review of what did and didn't work for me. But when I try and put into words my feelings on the book, I just feel this overall sense of confusion. There were so many things about this book that could have been great, but because they were all mashed into one book, it was hard to really appreciate anything because there was just too much to straighten out in my head. I may try to read Edison's next book to see if he's perhaps resolved some of these issues, but I'll be going into the experience with a lot of hesitation.

Notable Scene:

A yelp from outside broke the silence.

Glass shattered and Sesstri screamed. The shadows of men appeared at the windows, then climbed into the room, and Asher leapt to action; he became a whirl of smoke that streamed to a bay window and brought down two men in brown leather smocks, their heads smashing together with a satisfying crunch.

Cooper sat up in alarm but found himself paralyzed. There wasn't time to be frightened, but for all his determination to wrap his head around the events of the day, his death and its subsequent repeal, the tale of the city and the worlds and lives upon lives, Cooper had no instinct for dealing with violence.

Sesstri and Asher had no such limitations. Asher continued to fell men in a blur of gray skin and twirling rags, while Sesstri had knives in each hand and stood like a pink and yellow-silk valkyrie with her back against the stairs, etching a sphere of safety into the air around herself with the flurry of her blades. One of her assailants fell back, clutching his guts as they slipped out of a sudden gash. Were those kitchen knives or daggers? Was she prepared to eviscerate men at a moment's notice?

Cooper found the good sense to jump behind the sofa in which he'd been sitting and tried to hide, but in doing so realized that he'd exhausted his combat training. Asher's right, he thought, I really am helpless. But I can flag down a mean cab.

More men streamed in, and Asher became a rush of doves beating wings against a storm, his hands and elbows and feet his only weapons, pale blades of bone and skin that danced violent and dangerous at the head of the sudden incursion. Blood flew from the faces of the men who swarmed him. They were pulling themselves through other windows now, and someone kicked down the door with a smash.

"Cooper!" Sesstri called. "To me! Upstairs, now!"

FTC Advisory: Tor/Macmillan provided me with a copy of The Waking Engine. No goody bags, sponsorships, "material connections," or bribes were exchanged for my review.

Rafaela says

NOTE: This book was provided by the publisher, through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.

(review on my blog)

1. Plot

Cooper is not your average book protagonist. He's gay, he's overweight, and he's *dead*. (this is where I give David Edison a respectful high five because YAY PROTAGONISTS THAT BREAK THE MOLD!) When he wakes up in the City Unspoken, with no idea of how he got there, he is immediately adopted by a grey-skinned man and a pink-haired woman, who seem to believe he is the solution to the overpopulation problem that plagues the City because the dying can no longer die. Of course, you and I know where this is going. Cooper, is of course, the good old Chosen One. In the span of a few days, he develops totally rad powers, including sensing people's fear in verbal form and traveling through some sort of anachronic faerie-powered internet, and in the end, he does what Chosen Ones usually do. Meh.

This is the main plot – and it's pretty bland, compared to the subplots. Look above. Look at the blurb. See the murderous aristocrats? Sure, I know we see nobles killing each other in 90% of fantasy books... but not while they're locked inside a glass dome, not over something as fickle as wearing the same dress two days in a row, and definitely not when none of them can actually die (since their souls are bound to their bodies). It's inside the dome that we meet Purity Klo, a noble girl desperate to find a way out – so desperate, indeed, that she spends a week slitting her own throat only to come back every single time.

Sure, a story about murderous teenage nobles dressed in the metaverse's equivalent of Lolita fashion wouldn't have appealed to the target audience that **The Waking Engine** is trying to attract, I suspect... but I had a lot of fun with Purity's subplot, and would have switched it for Cooper's without so much as a second

thought.

Final words about the plot: it's convoluted. I love the idea of the City Unspoken, but a setting that is *part our world part every other world in existence* demands time, and Edison doesn't cut the reader any slack before overwhelming them with references to greek mythology (*Omphale*, right, well played), the AIDS epidemic of the 80s, Cleopatra's historical relevance, the wise advice of a beluga whale, and the literal ins-and-ours of a cyborg Queen.

2. Characters

As far as protagonists go, Cooper sure breaks a couple of molds, but it takes more than that to write a good character. It's not just that he's uninteresting, he's not even very coherent – he speaks like an angry New Yorker ready to break a few noses, but his inner monologue is equal parts disoriented, skeptic, and terrified, and his actions are reactive at best. Sometimes I felt as if I was reading three different characters. And then, of course, he meets attractive men and his brain goes into full shutdown, which is both amusing and exasperating. Focus, sir!

About Purity (our other protagonist, sort of), I found her to be just the right balance between... well, what her name suggests her to be, and someone I wouldn't want to cross on a bad day. She's smart, she's competent, she's a bit of a wildcard, and she's sexual without being sexualised. I could see her leading a girl gang, really.

I won't write about every character, so let me just wrap this section by saying this book achieved something really, really good with its female characters. Here, women move most of the plot, making this book something I'd like to show all those male writers who say "they can't write women". Listen, here's the secret: write more than one-two, and give them a personality of their own. Thank you, David Edison.

3. Setting/worldbuilding

I've already written a bit about my love for the City Unspoken as a concept, but now I'd like to present a complaint about the way it was written. For a place where people of all universes come to die, the City was a little overpopulated by humans, no? Even the architecture of the place was awfully familiar – taverns, shady boarding houses, classy bordellos, sex workers on every street corner. If your City is a repository of culture for every universe, why does it look like every dark medieval-ish city I've ever read? Surely beings from other universes have priorities other than food-sleep-sex, no? If not, I call lazy writing. It takes more than supernatural powers and skin of an unnatural color to create a different species.

Now to the good points: I loved the Apostery, a temple for dead religions. (what an idea!) I also found the different types of "prostitutes" very interesting – I mean, it's terribly morbid to have someone body-bound accepting their own murder every day in exchange for money, but it's a good idea that fits perfectly with the bigger picture. I could have lived with a little less "whores" and "sluts" every two paragraphs, though.

4. Writing style

As a general rule, I don't complain too much about elaborate writing styles, because I like them. Here, though, I found the "style" really overwhelming – there were sentences I had to read over and over again, just to extract some meaning from their structure and the excess of strange, possibly universe-relevant but plot-irrelevant words.

Conclusion: the ideas behind this book are all very good, but the execution left quite a bit to be desired. The main-main character, Cooper, is easily the least interesting character in the book. The setting wasn't as exhaustively explored as it should have been – or, in any case, as I wish it could have been. The writing style

was a little too much for me. It's not bad, in any way, but I can't lie – it took me a month to get through it, and that simply doesn't happen with books I like. So, it shall receive a two-star rating, and I'll keep my fingers crossed for David Edison's next book.

Scott says

A richly imaginative novel that overwhelms the reader with wondrous imagery while leaving the actual story in the dust. I still don't understand the reincarnation premise, or why any number of characters did the things they did. There is a murder mystery somewhere within that was the most interesting aspect for me, but by the end of the book it seems like a footnote. Still, I mostly enjoyed it and continued on where I might have put another book down, which says a lot about the quality of the writing.

Elizabeth says

A lot of people have asked for my thoughts on this book, so here you go freaks...

When I read a review, I like to see how the book or film matches up to other pop culture references. The Waking Engine is a mix of The Matrix (heavily influenced by The Wachowskis), Hans Christian Anderson, weirdly The City of Bones (faeries/magical creatures/urban setting), and David Bowie.

This book is hard to summarize, so I am going to keep it simple. Man dies. Man wakes up in The City Unspoken. Man finds out when you die you wake up on endless planets until you die the final death. Man makes friends. Cyber faeries and undead sky lords are trying to take over the City Unspoken. Man and friends have to stop them.

Let's go over some things I loved:

I loved reading from the perspective of a gay main character.

I loved the character Purity Kloo.

I LOVED the female characters in general—heroes and villains.

I loved the author's concept of the after life even though it sounds absolutely terrifying.

I loved how easily the writer plays with grotesque situations and humor in the same sentence.

There were characters and scenes that I loved, but (deciding whether this was a big "but" or not made it hard to pick between 3 or 4 stars) I never felt like I got enough of those elements that I enjoyed. They were often padded in between wordy, vague descriptions and unanswered questions. A LOT of unanswered questions. Though the book is set up for a sequel, I am not sure if the author is actively working on a sequel.

This book is ambitious, daring, and...confusing. You can sense the youthfulness of his writing. A unique storyteller that more people should be talking about. I would definitely be interested to read more of his work.

Jason says

5 Stars

What an amazing ride is this novel. *The Waking Engine* is a high concept science fiction fantasy that will make you think about life and what it means to live and die. I wish that I had written a review as soon as I finished this one but that was two weeks ago. As is I cannot give it the due that it deserves. I can only give it my highest recommendations and to let all my friends know that I am sure that they too will enjoy this book.

"Oh, thought Cooper, with a detached nausea that brought more of himself online by reflex. Machines that feed on life. A family of evil faeries, starring Lallowë Thyu. A cyborg queen with the body of a Chinese dragon, who wants to devour the chewy center of the City Unspoken. Of fucking course."

"Tam cocked his head sideways. "You're a strange young man, CooperOmphale."

"Well of course I am. You'd be strange too if you started your week as a magic turd who'd been dragged across the universe—metaverse, whatever— by a goddess, kidnapped by a faerie princess, drugged by Cleopatra, met the Cicatrix from the inside out, fucked and flayed by a dead gigolo from the motherland, saved an angel-thing from an undead monster straight outta Vogue, dumped in cave of tears, and thrust into the mansion of an evil elf who's sounding more and more like Cruella De Vil every minute. Does she wear puppies? Oh, and Nixon was there.***"

Highly recommended!!!

Kdawg91 says

This was actually about a 3 and 1/2 in my view (I don't round up unless it's a stellar book.)

First and foremost, I congratulate Mr. Edison on the sheer bleeding craziness of this book, The world was like a China Mieville book on LSD (Figure that one out.) **HOWEVER**, the main plot was a bit bland and the sheer amount of knots the subplots tied themselves into don't keep you involved enough to keep interest. The language is stunning in spots and a touch overdone in others.

That being said, I dig imagination and wild ass ideas, I will check out further works by Mr. Edison, **THIS TIME**, slack plot and confusing me only works the first time :)

Caleb Hill says

"When we die, we don't cease to exist or turn into shimmering motes of ectoplasm or purple angels or anything else you may have been brought up to believe. We just...go on living. Someplace else."

I oftentimes feel like I can tell when a book is objectively good or not. Yes, there are personal biases and selective tastes that make this wrong, but on a general level, I like to think I know what makes a good book. The problem with *The Waking Engine* is not wholly that it has its flaws, but that the style just wasn't for me. It's a good book, in certain aspects, but more than that, it's a type of New Weird that is not the bizarre I

usually love. It's an absurd niche in that subgenre, and I just couldn't take it.

If you're lost, bear with me.

Edison's debut starts off with the main character, Cooper, waking up in a strange land. He's disoriented, as is the reader. As the man stumbles along on his journey, we learn that there is no Heaven and Hell, unless metaphorically you think there is. Instead, people are reborn over and over again. At the end of their tale, they come to the City Unspoken. Here, people come to Die for the last time. Problem is, the gate is clogged, and a disease is spreading through the streets, causing pilgrims to turn into brainless zombies. The people that find Cooper believe he is the savior, simply because he has a belly button, a scar that disappears after your first death. Because of this, they think he isn't dead. So he's going to save the world, by golly.

And that's the easy part to grasp. Throw in cyborg-fey (which is probably the coolest idea of the book), gray-skinned folks, whores that kill themselves for profit, a tower where religions go to die, and psuedo-vampires that feast on pain, and you have the basis for the world-building. Yeah, I wasn't kidding when I said this was a strange land.

Edison's imagination is by far his best tool. But I would argue his prose is just as wonderful. It's poetic, verbose, and lovely. He can capture a scene almost perfectly. This transfers greatly with his ideas, letting the reader see them easily. However, Edison has a big problem with overwriting scenes. He's borderline pretentious. There are times when my patience was tested. His love of the written word can, at times, slow down the pace tremendously. I enjoyed walking in his mind, but not having to make mine work so much.

Even though he explains very well, he either does too much or too little. Because of this, your gray matter is constantly being taxed. It doesn't make for a pleasurable ride. That's not to say it's a bad thing; I just wasn't enamored. I wanted a middle of the road approach. Maybe something intelligent but subtle. Instead, Edison released a purple elephant on us and said it was a giraffe.

This ability to write craziness often translated to me becoming lost. The ideas can become unfocused and opaque. But when Edison does hit the mark, he does it so well.

“What he saw seemed to be the very idea of a city, barnacled and thick with itself.”

His worst execution might be the plot. The first half really shows his weakness in plotting. Nothing really happens, and if it does, it comes out of nowhere with no real motivation or foreshadowing. The beginning creates a sense of build-up, but that goes nowhere. The characters don't make decisions. Edison does for them. As the story progresses, it doesn't get better. The author juggles multiple subplots, creating tangents that are interesting in their own right (especially when we're inside the Dome), but become tangled near the end. Edison doesn't really unravel all of them, which hurts him.

I would say the worst thing Edison did in his first novel was try and be too ambitious. He tried to do too much, and ultimately missed the mark.

Nowhere else does this ring truest than with the characters. Besides Nixon, Purity, and the cyborg-fey, the majority of the cast don't have any real motivation, or at least none that I could decipher. Cooper, in fact, is the worst of them all. He's the most uncompelling protagonist I've read in a good while. Edison tried to go for an everyman, an anyman that the average Joe could attach to, but I don't read to experience what would probably happen if the Chosen One was randomly picked off the streets and deposited in another dimension to save the day. I don't like stupid and lost heroes. I want competence and drive. I want active characters.

Cooper is anything but that. The outsider wasn't done well. The execution was off.

But what saddens me the most is that Edison tries too hard to make the city into a character, and sacrifices the cast for it. The place is interesting, of course, but he needed to take time away from that and insert it into the characters. He didn't.

While Edison's debut *The Waking Engine* does a marvelous job of sketching out a city being overrun by the indifference and destruction of death, he fails miserably on every other part. He has too many ideas, and not enough focus for them. I could read his writings all day long, that's for sure, but I'd rather sit in one of his short stories than a bloated novel.

"His dog, Astrid—would she sit by the door, waiting for him, wondering why he never came back to her? She wouldn't understand, just ache. The same when for Cooper as for those he'd left behind. No understanding, just pain and loss and a false promise of peace at the end."

Therin Knite says

[Plot

A guy named Cooper wakes up on a different world in a different universe and has absolutely no clue what is going on. He finds out that when you die, you don't actually die but end up in another universe and live another life. And so on and so forth until you finally "gain" the right to die for good.

A dude named Asher thinks Cooper is something special that will help him solve some important problem, but when the woman advising him, Sesstri, tells him Cooper is totally normal,
