



Defenders

Will McIntosh

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A new epic of alien invasion and human resistance by Hugo Award-winning author Will McIntosh.

Our Darkest Hour.

Our Only Hope.

The invaders came to claim earth as their own, overwhelming us with superior weapons and the ability to read our minds like open books.

Our only chance for survival was to engineer a new race of perfect soldiers to combat them. Seventeen feet tall, knowing and loving nothing but war, their minds closed to the aliens.

But these saviors could never be our servants. And what is done cannot be undone.

Defenders Details

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Author : Will McIntosh

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Fantasy, War, Fantasy, Military Fiction, Dark

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From Reader Review Defenders for online ebook

Jae says

The premise was certainly interesting and I quite enjoyed the long-term implications of the novel, but found the characterizations so minimal as to be nonexistent. I didn't particularly care if anyone lived or died, with the exception of one or two characters. Every time a character started becoming real to me, the action took over. So I didn't get any of their motivations beyond the most obvious.

So, obvs, an alien invasion would totally suck, and then creating a weapon to repel the alien invasion only to have that weapon turn on you would likewise suck. And some people would die and some people would live and the people who lived would be sad about the people who died, and Earth would be changed forever and stuff. That's basically the whole novel with about the same level of emotional attachment I felt. This is not to say it wasn't entertaining, because it was, but it was the book equivalent of a popcorn movie.

Courtney Nicole says

Bought this as a "Blind Date With A Book"

All I know about it is four bullet points:

- Science Fiction
- Invasion
- Telepathic Aliens
- A Cure Worse Than The Disease

Excited to read this some time this year!

Thoughts after reading it:

Completely loved it and definitely worth the purchase!

David says

Fantastic. This book just catapulted to the top of my recommend-to-others list.

The two non-human races in this book--one alien, the other created by humans to fight the aliens--are perfectly drawn, with clear racial traits and yet with strengths and flaws as individuals. They aren't heroes or villains, just people, driven by fear or love or ambition to fight against those who threaten them.

My personal favorites were the Luyten, a race of starfish-shaped creatures the size of elephants. McIntosh does telepathic aliens like nobody's ever done them before. They use their telepathy in war to tremendous effect: perfect communication that can't be intercepted, and perfect knowledge of their enemy's movements. They're smart and frightening, and yet sympathetic, too, backed into a corner where they must fight or die. The conversations between Luyten and humans were some of the best parts of the books.

The defenders are less sympathetic, their actions motivated by ambition and hatred more than self-preservation, but they still inspire some degree of pity, since they were, after all, made to be the way they

are. As with the Luyten, the individual characters are where the sympathy comes from, when you see how childlike and insecure they are, despite their power and violence.

In fact, the difference between the individual and the group is almost a theme of the book. As a group, any of the three races (humans included) can be threatening, unknowable, evil. As individuals, however, each is understandable and sympathetic, acting only to protect what they love.

You can tell McIntosh is a master storyteller, and it's no wonder he won the Hugo Award. The plot is never predictable, but each event seems inevitable, perfectly caused by what came before. Each character's actions is consistent with their personality and their situation, each conflict required by who they are and what they need.

I can't imagine the movie being as good, but I hope Warner Brothers goes ahead and makes it (they've already optioned it for film), if only because it will encourage more people to read this marvelous book.

David says

This is one of those books where even though it may not be the deepest book you've ever read and sometimes your suspension of disbelief wobbles, you just keep reading because you have to know what happens next, and the shift between multiple POVs actually works to increase the tension and invest you in the story. I believe this is what we refer to as a "page-turner."

In the beginning, *Defenders* is your basic alien invasion story. A race of telepathic giant starfish-like aliens called the Luyten land on Earth and in a long campaign of escalating attacks, eventually have humanity on the ropes and facing apparent extinction. Besides their superior technology, the Luytens' telepathy makes them almost impossible to defeat. When they begin wiping out entire cities, driving humans out and then slaughtering them with heat rays, the President of the United States, as Commander in Chief of the improbable Global Alliance that has formed to fight the Luyten, is preparing to offer mankind's surrender.

Then humanity unleashes their Hail Mary superweapon: a genetically-engineered race of giant three-legged supersoldiers who are immune to the Luytens' telepathy. The Defenders, in a matter of months, turn the tables on the Luyten, and soon it is the aliens who are surrendering.

Unfortunately, the scientists who created the Defenders didn't really think about what they'd do *after* the Luyten were defeated.

I liked this book a lot, mostly because it just kept ramping up the tension, but also because all of the characters — human, Luyten, and Defender — managed to be fascinating in their own ways. The Luyten initially appear to be genocidal monsters bent on humanity's extermination, yet through conversations some of the humans have with Five, a captured Luyten, it's evident that they are much more complex and their motives may not be so clear-cut. The Defenders, for their part, were created to be weapons against a specific enemy, and are left without a purpose once that enemy is defeated. Despite being based on humans, their psychology is nearly as alien as the Luytens', and unfortunately, they turn out to have just as much difficulty coexisting with mankind.

The multi-layered characters and the constant shifts in the fortunes of war (there being several wars during

the course of the book) made this one of my best reads this year. It's *almost* a 5-star book, but it gets dinged for three things. First, the writing at times almost seemed aimed at juveniles, with very simple, repetitive sentences that made me wonder if the author got told in some writing workshop that long sentences and big words are bad. Second, there were several big suspensions of disbelief — one or two I could handle (like human scientists being able to whip up a genetically engineered race of giants and mass-produce them in factories around the world, in response to an alien invasion that is wiping out every country's infrastructure - or mankind then ceding Australia to those giants once the war is over) - but after a while the big ideas plus some of the smaller ones became so cinematic I just nodded along without buying any of it. Lastly, there were so many questions I really wanted answered. The Luyten spend *years* not communicating with humans at all, and then suddenly are rallying them as a species. They go from exterminating invaders to sympathetic and almost admirable, but there is never really an adequate explanation of why their initial attack on Earth was so bloodthirsty, with no attempt at more peaceful negotiations. And much is left unanswered in the epilogue.

Maybe some of the questions are meant to be unanswered - one of the crucial ones, echoed by the characters over and over, is whether one can ever truly trust the Other. Luytens mistrust humans, humans mistrust Luyten, both hate the Defenders who hated the Luyten and admired but felt inferior to humans, that inferiority complex turning to rage when they felt betrayed because humans reacted with paranoia to what seemed to be Defender aggression... multiple devastating global wars started because two races couldn't just talk to each other. Although this book is very much a comic bookish sort of epic, something that would look good on screen with a big enough special effects budget, these themes make it perhaps deeper than it was intended to be.

Thus, *Defenders* gets 4.5 stars - not a perfect book, and the writing could use some polish, but it's one of the best alien invasion stories I've read in a while.

Kelly says

A few of my reviewing friends had very good things to say about Love Minus Eighty by Will McIntosh. So when Orbit dropped the price of McIntosh's newest release, 'Defenders', to \$1.99 (ebook only, courtesy of the Orbital Drop newsletter), I figured it was a good time to take the author for a test drive. It was an exhilarating ride.

Defenders is a near-future, near-apocalypse science fiction novel. The aliens have landed and they look like big, killer starfish. They call themselves Luyten. Employing weapons of gruesome destruction, they run rampant across our planet, melting ground troops into horrific lumps of gore and searing air support from the sky. If the Luyten seem to always be one step ahead of the allied forces of humanity, that's because they are. They can read minds, which proves to be their most insidious weapon of all.

How does one fight an enemy who knows the plan in advance, who can sense the hidden and hidden agendas and can trounce any ambush? One creates a soldier with a mind that cannot be read, of course.

It is determined that the lack of serotonin in a human mind would render our thoughts inscrutable to the Luyten and so the Defenders are created. Seventeen feet tall, with three legs and detachable limbs bristling with armaments, the Defenders are engineered for one purpose: to kill. They are highly intelligent, but lack human emotional response. Apparently, that's the cost of no serotonin. No one considers the implications of a soldier without emotions until after the Defenders win the war...and teach humanity an extreme lesson in

humility.

The novel follows a handful of interrelated characters over the course of twenty years, from the depths of the Human-Luyten war forward. Scientists and soldiers, both, all caught in the tumble of events. It is the experience of each of these characters that tells the story. Lila Easterlin's affinity and affection for the Defenders actually shows more clearly than any other perspective just how monstrous are these creations. Being the first to engage in two-way telepathic communication with the Luyten, Kai Zhou has a unique understanding of their purpose and motivations. Oliver Bowen is one of those characters who is plucked from obscurity and thrust through heroics. Dominique Wiewall created the Defenders.

Like most apocalyptic novels, *Defenders* is a cautionary tale and it's not subtle in the telling, but it is extremely enjoyable in its exploration of an interesting set of 'what ifs'. There are some obvious messages, such as a two-time examination of humanity's tendency to shoot first and ask questions later (kill them all and let God sort them out!) and a more disturbing suggestion that even while we might ally against a superior (alien) force, we're still a bunch of racists. The Defenders and the Luyten are both given (exiled) to Australia. Out of sight, out of mind?

As a native Australian, I did take humorous exception to the use of my country as place to put undesirables. But, as my husband pointed out, it's not as if it hasn't happened before. I would like to note that the displaced Australians would NOT be happy in North Dakota, however. That would be like putting a lizard in Antarctica. Honestly, I'm surprised they didn't revolt. Then again, we can be a lazy bunch.

Then there is the examination of the Defenders, themselves, who are ultimately more alien than even the race from beyond the stars. Yet, we designed and built them. This is the heart of the story and at times shockingly brutal. I liked that McIntosh pulled no punches when it came to demonstrating our folly. At times, he managed to draw an extremely thin line between absurdity and horror and I wasn't sure which side of the line I was on.

Defenders isn't really an 'All's well that ends well' novel, neither. By the end, the tally of losses is significant. But I don't think the story could have been told any other way, not with the same impact. My only complaint would be that while McIntosh managed to pack a lot of story into the novel, he did skim of the more human aspects, such as the relationships between Lila and Kai and other pairings. Considering his subject, that might have been on purpose. Either way, he certainly managed to convey the fact the Defenders were not at all human. Highly recommended for fans of Science Fiction – military, near-future and otherwise and readers with a super-soldier fetish and those who enjoy a good apocalypse.

The version I reviewed had an excerpt of *Love Minus Eighty* at the end, which has only whet my appetite for more Will McIntosh. I've already bought it and plan to read it over the summer. Consider that review pending.

Written for SFCrowsnest.

Timothy Ward says

Reviewed at Adventures in SciFi Publishing

Podcast + giveaway with Will, discussing writing, *Defenders* and *Love Minus Eighty*.

Will McIntosh's *Defenders* is unlike any alien invasion book I've read. It starts off with introductions to characters you immediately care for, revealing the strangeness and borderline horror of the world they live in. The Luyten are an alien species that has already almost won the war, combining their ability to read human minds with heat ray guns to decimate humanity into living in the shadows. Their victory is inevitable, and yet we experience their dominance, initially, through young minds, adding to the sense of vulnerability and hope.

Into this situation, we meet a very likable cast of characters:

The sole captured alien, Five, is being interrogated by Oliver in a secret compound far enough away to be out of range from the other Luyten's telepathic reading. Without spoiling anything about Oliver's circumstance, I'll say that he has marriage problems, trust issues, and is on the verge of losing everything for this war. He is very smart, but lacks charisma and self-confidence. He will be vital to humanity's attempted survival, though, so don't expect him to catch any breaks any time soon.

Kai is a young teenager when we first meet him. He's left his only friend and has no family, and is struggling to find food and warmth in the narrowing space humanity has left. His only means of survival will be following Five's instructions.

Another young teenager, Lila, is on the run with her father. Her moments with him are as emotionally engaging as if I'd been there with her, needing my father to make the broken world around me somehow right--and yet also recognizing that I'm strong enough to be valuable in that change.

As the title reveals, the Luyten are not the only force to reckon with. *Defenders* are Goliath-type soldiers created without serotonin so that the aliens can't read their minds.

There are lots of twists in *Defenders*, so I'll leave the plot alone at that. As I mentioned above, this book was a unique experience. When I see a book about invasion, I think I'm getting ready for a sprawling series of give and take. This book isn't small, but it does complete the story in time jumps that unfortunately made me feel like it was progressing too quickly. Will is an incredible writer, and one could argue that the book is tightly edited to only include the necessary scenes. His father is a Brigadier General, and Will acknowledges that he provided a good deal of advice on military tactics. I don't know much about tactics, and while this book displays believable scenarios, it doesn't get bogged down in the details. Maybe I should be thankful he didn't spend chapter after chapter of waiting in the months between major events. On the other hand, skipping time sort of took me out of their experience, as though I were reading a documentary after the fact instead of living with them during. I'm conflicted making that statement because he does place us in their daily lives during key moments, with battles that are fresh and intense and in dramatic conflicts where death is imminent, such as while the bad guy is trying to be a friend.

In order to keep the main cast central to the narrative, Will sometimes jumped ahead when I would have liked to have seen more of the effects of major events. We see how they affected our main cast, but I guess my preference would be to have seen this story expanded to multiple books. Relationships formed off the page, for example, but then had strong emotional moments on the page, so it was a give and take between wanting more and getting what I hoped for. While I had moments of strong emotional responses to their conflict, I wonder if I could have had more had the off page moments been included. The result was loving the first stage of the characters' lives, but only having a so-so enjoyment and engagement with the middle and end of their stories.

While I didn't predict many of the plot twists exactly, there was kind of a predicted pattern to the conflict

that played out about as I thought it would, leaving the ending less surprising and fulfilling than I would have liked.

In spite of being conflicted about the style of storytelling in Defenders, I recommend it. For alien invasion stories, it has one of the strongest casts I've read or seen. The action is visceral and unrestrained, evoking a real sense of danger that shined just as much as the character moments. I just wish it would have taken more time with the characters and had more surprising plot twists.

Banner says

Humans sure have it ruff in science fiction and they really take a beating in this one. But never underestimate our survival instinct! That's the mistake the Luyten (i.e. alien invaders) make as they arrive and systematically take control of our planet. While the aliens are physically and technologically advanced, their real strength lies in their ability to read our minds.

At this stage in human technology we have come a long way in genetics. We develop a genetic species which is not really human but share many of our traits. They are smarter (higher I.Q.) stronger and faster (they have three legs) than humans but they are missing that part of the brain which is necessary for the Luyten's to be able to read their thoughts. Thus was born the Defenders.

The problem is the cure maybe worse than the sickness.

This is a character driven, action intense, good old fashion science fiction story. I enjoyed the fast pace, but there were a couple of times I would have like to have explored the character or event a little more. The aliens were well conceived and believable. Some of the mental pictures were so well drawn that I could really visualize the aliens and Defenders (however I confess the third leg was a little difficult to picture). This is not great literature, but it is great entertainment for all of us science fiction buffs.

Tabitha says

Defenders by Will McIntosh firmly proves in my mind that the man is a master. He writes people in such a way that ignites an instant connection with those characters. Whether it's using situations that might be common to the every day reader or delving deeper into the human psyche and laying bare those thoughts, desires or fears that you have. The ones that you didn't even recognize until BAM there they are right there in your face.

When I read the description I thought that the book was going to focus on these 'Defenders' but in actuality things start before the Defenders were even created. We see the invasion taking place at it's height as well as at it's start. Infact Part 1 of the book is "INVASION" jumping back and forth from June 2029 forward 9 months and then back again quite a few times. This could be jarring to a reader who doesn't like this style of storytelling but it does come together quite nicely and it worked fine for me and usually I do have an issue with timejumping in a storyline.

The book has three main human perspectives:

Oliver Bowen – He is an interrogator tasked with finding a way to communicate with a captured Luyten, the alien telepathic starfish race that has invaded earth and is systematically wiping out the entire human population. The interaction between Oliver and ‘Five’ (what the captured Luyten calls himself) is really interesting. It’s uncanny to see how someone would react to another being who can quite literally read your mind and seems to know how you feel better than you do.

Kai Zhou – a 13 year old orphaned boy, we first see him trying to unsuccessfully steal food from one of the very few open convenience stores left in his town. He is starving, cold and all alone...until someone decides to help him. Later on Kai becomes tied to Oliver.

Lila Easterlin – another young teen, this girl is a Virtual Reality savvy genius who now has no net to play with and so thus she starts to tinker with hardware and can create all manner of things or get old junk things working. She gives us the perspective of someone who still has some family ties left and she’s in the middle of one of the biggest cities still left uncaptured by the enemy Luyten.

There is a big jump forward in time of about 15 years after the invasion and war so we get to see the teens as adults and how people have adjusted. The first part of the book for me was entirely engrossing because even though it wasn’t extremely action packed all of the build up was fascinating. I do have to admit some of the pace slows down considerably but that doesn’t stop the momentum.

There is a lot of exploring of the human condition. What would people and the government do when faced when this kind of crisis. Would they be supportive of their fellow man or would it be everyone for themselves? Do you know yourself as well as you thought you did. Are your ideals and your thoughts of right and wrong something you would stick by when faced with this kind of catastrophe? What kind of freaking corners would you cut and how forward thinking could we as a people afford to be? There are just so much brain candy to be mulled over in Defenders and not all of it as you can tell is sweet. The way McIntosh blends story with characters is perfect. He gives these characters that are so well written coupled with worldbuilding and storytelling that is unparalleled. I can’t rant on enough about how much I’ve loved the two books of his I’ve read already. **My friend teases me that I have a Will-o-mance going on because of how much I love his books. I’ve got no shame ok, he’s an amazing author! I would read this man’s grocery list. Ok maybe I’m going too far now. (See my Love Minus Eighty review and see me rant again about how amazing that book is.)**

While I felt many of the major plot turns were obvious this didn’t take away from the sheer impact of the story. I think this was more about experiencing this crazy journey with Oliver, Kai and Lila rather than anticipating what was going to happen. I thought I knew where things were going and I was right but walking that road with these people was an emotional roller coaster that I definitely wouldn’t have wanted to miss.

I think I must have raved about this books to more strangers in the past week than I have any other book in the past 5 months. I like to rave – and the one thing I kept repeating **“FREAKING ALIEN TELEPATHIC STARFISH!”** – I just couldn’t get over how cool that was. It wasn’t the most important thing of course but come on...that’s pretty crazy. I love seeing the different forms aliens take in Science Fiction. But you have to remember – we humans genetically engineer a race of ‘Defenders’ in this book that are so different from humans you’ll be surprised to see just how. Will McIntosh is definitely my favorite science fiction author and I’ve only read two of his books. Defenders was an emotionally powerful book as well as something that will get you thinking, just how humane are we?

Overall 4.5 stars

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are strictly my own.

Milo (BOK) says

More like a 4.5 than a straight 5, but still a very good book and it comes highly recommended. Review coming soon - the backend of the Founding Fields is currently down meaning that I can't post reviews, but they'll go up when the problem is resolved.

Terence says

In Defenders, aliens come to the Earth that humanity can't defeat because for an 8 mile radius they can read our minds.

My problem with this, beyond the writing that made me feel like I was being punished for something I didn't do, is even Fry from Futurama found out from a Hobo that when an alien is trying to read your mind you have to wear a tinfoil hat.

I mean come on, even Weird Al Yankovic knows to go with the tinfoil hat.

I want to see battles and the unstoppable alien forces instead I got a guy doing a job he's not qualified for, two kids, and a dead soldier prologue. The story was so disappointing and frustrating that I was not about to force myself to finish it.

M Tat says

There's a big idea here, yet it's crammed into too few pages. Peter K. Hamilton's Night Trilogy represents what McIntosh should have done: expand this into three, well fleshed-out novels that provide a greater sense of 'war is hell' and that there are shifting sides. It would allow the characters to be more relatable, as well.

At the same time, given that I was looking for a rapid, brief read, this worked. I chewed through the book in less than 4 hours.

The imagery associated with the battles is brief, fresh, succinct, and reads a great deal like a movie script. Nowhere near as bad a movie script as the Nightwatch/Daywatch/Twilightwatch series or as stunted, but it does read like a movie script in its simplicity.

It also seems odd--and by odd I mean 'poorly thought out'--that the other lifeforms/organisms in this novel have such anthropomorphism. Couldn't they have actually been legitimately diverse instead of just humanoid

behavior in different types of bodies?

A.G. Riddle says

A fresh take on Alien invasion. I loved it.

Tim says

I accidentally recommended this book before I finished it. I should know better than that.

The first 1/3 of the book was phenomenal. The action was intense. The overall premise was new and exciting. Hard to predict. Definite page turner. Then twist #1 hit, and it all fell apart for me. I feel like with stronger character development and much stronger dialog, this could have been incredible. Unfortunately I found myself uncomfortable reading the cheesy, clunky, unbelievable dialog, even given the circumstances. The reactions of the main characters started getting more and more ridiculous and irrational. I understand that this story is attempting to display the different ways humans cope with extreme situations, but it just didn't deliver for me.

I'm a details guy. You give me a ton of consistent details about the world and its inhabitants and I will be fully absorbed into that Story. The contradictions scattered throughout this plot were distracting. Not many facts were shared on either of the two new races, yet they were easily thrown to the side when convenient. Again, I understand that this was used to further push the plot along to the end goal, but it took me out of the story, questioning if I misunderstood these few basic facts, or wondering 'why the hell did they just do that?!', never to receive a satisfying answer.

Part 1 of the story (the first 1/3) gets 4 stars. I would have been happy if it were a novella and ended there. The second and third parts were rough reading, and by the end I just wanted the book over with, earning 2 stars... All balancing out to 3 in the end. I'm glad I got this for only \$1.99; I woulda kicked myself in the ass if I bought the hardcover for full price. I won't recommend this to others. Another missed opportunity... I seem to be reading a lot of those lately.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

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

Last year, I read an incredibly moving book called Love Minus Eighty. As I closed the cover on the last page and settled back with a roiling mind and warmed heart, I knew right there and then that any future novels written by Will McIntosh will be going straight onto my to-read list. Someone who can write such a magnificent story (not to mention give me all these feels) certainly belongs on my list of favorite authors. And so that is how I came to review Defenders, and I don't have to tell you how excited I was.

On the surface, the two books I've read by Will McIntosh could not be any more different. Love Minus Eighty explores love in a future caught up in a tangled web of digital information and social media.

Defenders, on the other hand, is about war and an alien invasion. Taking place over a period of twenty years, the book is divided into three parts. First, it details humanity's losing battle against the Luyten, a race of giant, starfish-like aliens whose greatest advantage over us is their species' telepathic ability. How do you fight an enemy who can read your every thought and know your actions even before you do?

Enter the defenders, humanity's answer to that question. Tactically-minded and highly intelligent, they are a new race of warriors genetically engineered to be immune to Luyten mind-reading. Needless to say, they summarily wiped the floor with the dastardly starfish. But what happens after the war is won? What on earth do you do with millions of seventeen-foot tall, three-legged extraordinary warriors now that there are no more aliens to fight? They were our saviors, our own beloved creations, and yet they might as well be as foreign to us as the Luyten. The rest of the book covers the tumultuous two decades that follow, exploring the idea of sharing the world with the defenders.

Like I said, superficially there appears to be very little in common between Love Minus Eighty and Defenders. But dig a little deeper, and a couple similarities come to light.

For one thing, thematically different as they are, both novels pack a powerful punch. Will McIntosh has a remarkable ability to write stories that reach deep into your mind and heart, raising questions about ourselves both individually and as a society. I enjoy his tightly woven plots and multiple narratives, but it's the messages in them that transcend the content and that's what ultimately makes reading his work so rewarding.

When you read Defenders, look for the forest, not the trees. Just as you weren't supposed to pick apart the minutiae of cryogenics in Love Minus Eighty, I realized very early on that I shouldn't get too hung up on the logistics of an alien invasion or the ins-and-outs of bio-engineering a whole new warrior race. This science fiction novel isn't so much about the "science" than it is a thought-provoking social fiction piece exploring how humanity might approach an "us vs. them" situation. Needless to say, if you enjoy "what if" stories, this would be the ideal book for you. But even in the face of implausible circumstances, Defenders was an enthralling and sometimes terrifying read, given how the speculation always remained grounded in human nature. Humanity has essentially created an army of living, breathing killing machines with only a swift and decisive victory against the Luyten in mind, and now they must live with the consequences of their actions.

What makes someone a friend or foe? Who can put a price on the cost of freedom? As ever, the scenarios in McIntosh's stories are enhanced by his characters; they are the ones who help expand our understanding of the dire things happening in the world, very important in books such as these. And in Defenders, that's no exception. Through the narratives of only a handful of characters – Oliver, Kai, Lila and Dominique – we are able to get a well-rounded sense of the culture and climate of the situation. It's interesting to watch their relationships evolve over the years, and to see how the events of the war has influenced their individual beliefs and perspectives.

Of the two novels from McIntosh I have read now, I think Love Minus Eighty still remains closer to my heart, but Defenders isn't far behind. Both are eye-opening works, and are simply excellent books. I've said this many times before, but this author deserves A LOT more attention!

Patremagne says

Wow. That was a powerful novel.

Last year, Will McIntosh's social science novel *Love Minus Eighty* took many genre readers by surprise in its exploration of human feelings. McIntosh changed things up this time around with *Defenders*, a novel about an alien invasion of Earth.

An alien race known as the Luyten have invaded Earth, wreaking havoc throughout the planet with their heat guns, melting people, cars, and buildings alike. The Luyten have a distinct and incredible advantage over humanity – they're telepathic. They can read minds. How unfair is that? Turns out it's extremely unfair, and humanity is on the brink of destruction; thousands are dying whenever a group of Luyten – often called "Starfish" by the protagonists – attack. Nothing Earth's generals can come up with works because the Starfish know it's coming. In a last-ditch effort, Earth's most brilliant minds create the defenders – seventeen foot-tall beings who know nothing but war. They're missing serotonin, the chemical in the brain that controls feelings, therefore the Luyten can't use telepathy on them.

The blurb is fairly misleading in that upon reading it, you'd think that the war is over and the issue of what to do with the defenders is the main plot. Nearly half of the story is actually prior to the engineering of the defenders, while humanity is getting its ass kicked by the Luyten. We're brought through the brutality of the war through the eyes of Lila, Oliver, and Kai, and no punches are held. McIntosh's prose is elegant, but also simple – something I'd liken to Mark Lawrence. They both write beautifully, but succinctly – not flowery, overbearing, or "purple" as some call it. The structure of *Defenders* is strange in that, as mentioned before, the blurb doesn't describe the novel's full plot, and thus it's difficult to talk about without spoiling.

Defenders is a deceptively deep novel. On the surface, it reads fast, but beneath it, McIntosh continues his exploration of human nature and what it is to be human. One scene in particular stood out:

"Humans made defenders with three legs, because you see us as valuable, but not as valuable as humans. Mammals have four legs, insects six, and Luyten either six or seven. So killing a Luyten means nothing, but you should only kill a dog if you intend to eat it. Do you think that makes sense?"

It's very thought-provoking stuff. The interactions with the defenders are where it really stands out. Lacking serotonin and therefore emotion, they try to do things that they see humans do in their warlike manner, but the effect isn't the same as it would be if a human did it. The inability of the defenders to properly interact with their creators leads them to distance defender society from that of the humans, and that's when the conflict mentioned in the blurb begins.

Will McIntosh's *Defenders* is definitely one of the best science fiction novels I've read in recent time. The characters are deep enough that you'll feel various things for them, ranging from annoyance, to hatred, to love, and that's where McIntosh thrives – in his characters. Orbit continues to earn its reputation as one of the top publishers in the business.
