



The Fictional Man

Al Ewing

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Hollywood: Niles Golan is writing a remake of a camp-classic spy movie. The studio has plans for a franchise, so rather than hiring an actor, the protagonist will be 'translated' into a cloned human body.

It's common practice - Niles' therapist is a Fictional. So is his best friend. So, maybe, is the woman in the bar he can't stop staring at. Fictionals are a part of daily life now, especially in LA.

In fact, it's getting hard to tell who's a Fictional and who's not...

Funny, clever, profound and moving, *The Fictional Man* is set to be Al Ewing's break-through novel.

The Fictional Man Details

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Author : Al Ewing

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Mieneke says

Niles Golan is an ass. There, I said it. He's unlikeable, narcissistic, egocentric and he's a realist—and not in a good way. Yet despite all this I was rooting for him to get it right, to get his life back on track and to become the success he so desperately wants to be. It is a testament to Al Ewing's considerable writing skills that Niles manages to be a sympathetic character despite all his flaws. But *The Fictional Man* is more than just a character study of a rather unpleasant man; it's also an exploration of what it means to be human. When does the Other cross that line and become human to us? Who are we? Are we who others perceive us to be or who we tell ourselves we are? Ewing never gives us the answer to these questions, but he gives us an answer. It makes for a fascinating, many-layered story that keeps surprising the reader at every turn.

The Fictional Man is a little metafictional as it's a book about a writer writing a screen play. The story uses several different forms to tell its tale. There are fragments of a film script, a review, a children's book written as a poem, a short story all contained in the narrative. And of course there is always Niles narrating Niles. These can be jarring, but as opposed to the metafictionality described by Adam Calloway, it doesn't alienate. Yes, you are aware you are reading fiction – an awareness emphasised by this world being an alternate reality, it's our world now, but with some rather significant alterations – but you're never quite sure where the primary layer of fiction ends and the following layer begins. The reader is also confronted with the fact that every narrator is potentially an unreliable narrator, especially if a story is told in the first person. Ewing drives this point home through letting Niles self-narrate his life. It doesn't just make for some very funny inner dialogues, it also shows that how we feel and what we think, in many cases isn't what we say or do. In Niles' perception – and imagination – he's a badass crime writer and the only reason he's not a bestseller such as Stephen King or James Patterson is because the critics have it out for him. But the Niles we're shown in the novel is far from the stellar talent he thinks himself and we see him scrabbling for every bit of recognition and success he can get, even if it means doing something he'd rather not.

Ewing's concept of fictionals – artificially grown beings, who are live versions of fictional characters – is awesome. It's also a little scary, what if they translated Hannibal Lector, and rather exploitative, but brilliant in its wish-fulfilment potential. As such, I really liked the taboo on fictional/realist relationships, as on the one hand it takes away one exploitation factor, on the other hand it also shows the innate human tendency to dehumanise the Other. It makes Niles' gradual realisation that fictionals are also humans, or at least as human as they've been written to be, more powerful and his prior prejudice even more obviously wrong-headed. He gains insight and a different perspective due to his friendship with Bob, a super hero fictional gone independent, and through his research of the source material for the film he's asked to script the re-make for. Niles realises Niles Golan is just as fictional as Bob is, that in the end we're all fictional, we all write our own stories, for good or bad. It's a powerful message and it reminded me of the following quote from Kurt Vonnegut from the introduction to *Mother Night*: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

In the end, Niles does get his fictional, even if it isn't the fictional he expected. It's a satisfying ending, even if a little disturbing and sad. I was blown away by Ewing's *The Fictional Man*, not in the least because the more I think about it, the more layers I discover and the more impressive it becomes. There is so much to unpack in this story, it's amazing. This is definitely a contender to make my best of year list at the end of the year, in quite a high place as well, and I wouldn't be surprised to find it on awards ballots next year. And you shouldn't be surprised that I highly recommend it.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

Indi Martin says

Imagine a world that's perfected human cloning, but of course the ethical questions remain; laws are enacted to protect against cloning any actual human beings - but movie studios find a loophole in which they are able to use carefully-engineered cloned bodies to create real-life people out of fictional characters, the Fictionals. A slightly clunky premise, but it's more than made up for by the lushness of Ewing's writing. We follow Niles Golan, a prolific author who isn't nearly as good at his craft as he imagines himself to be, and who obsessively narrates his life in an inner monologue that glorifies himself as the hero of his life. He's a deeply, DEEPLY flawed protagonist, and a fascinating prism through which we view the rest of the characters, some "real," and some, like Bob Benton, his best friend and arguably the most interesting character in the novel, Fictionals. The plot wends its way through what feels more like a character study, a lazy river on which Golan's ego floats, but is nonetheless entralling by the end. My favorite of my recent reads, I'd like to read more of Ewing's work and highly recommend it.

Gavin Gates says

Brilliant, clever writing as is expected from a name such as Al Ewing but with his 2000ad pedigree you would expect a flat out action bloodbath, but while you do get some oldschool comic book narcissism, you couldn't be more wrong, instead, what you get is a seriously intelligent backdrop with complex plot lines and characters with more bite to them than you would have thought possible exploring a real dark side to the human and manufactured persona. Absolutely nothing about this novel from the brilliant artwork of the front cover to the very last word could be considered anything short of spot on.

Steve Bishop says

What could have been an awesome PKD/Frederick Pohl sci-fi instead falls into the trap of postmodern self indulgence. What could have been a fascinating foray into psychologies of people in a world where even the human can potentially be mechanised, reproduced digitally, where uniqueness is a commodity, now one that is replicable, is simply a chronicle of the trials and tribulations of some jaded Hollywood hack. No character insight, very little philosophy, I was very disappointed because the central idea of simulants of fictional characters being fabricated as apparently real live humans is brilliant.

Mjhancock says

Call it a 3.5. The book stars Niles Golan, narcissistic writer of a pulp thriller book series that isn't quite as good as he thinks it is. Niles lives in a world like ours with a sci-fi twist--cloning technology has been combined with computer programs that can translate written accounts of people into blueprints for bodies and minds; in short, you can clone fictional people. In fact, Niles' best friend is a fictional named Bob, who

formerly starred in a superhero TV show. Niles is given the opportunity to create his own fictional when he's hired to write the reboot of a campy spy film. But when he realizes the film is sexist crap, he becomes obsessed with tracking down its origin, through television, children's books, and a short story, searching for the kernel of a "true" core. Along the way, he's slowly forced to confront his own hypocrisy, and decide what, if any, version of him is the "real" him.

It occurs to me the book could go a lot further in world-building than it does; it's established that the fictional people are only made by Hollywood studios, and tend to keep out of the spotlight after retiring from the roles they were created to play; there's not a lot on how this affected "real" actors, or what happened to society on a broader scale--ok, there's a taboo about sex between Fictionals and real people, but not a whole ton beyond that. (Though there is a LOT done in that direction; one subplot features a sex group where the members specialize in pretending they're characters in fictional stories.) What happens when you make fictionals based on historical people? Or people who already exist? Granted, the book's best gag, involving a gaggle of Sherlock Holmes, is inspired. But it never quite reaches the mania of similar books, like the Thursday Next series.

And it never quite reaches the depth of the really great metafictional works either; this isn't *If On a Winter's Night A Traveler*, despite the shared element of a search for an original story. I think the problem there is that Niles is deeply unpleasant as a character. He gets better as the book goes on, and it's clear that Ewing *means* for him to be that unpleasant so that his potential Road to Damascus or swerve away from such is that much more impactful, but it's still a bit of an eye-rolling slog to start. It's not a great book gender-wise, as the main women are either wedges between Niles and others or weirdos, though that's excusable on some level if you accept that all the characters are here in terms of their relation to Niles, regardless of gender. (Though it would be nice if Niles felt a little more worth it.) Other characters are too similar--Niles' best friend Bob and his life coach feel very similar (though I feel racist for saying so. I swear, not all fictionals look alike to me! Some of my best friends are fictional!okay, that last one is true, though sad.)

All that nitpicking aside, it's a fun book, and I'll give it credit for making marginally more sense than the similar *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (the original novel, not the movie) and a little more hopeful than another "fiction comes to life" story, *The Land of Laughs* by Jonathan Carroll (though to be fair, Carroll was going for more of a horror vibe). I read it in a single sitting, it asks some interesting questions about what it means to be a creator and/or a decent person, and the fictional idea does get some good laughs. I'm glad I read it, on that level at least.

Stuart says

First Impression: I fell victim to another awesome book cover. Thankfully what was contained within was worthwhile reading, which is always a bonus. *The Fictional Man* is a story of identity, neurosis and pop culture. I enjoyed my time within these walls and I related to the main character quite a bit as I am also an introvert who wishes he was more assertive!

Summary Of The Book:

Niles Golan is an author, he was a half decent one but now he is sliding away from the public view after sending out one embarrassing novel after another. Golan's main novel series is about Kurt Powers, an ex lawyer turned non-nonsense private investigator. After 17 novels under his belt Golan wants to revitalise his character on the big screen and in real life. Golan lives in a world where cloning technology exists and it is

quite an established and almost common practice. Society rejects the idea of cloning real-life people as it would lead to problems and most likely increase crime rates. They do however believe that it would be acceptable to use this cloning ability to bring to life fictional characters. Golan wants to invigorate his career and his life by bringing Kurt Powers to real life to be his best friend and his meal ticket.

As Golan has let himself and his career slide he isn't able to just create Kurt Powers by himself, he needs a studio to fund the project and eventually his first movie. After approaching a studio he is offered a project, not the one he wants but he is led to believe that this may be the first step on the journey to a freshly made Kurt Powers. The project is to re-imagine his favourite childhood movie 'The Delicious Mr Doll', a cheesy parody of James Bond with the smuttiness and silliness turned up to 11. Armed with his incredibly introvert personality and his fictional friend Bob, Golan must get to the root of this movies origin and write a box office smash so he can get what he really wants.

Set in a world where pop culture literally walks the streets and the line between reality and fiction is blurred to the max, *The Fictional Man* is a fun, neurotic and odd novel that will make you question if you really want to meet some of your heroes or just leave them within the pages of your favourite book.

My Review:

The Fictional Man is a book that pulls a lot of separate concepts that appear across literature and pop culture and amalgamates them into an amusing, semi-complex story of a man's undoing. The author takes cloning, espionage, sex, internal monologues and fiction and splices them together, I enjoyed this book and not just because I am a dork just like Niles Golan...

First the positives...The story was original. I found the concept of an author chasing the origin of a story that has been so stretched, mangled and warped that you can't believe how the end result came about vastly enjoyable. Also the undoing of the introvert, uptight, dorkish and unpleasant Niles Golan was probably the best part of this book. The author set up this unbearable and frustrating character and then picked him apart slowly over the course of this episode and left him almost reborn. Niles is a funny character, he's a part of all of us at some point in our lives. He is the bad choices we make, the silly decisions and the internal voice we all wish we had the courage to fulfil (well myself at least). The other cast members all have their place and they add plenty to this story, Bob the fictional best friend who tries to settle the argument that 'Fictionals' are real people. The ex-wife who tests Golan every step of the way and makes him question himself. The various and absurd characters that make the reader smile or think WTF i.e his douche bag agent or the woman who pretends to be fictional. This book made me laugh!

Dislikes...there was not much I didn't like in this piece, it is not perfect by any means but I didn't find myself frustrated, bored or unchallenged. There were a few themes and parts that I did not find interesting, the whole no sex between Fictionals and real people was a bit phoney. The concept of cloning fictional characters is questionable but it was core element of the book so i embraced it. I found it hard to care about Niles to begin with, but once his character started to break apart I found myself rooting for him. This book is cheesy, disturbing and weird, but it is also charming and everyone can relate somehow.

The main themes included are identity, cloning, culture and humanity. The author conveyed these themes well and I think the only weak theme was the cloning, but cloning is always abused in books and television as it is a versatile and shady practice. The authors development was superb, I genuinely saw Golan change and peel of his undesirable characteristics and leave him as a blank slate, taking life one day at a time.

Overall *The Fictional Man* is a decent and highly readable piece of fiction that all fantasy or science fiction

readers at least will appreciate. This novel is grimy, warped and a lot of fun!

7/10

If you have visited Always Trust In Books already then come back again! If you have not swung by then please do and spend some time reading my reviews, there is something for everyone!! We are also on Twitter, Facebook, Goodreads, Amazon UK/US and Bookbridgr. Have an awesome day!!

Ray Lux says

Terrific short stories strung together with a loose overall theme. It's sort of like a clip show. Every single story is great.

Liz says

An Azimov-like exploration of what it means to be human, with plenty of nods to noir that surprisingly didn't feel out of place in a story set in 2013. One of my favourite sci-fi stories I've ever read

Andrew says

Al Ewing has created a very interesting and original science fiction novel. The novel centres around Niles, a mediocre writer who lives a lonely and delusional life, with dreams of making a movie and creating a Fictional, a human clone-like-being made especially for the movies, which perfectly represent the characters they are made to play. The novel is humorous, in a deeply depressing sort of way, and does not skimp in the emotional blows. The characters in the novel are very real, which makes the subtlety of the alternate history/science fiction that is featured all the cooler.

Gray says

'God, as he emerged from the translation tube, had a warm, beatific personality and a wickedly dry sense of humour, but what made his performance – as himself, or Himself, depending on how heretical you were feeling – was the essential otherworldliness he brought to the role, that strange touch of unreality.' (Loc 154)

Al Ewing is a British writer more widely known for his work in comics. He began writing for the British comic book *2000 AD*, and currently writes for a number of publishers including Marvel Comics. He has written titles including *Judge Dredd*, *the New Avengers*, and *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. His debut novel *Pax*

Britannia: El Sombra was published by Abaddon Books in 2007. *The Fictional Man* is my first experience of his work.

Just suppose that huge breakthroughs in science in the field of cloning were made in the 1970s. It becomes possible to grow fully formed adult beings with preset personalities. However, this advanced technology was purposely limited to creating specific, designed individuals, namely TV and movie characters called “Fictionals”. Thus Indiana Jones, for example, is actually a clone designed and grown by Hollywood complete with his tailor-made personality. When these Fictionals’ TV or movie career is over, they take ordinary jobs in the public and private sector. So you might see James Bond as a doorman or Jane Eyre working in a library.

The Fictional Man is set in L.A. and introduces us to pulp fiction writer Niles Golan. He is best known for his series of “Kurt Power” adventure novels, the latest being “Death by Degrees”. Unfortunately, these books are not well regarded in the literary scene and the reviews are getting progressively worse with each release. In a stroke of good fortune, Niles is hired to write the script for a big budget remake of a camp 1960s spy movie. Seeking inspiration, he begins to research the background of the writer of said movie.

If you like your fiction with added ‘meta’ then this book could be for you. *The Fictional Man* is a very metafictional story. The author uses his central theme of cloned fictional characters to ask questions about identity as well as exploring what it is that makes somebody “real”. (*Definite parallels with Philip K. Dick here.*) There are some interesting discussions on this topic between Niles and his therapist, Ralph, who is a Fictional:

“Ralph... do you mind not being real?”

Ralph raised his eyebrows. “Wow.”

“I know.”

“I see someone’s closet realism is no longer very closet.” (Loc 2839)

Niles also enjoys ‘internally narrating his own life story’, often imagining a much better outcome to the different situations he finds himself in. This leads to some very funny scenes later on in the book as Niles’s narrations become more and more exaggerated. These internal monologues, coupled with his bias against Fictionals, help to reveal Niles’s personality. He is a difficult character to like, but there are parts of him that we will all recognize. It feels like a deliberate choice by the author to make his main character unpleasant. Perhaps it is through his flaws that we come to understand him, almost sympathize with him and his lot.

It is unclear how successful this book has been for Al Ewing. I discovered it thanks to **Bookpunks'** enthusiastic review of it. It is a very entertaining story that is crying out for a wider audience. If you are interested in Philip K. Dick or metafiction, then this could be the book you're looking for. Recommended!

<https://biginjapangrayman.wordpress.c...>

Cindy says

I knew when I started this book it would be well outside my comfort zone. I mostly read (and enjoy) High/Epic Fantasy and the occasional SciFi or Horror book. I sensed “The Fictional Man” would be

something I couldn't stash in one particular genre and that it would be different than what I'd normally read. However, I was intrigued by the idea of 'Fictionals' walking among ordinary people and how it would affect normal life.

Al Ewing takes us to an alternative LA where most movies don't have a star actor anymore, but a Fictional, a person specifically written out and made to fit a certain role. Imagine Sherlock Holmes dashing around or Katniss from the Hunger Games buying groceries in the store around the corner. And I'm not talking about someone portraying these characters, no, I'm talking about the actual characters, taken from the pages and brought to life in a cloned human body.

The main character is Niles Golan, an author with a huge ego and whose life is a complete train wreck. He's tasked with rewriting a spy movie and although he'd love to see his own books adapted for the big screen (and have his character made as a fictional), he takes this opportunity with both hands. His best friend is a Fictional, so is his 'therapist' and he wants to create a fictional. You'd think he's a big Fictional-loving man. But he's not.

It was really interesting to see this story develop. The story itself (and especially the rewrite of the movie) isn't that important. This book makes you think about the ethics of cloning people, about how the reaction to these persons may be. It confronts you with the prejudices of the common people towards the Fictionals. It introduces you to how certain Fictionals might feel and how diverse even that is. Throughout the story we can see a change in Niles. At the end of the book he's not the same Niles we got to know in the first part of the book.

It's the little things that hint at these changes. For instance, Niles has some sort of inner voice that makes up scenarios as he goes through life. Obviously, Niles is always the hero, the stronger man, the bad-ass in these made up stories and obviously it never works out that way. But the more the book continuous, the more the tone of this narrative, inner voice begins to change.

As I said in the beginning, this book was not really in my comfort zone and it's not a book I'll probably reread some years from now, but it was very interesting to read nonetheless. It has a very ethical-debate, psychological tone going on and I like to read these sort of books occasionally.

All in all, not entirely my cup of tea, but interesting enough to keep me hooked.

Oscar says

An interesting premise that's kind of bogged down by a race allegory. There's interesting things about responsible writing, how stories might grow or be interpreted differently by audiences and so on, but honestly I would've vastly preferred an increased focus on the hysterical "all the Sherlock Holmes actors solving a murder" subplot.

Vanessa says

THE FICTIONAL MAN by Al Ewing was not an easy book to read. The main character, Niles Golan is a jerk. He's spent his entire life in denial of his own faults (of which there are many) and now that he's alone and miserable he's finally beginning to understand why.

In Niles' world cloning technology exists, but there's too many legalities involved in making clones from real people. The workaround is "fictionals," which are people created from tubes that are the live embodiment of fictional people, for example Sherlock Holmes. Imagine what it would be like to see James Bond in real life--or at the least playing himself in a movie.

But if fictionals aren't real should they be able to have a relationship with real people? Will their wiring allow it? How would real and fictional people interact? What would life be like for a fictional--never growing old, always being stuck being a certain way?

Niles doesn't consider himself a "realist," or a person who considers fictionals to be second-class citizens. His best friend is a fictional (Bob Benton, the Black Terror!), he hired a fictional life coach since his last therapist was so ineffective, and at the bar he often visits sits a woman he stares at who's a fictional (maybe). But as the story progresses it becomes painfully obvious that Niles does have an issue with fictionals, the question is how long will it take him to realize it for himself?

Because Niles is not a very sympathetic protagonist, and he stumbles around his life without any purpose other than his own self-aggrandizement, I had a hard time caring about where the story went. Sure the premise is interesting, and Ewing presents it in a very close-up, visceral way that makes the reader think about prejudice in general and the stereotypes involved. And sure Ewing can tell a story about a very flawed man in a very flawed world where rose-colored glasses were long ago thrown down and ground under foot. But, ultimately this book wasn't for me, because...well, I happen to like roses and nice people and protagonists I want to root for.

Set in an alternate current-day Los Angeles, **THE FICTIONAL MAN** revolves around Niles' movement as he attempts to come up with a movie pitch based on a remake. But Niles finds layer after layer of background inspiration, and he's compelled to uncover the mystery. Among the mystery are Niles' memories, self-narration, visits with his ex-wife and friend Bob, and so on--all of it together, it's all just so weird. This is an uncomfortable book to read, and it doesn't help that the steady pace is slow and pedantic. The prose is great, very clean and smooth, and it's obvious Ewing's skill with words. Doesn't make the story less weird, though.

So if you like weird stuff with seriously flawed characters and a subtext asking what being "real" really means...then **THE FICTIONAL MAN** is for you.

Recommended Age: Adults only

Language: Frequent

Violence: Some punches thrown but that's about it

Sex: Lots of references and details

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Gina Boyd says

Wow! There is so much going on here! Reading this book is kind of like holding a mirror up to another

mirror and watching that tiny weird stream of infinity. It's fun, it's disturbing, and it makes you wonder what's real.

The whole book, which presents a universe wherein people have to wonder whether fictional characters can be real, comes down to this: "Change," he said. "If you can change...that's what makes you real."

Pretty much, sad, disturbed, jackass protagonist. Pretty much.

Alex DiDonato says

I devoured this. Please, PLEASE, everyone, read this! If you like weird, meta, and/or science fiction this book should be up your alley. PKD fans take note too. If anything, I would be OK with it being a little longer.
