



Runtime

S.B. Divya

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The Minerva Sierra Challenge is a grueling spectacle, the cyborg's Tour de France. Rich thrill-seekers with corporate sponsorships, extensive support teams, and top-of-the-line exoskeletal and internal augmentations pit themselves against the elements in a day-long race across the Sierra Nevada.

Marmeg Guinto doesn't have funding, and she doesn't have support. She cobbled her gear together from parts she found in rich people's garbage and spent the money her mother wanted her to use for nursing school to enter the race. But the Minerva Challenge is the only chance she has at a better life for herself and her younger brothers, and she's ready to risk it all.

Runtime is S. B. Divya's exciting science fiction debut.

Runtime Details

Date : Published May 17th 2016 by Tor.com

ISBN : 9780765389794

Author : S.B. Divya

Format : Paperback 128 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Novella, Fiction, Cyberpunk

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From Reader Review Runtime for online ebook

Lindsay says

A terrific little novella with elements of human cyber-enhancement and the lived experience of being an illegal immigrant in the US.

Marmeg is of Filipino descent and living as an unlicensed person in the US like most of her family. In this US of the future you need a citizen license to access any of society's infrastructure and it costs a lot of money to get one. (A background piece early on shows politicians trying to make it *more* expensive). She's under huge pressure from her mother to give up on her dreams to be an enhancement engineer and to become more cyborged. But instead, she enters a wilderness race for the cyber-enhanced, using enhancements that she's salvaged, repaired and programmed herself in the goal of winning enough prize money to get herself a future and to buy her youngest sibling his citizen license.

This is terrific. Marmeg's drive to become better is palpable, and she faces huge obstacles including her wonderfully supportive (not!) mother. There's interesting perspective as well from the anti-enhancement people that she encounters, who initially start making sense, but then show some really disturbing moral choices.

I'd love to read more in this world.

Bridget McKinney says

I read all of Tor.com's novellas, which is a good thing because I otherwise might have missed out on this gem by S.B. Divya. I would never have picked up a story about a cyborg endurance race on my own, but I'm glad I read this one. Runtime is a marvel of world building and character portraiture wrapped around a perfectly executed straightforward plot and just the right amount of smart-but-not-overbearing social commentary. It's a near-perfect use of the novella length, and I cannot wait to see what S.B. Divya does next.

Read the full review at SF Bluestocking.

Rana says

Well, fuck me. This was way too short. I was loving this and digging this world and so ready for what was going on with gender and then it stopped. Apparently this was just a novella. Damn.

But regardless, this was excellent. Loved the setting, loved the shit about immigrants and naturals and citizens, loved the gender stuff.

Want more, please.

poiboy says

How this is a nominee for a Nebula makes we shake my head till dizzy. Great basic idea, weak execution, glaring unresolved plot points and a surprisingly wasted ending. There are better novellas written that deserve their nominations.

Veronique says

Divya paints a very interesting world with a few strokes. Through the eyes of Marmeg, we see the raging social inequalities held in place, surprisingly by both sides. Dualities seem to be everywhere: people benefiting from the system and those who don't, people with exoskeletons and opting for a neutral gender and those firm against any technology. In fact, most characters in this novella see things one way or the other, black or white, and this is where Marmeg shines in her refusal to follow this, to find her own route, physically, and more importantly morally.

Great thought-provoking read! Hope the author carries on with the story.

Beth Cato says

I received a signed copy of this novella from the author during Nebula Weekend.

Divya's novella is fine scifi: an underdog tale of a cross-country runner with an exoskeleton built out of scrap parts. Marmeg is a heroine you can truly root for, someone who works with black market goods out of necessity to survive, but keeps her eyes on the prize of college and a better life beyond. The world-building here is really something. This is a future America with frequent body modifications and an unsettling yet realistic caste system; many things are merely implied, and I can't help but want Divya to write more works in this setting. Then there is the race itself, where Marmeg confronts the brutality of nature and her fellow competitors... and everything leads to an ending that is complicated and oh so right.

This is a novella to keep in mind when I vote for the Hugos and Nebulas next year.

Carolyn F. says

Small book about the US having a caste system and one woman's attempt to get out of hers. Kind of heart breaking toward the end with a nice HEA (happy every after).

Thomas Wagner says

Full review coming. *Rock-solid 3.5 stars.* Divya's story takes the hackneyed premise so common to the YA dystopian genre (have-not partakes in a grueling competition to better her and her family's mobility) and

actually uses it for the purpose of meaningful cultural commentary.

Stefan Fergus says

There's some interesting stuff in this novella, but it felt underdeveloped. It never caught fire, and so often didn't fulfill its promise. Certain things are given a cursory nod, when it would have been great to hear/read more.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

I received this as an egalley from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

This was a pretty interesting story of a young woman entering a race (using an exoskeleton suit), hoping to win and use the prize money to better her life and her family's. It tackles some ethical questions about cheating and doing the right thing even when it means it might hurt you.

It was enjoyable and I thought the use of language was strong, but the story didn't go as deep as I wanted it to. I would love to read more in this world though and see the details fleshed out.

Scott says

If you're looking for a fun, bite-sized book snack in between larger reads then look no further - S.B Divya's *Runtime* is the literary doughnut you are hankering for.

It's small, satisfying, and occasionally a little too sweet, but this novella goes down very, very easily.

Divya sets her story in a convincing American dystopia, where citizens are classed on whether they are native born and registered (in which case they get access to health, education, etc.) or unregistered, in which case they are left with the support services of Darwinian selection.

Unregistered residents can pay to become legitimate, but the vast cost is beyond the means of most, leaving them stuck in an impoverished underclass.

Into this hellish (but not implausible) mess comes Marmeg Quinta, an unregistered coder and tech-wiz with an insufferable (and one-note) mother and a couple of neer-do-well brothers. Marmeg's life is at a crossroads where she is balancing her passion- getting a real tech degree, becoming registered and making a new life – and the pressure her mother is putting on her to gain an aged care qualification that will guarantee her regular work, but never allow to escape poverty.

In her techie travels Marmeg has accumulated a host of black-market implants that allow her to interface with exoskeletal enhancements, and over time she has gathered discarded and unwanted gear which she has fashioned into a working super-parkour suit, a suit which could be her ticket to a better life.

In a desperate shot at success she has decided to enter the Minerva Sierra Challenge. A brutal, day long race

through the Sierra Nevada mountains that can make superstars of its winners. The catch is that she will be competing with wealthy, sponsored athletes in the latest gear, equipment that makes her own recycled exosuit look like a blunderbuss at a laser cannon convention.

Spending the last of money she buses to the start line of the race with a bag of spare parts and begins her gruelling trek across the mountains, where she will test herself, her ethics and what she will sacrifice to her desire to win.

Runtime is a fun read. The pages flash past, and the story Divya tells is engaging. The novella has a bit of a teen fic vibe, from the age of the central character through to the triumph-of-the-poor-kid and stay-true-to-your-values messages the story imparts, so don't expect anything particularly dark or horrifying, or a grim ending.

It verges on being a tad saccharine at times, but in saying that, grim endings and dark stories are common in SF, and if you need a break from the grind of heavier books *Runtime* is the reading treat for you.

Divya writes well, and tells a good story, ending her narrative at the point when, like any good purveyor of sweet treats, she knows her customers will be left wanting more.

Che Adventure says

Listen to me ramble about exoskeleton suits, a cyborg adventure race, and the consequences to winning a race no matter the cost or means to do so. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6320M...>

Kaa says

There are the bones of an interesting world here, but the story fails to sufficiently flesh them out. S.B. Divya is a talented writer, but I needed more from this novella. I enjoyed that the story got going right away, but there was not sufficient time left for world-building. Additionally, there were two aspects that made me very frustrated.

The conflation of cyborg mods and gender identity was probably the thing I disliked most about this book. It felt like gender identity was entirely tied to bodies - very obviously in the blatant transphobia of two of the characters, but also by the underlying world-building. As far as I could tell, the people who used ze/zir pronouns were those with lots of cyborg body mods and surgery that altered sex-associated anatomy and left them sterile. Which is a very different thing than having a non-binary gender identity. Like, hey, in fact you cannot tell anyone's pronouns by looking at them? For me, the topic of gender identity was just very poorly handled (I actually don't think *identity* was ever even mentioned/discussed), and I was annoyed by what seemed to be unnecessary transphobic comment and misgendering in the middle.

The other aspect that made me angry was the theme about "earning" your place in an inherently unjust society. I kept hoping that Marmeg would get past this, but by the end she is still saying that she has to "prove" herself. Look, the idea that people who are structurally disadvantaged have to play by the rules, work hard, and get the approval of people in power to be "successful" is a lie that only serves to maintain social hierarchies.

Renay says

This was a pretty quick read and tangled with some neat topics around body modification, ~cyborgs~, gender, and doing the wrong things for the right reasons. I really loved Marmeg. I wanted this to be longer, tho! Ah, Tor novellas, you're really digging in on that "always leave them wanting more" shtick.

Fangirl Happy Hour discussion: <http://www.fangirlhappyhour.com/2016/...>

Jasmine says

The main character is born in a no-win situation, attempts to escape to a maybe-win situation, is trapped in another probably-win situation (it just requires giving up their ethics) by situations beyond their control, and chooses to lose for the sake of their ethics. And thus, wins.

It's also a fun and interesting piece of SF, with registered citizens having all the benefits of the future, our character's family having almost none, and the determined struggle to get to the point where they can help each other to a better life. Health care. Education. Food. Technology. There's so much family feeling here.

There's also (also) an interesting bit of story crafting in that our main character wants to become 'moot' (genderless and perfected through technological implants), which is said to be forfeiting their humanity by their mum (and other detractors). But they're shown to be one of the few people who keeps their empathy and willingness to help others (humanity?) in this harsh future, notwithstanding.
