



Cryptic: The Best Short Fiction of Jack McDevitt

Jack McDevitt

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Jack McDevitt loves a good mystery. And he enjoys baffling his readers with enigmas like why, after so many years of listening with no results, would a SETI director hear an artificial signal and keep it quiet? Why might an astronomer at a space station, facing imminent death from a solar radiation blast, send off a frantic message that he had discovered a Clyde Tombaugh Special? Tombaugh, of course, was the discoverer of Pluto.

What really happened to Christopher Sim, the George Washington of the war against the Ashiyyur? Why had a beloved artist at the top of his profession, with everything to live for, killed himself? Why had a brilliant young biologist discovered how life got started on Earth, but neglected to tell anyone?

And there are of course other anomalies to be encountered in McDevitt's work: A computer threatens the literary world, while a time traveler worries the churches. One artificial intelligence runs for president, and another claims to be a Catholic and demands access to the sacraments. Two friends discover that whenever they get together, shuttles crash, wars break out, or tidal waves hammer a coastline.

A researcher watches endless fighting on another world and finally rebels against the Academy's hands-off doctrine. Meantime, a crewman stranded light-years from Earth, entertains himself by intercepting radio broadcasts from home, originally transmitted during World War II.

Among other questions these tales will answer: What might happen when people in a research lab literally try to play God. Why you don't ever, ever, want to turn out the lights at Bolton's Tower in the Dakotas. Why someone might want to blow up a star. And why it would be a really good idea if Hatch kept his hands off the mallet. These, and twenty-three other cosmic rides, await the reader.

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