

CHASER OF GHOSTS:
A NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Chaser of Ghosts is a speculative novel. The story is set in Octopolis, Moscow Division, year 2115, and explores family, prejudice, and greed. During a routine campaign press conference, Nika Niles thwarts an assassination attempt on her mother's life. Her mother thinks she will be safer with her father, so Nika travels with a retired black ops agent to visit her father's geology lab, where not all is as it seems. Nika learns a life-changing secret about her family and a confirmed bachelor struggles to help her accept the truth, her identity, and the role of those who have lied to hide the past. Meanwhile, Nika's mother, Kristian, is trying to stay alive. The state struggles to uncover the identity of Kristian's enemy, who sends taunting, psychological threats. The violence against the citizens escalates. When evidence suggests that a business mogul is orchestrating assassination attempts and civilian massacres, the Niles and Evanovich families, along with their closest allies, must decide who to trust. After Kristian and a little boy are kidnapped, the two families receive unexpected help in their efforts to find the captives and defeat the mastermind before time runs out.

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Chaser of Ghosts is a speculative novel set in 22nd-century Octopolis, Moscow Division. It explores family, power, and difference and contains more subtle notes of greed and prejudice. The novel opens with Mikaila's account of the primitive post-war conditions of 2120 and the failure of her technologically advanced society. Following her short prologue, the novel describes the events of 2115; the first fissure before war and dystopia.

As Poe's adherent, I believe in reading a story or a chapter in one sitting. My chapters were short and in sequential order by four characters: Nika Niles, Dr. Alexi Evanovich, Lionel Nai, and Representative Kristian Stahl. A professor recommended Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*. Robinson's use of eight octets with eight movements each provided the basic structure I applied to my own work. I refashioned my prologue, thirty-six individual chapters, and epilogue into the equivalent of a prelude, nine quartets composed of four movements each, and a reprise. This structural change created flow and left plenty of white space, or pauses, between perspectives. As a result, *Chaser of Ghosts* became less ethereal and more grounded.

The structure that made *Chaser of Ghosts* cohesive is also satisfying because it mirrors the novel's nesting doll-like order. All fiction speculates, but not all is speculative fiction. Instead, speculative fiction encompasses thought provoking science fiction and fantasy. Broadly, *Chaser of Ghosts* is speculative fiction. Specifically, *Chaser of Ghosts* is science fiction. Ursula K. Le Guin, however, defines science fiction in her "Introduction" to *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*. She builds on S. R. Delany's thoughts, which are, perhaps, the most comprehensible and complete:

[. . .] S. R. Delany, has defined the area of science fiction as 'subjunctive reality'. Reporting and history, in Delany's schema, deal with what happened; realistic fiction, with what could have happened; fantastic fiction, with what could not have happened. And science fiction deals with what has not happened.

He refines this useful distinction further to apply three major types of science-fiction stories: the extrapolative, the cautionary, and the alternate-world. The predictive or extrapolative story deals with what has not happened, but might happen. The cautionary tale deals with what hasn't happened -- yet. And the tale of parallel or alternate worlds deals with what might have happened, but didn't (27).

As science fiction, *Chaser of Ghosts* is both extrapolative and cautionary; however, like Asimov and Heinlein stories, the undertones of future resource scarcity, certain economic disparity, and potential failure of democracy nestle my science fiction novel within speculative fiction.

Family is the crux of *Chaser of Ghosts*. I read Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works*, contemplated my own familial ties, and discovered that my novel developed a strong theme of family refined and strengthened through adversity. Pinker argues:

Another surprising consequence of kin solidarity is that the family is a subversive organization . . . [E]very political and religious movement in history has sought to undermine the family. The reasons are obvious. Not only is a family a rival coalition competing for a person's loyalties, but it is a rival with an unfair advantage: relatives innately care for one another more than comrades do. They bestow nepotistic benefits, forgive the daily frictions that strain other organizations, and stop at nothing to avenge wrongs against a member (439).

There are excellent novels that resonate with Pinker's depiction of family. George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* depicts the great houses. They keep their own counsel, trust only immediate family, and strive to overthrow one another for familial gain. Another example is the Frasier family in *The Fiery Cross* wherein Diana Gabaldon discusses clanships. Both novels illustrate how far families go to protect their own. The Niles and Evanovich families tighten their circle of trust, gain strength, and mete out justice to the traitors. Their like-mindedness ensures the serviles have high-security hospice care to keep them safe.

Power is a critical source of intrigue. Kristian, the Madame Head of State, finds herself in a position where strategic maneuvers, which Alexi likens to Newton's Cradle, are paramount to survival. Using her wits and cunning, she delegates tasks to those with critical skills and trusts only her family as she strives to identify those who seek to rupture the democracy she represents. My chief influence for Kristian's character and the methodical strategies in *Chaser of Ghosts* is Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu's principles are easily seen when Kristian visits Skai Tech and engages in a contest of wills with Vice-President Sirena Gill; both women vie for domination through subtle words and body language. *The Art of War* was also critical to how Lionel trains Nika.

Difference is also a key theme in *Chaser of Ghosts*. Humanoids are human GMOs, genetically manipulated with a futuristic form of MAGESTICRISPR that uses stem cells from *T. dohrnii* in the modification process. Humanoids have a company chip tattoo that identifies them as a product; otherwise, they look identical to natural humans -- an important symbol because the humanoids are asexual. Asexuality is very real both in society and my novel. It is often hard to identify on the visible sexuality web because it is indistinguishable, albeit different, from abstinence or virginity. In *Chaser of Ghosts* Ursula and Alex Charles deal with speciesism, which is likened to racism. Their loved ones see them as equals, but neither humanoid is employed because it is dangerous. Nika recalls the story of a politician who called Alex Charles an abomination and highlights the evident prejudice towards humanoids. Only when times become dire does Alex Charles make a public statement. There are darker hints of speciesism within the Seven Unified Nations. The sinister, forced breeding experiments of the past and Ursula's own birth for experimental purposes illustrate the human ability to justify inhumane actions.

I have always wondered what our world might be like in the future. Speculative fiction, particularly science fiction, allows writers to push the limits of the possible while addressing important controversies. Poe's techniques and Robinson's structural ideas provided the first-person and third-person perspectives with logical harmony. *Chaser of Ghosts* swiftly develops the tale of how the Niles and Evanovich family unites against terrorism, flows through the avenues of power that permeate the story and its characters, and encompasses discourse on human prejudices. The topics examined are critical to current society despite the novel's futurism. *Chaser of Ghosts* asks what it means to be human.

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DEDICATION

If you go chasing ghosts, take the time to find your people before you lose yourself along the way. They're out there somewhere. I promise.

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