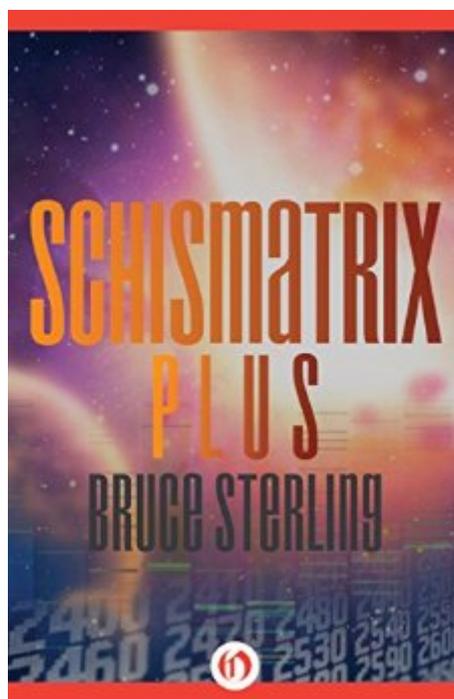


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Schismatrix Plus



Synopsis

The Nebula-nominated novel of a brave new world of nearly constant future shock plus all the short fiction of the Shaper/Mechanist universe (The Washington Post). Acclaimed science fiction luminary and a godfather of the genre's remarkable offspring "cyberpunk" Bruce Sterling carries readers to a far-future universe where stunning achievements in human development have been tainted by a virulent outbreak of prejudice and hatred. Many thousands of years in the future, the human race has split into two incompatible factions. The aristocratic Mechanists believe that humans can only achieve their greatest potential through technology and enhancing their bodies with powerful prosthetics. The rebel Shapers view these improvements as abominations, and their faith in genetic enhancements over mechanical ones has led to violent, even murderous, clashes between the two sects. One man is caught in the middle. The child of Mechanists, Abelard Lindsay is a former Shaper diplomat who was betrayed and cast out of the fold. Scrupulously trained in the fine art of treachery and deceit, he travels freely between the warring camps during his never-ending exile, embracing piracy and revolution all along the way. But while saving his own skin is Lindsay's main motivation, a greater destiny awaits him, one that could offer a bold new hope for a tragically sundered humankind. A breathtaking flight of unparalleled imagination, Bruce Sterling's Schismatrix Plus also includes every subsequent excursion into the Mechanist and Shaper universe, complementing his acclaimed novel with the complete collection of mind-boggling Schismatrix short fiction. The result is a total immersion into the Mechanist/Shaper universe from the Hugo, Campbell, and Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning author called a writer of excellent fineness by Harlan Ellison and one of the very best by Publishers Weekly.

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Customer Reviews

I became interested in Bruce Sterling's writing because he co-authored a book with my favorite sci-fi writer, William Gibson, called "The Difference Engine" about an alternative history of Victorian England. Sterling's Schismatrix Plus shows that he is truly Gibson's equal as a science fiction writer, capable of inventing a complete alternate universe. The Schismatrix novel, and the short stories that accompany it in this edition, take place in the future, where human beings have migrated to space stations and circumlunar colonies within the solar system. The schism at the heart of the universe is between two sects; the Shapers, who are genetic engineers; and the Mechanists, who believe in cybernetics. The Schismatrix novel follows the character Abelard Lindsay through his several hundred years of life, first starting out as a Shaper revolutionary, then after his exile becoming a pirate, and eventually the father of a new sect called Posthumanism. The book is reminiscent of Heinlein's "Time Enough For Love" -- we follow Lindsay through his several re-creations of himself much like we do Lazarus Long in Heinlein's work. The book has an eerie beauty to it; the posthuman universe, although melancholy, is not without charm. Central to the work is a distrust of ideology -- the blood feuds in the work between the various sects are extremely destructive of the characters' personal relationships; but Sterling's message is still positive -- all narrow sects are doomed in the end by the shock of the new future, and all old revolutionaries are outdone by their descendants. The short stories that accompany the novel are also very good; and they are helpful in explaining, in shorthand, the universe of the author.

For me, Ambitious is the very word that describes Schismatrix Plus. It aims very, very high, whether Sterling's aim was accurate, is for everyone to judge individually. I had very high expectations from this book. I've previously read Sterling's 'The Swarm', the very first Shapers/Mechanist story, in Gardner Dozois's anthology, THE GOOD NEW STUFF, and liked it a lot. Furthermore, the last two books I've read were very different from each other, and both really good - George R. R. Martin's

new Fantasy Epic A Storm of Swords, and Stephen Zweig's The Royal Game. In between those two masterworks, I've read the prologue to Schismatrix, and loved it. What impressed me most about the prologue, about the Swarm and indeed about the novel itself, was the scope and the vividness of Sterling's Future. The Shapers/Mechanist universe is clearly one of the most fascinating and exotic worlds created in Science Fiction. So I came to Scismatrix with extremely high expectations, believing I was about to read a classic on par with Isaac Asimov's Foundation series, Frank Herbert's Dune, or Dan Simmons's Hyperion Cantos. The first 80 pages cured me of that hope. I'm not a passionate Cyber-Punk fan, quite the contrary, and the first 80 pages consist of a Cyber Punk story set in Space. A well written Cyber Punk, no doubt - others have commented on Sterling's prose, and he has a great deal of talent, but a traditional Cyber Punk story nonetheless, and thus somewhat out of date.

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