



Fiction Feedback

Review of *GSOH* by Nicky J Poole

A warm and witty piece of writing that hooks the reader, engages their attention and their sympathies and pulls them along at a rapid pace, eager to find out more.

The Prologue has to be one of the most original and fascinating beginnings I've ever read. Immediately, I was intrigued and immediately, I was amused. The succinct way the eight blind dates were dealt with – and eight after all is a lot, and could have been tedious – was clever, echoing the style of lonely hearts ads, and very funny. If the meaning of one or two of the abbreviations wasn't apparent, it didn't matter. The murders too were quickly related, and in a way which told us from the off the focus of this book is humour rather than thriller. Absolutely superb.

The premise behind the book is original and attention-grabbing. Just a little offbeat, it lets the reader know what they're in for. Excitedly we read on, anticipating a treat.

On the whole, the remaining chapters maintain this early promise. We are entertained – the humour is laugh-out-loud in places – and engaged. The characters of Roger, our hero (maybe), and Candice, the heroine (possibly), are quickly made explicit and we follow their antics with enthusiasm. The next big premise, that of Candice helping Roger, is a tricky one, especially given Candice's antipathy to Roger which is perhaps overdone at times. The author handles the premise well, the reader sees why Candice might concur and is content to go along with it. The ending of chapter five, when we're given Crispin's viewpoint, cleverly deals with the credibility issue on this point. Crispin asks the question of Candice: "*Do you really believe all this*", and she replies "*No...it's a load of BS*", inviting the reader to laugh at their own credulity too, and to see the author plainly pointing up that he knows the issue is difficult to credit, but he's going to continue anyway. Do we want to follow? Like Candice, we certainly do.

There is a simplicity, almost a naivety to the work – the shenanigans around Roger's escape from Candice's house under the noses of the police, for instance, are rather ridiculous, but this does not matter. The reader is shown what they're getting in the story – it's going to be silly, but great fun – and because of all the elements of good writing they are happy to suspend belief and go along for the ride.

The amusing and original turns of phrase are just one element that keeps the reader entertained. I loved 'Poor fool, *thought Life thought to itself*' on p2, and the image conjured up by '*a mixture of shock, horror and revulsion all tried to park in the same place on her face*' on p9 was delightful. Alison's car pulling onto her drive and parking '*at a refreshingly non-conformist angle*' on p16 was wonderful, as was the passage that followed – though a tiny bit of editing could sharpen it up and make it even funnier. This passage was also useful as it gave us a clue to Alison's bumbling character; as did her evocative surname: Lumpden.

The descriptions of the other three women move the plot along beautifully, give us a snapshot of the *dramatis personae* we guess we're going to get to know better, and also dangle the crucial 'could they be the murderer' question that is, we suspect, going to tease and tantalise us over the coming pages, giving the reader more reasons to read on.

Sparkling dialogue that is well written and ladled with wit and humour is a major facet of this extract. Overall, dialogue is handled exceptionally well and progresses the story, too. It's rare not to be sure who is speaking, and nowhere do we think, that character wouldn't have said that. There might be the occasional 'wrong' word, ie it doesn't sound right in conversation (I'm thinking of '*also*' used on p49) or places where the word order needs adjusting, but these are tiny points and occur infrequently. The banter at Crispin's home is in parts exceptionally funny and witty, although some editing would sharpen it up even further. The conversation's not quite as good at the Traveltel, it seemed a bit strained at times, and I also floundered a little bit in understanding Crispin's lines, although overall we see where his sympathies lie clearly enough. I didn't quite get the motivation for the last line.

On sticking points, there was the odd occasion where I didn't quite 'get' something; hard to put my finger on, but at times on the three-way conversation between Roger, Candice and Blue Suit, and

similarly with Crispin. Re-reading sometimes made this clear, but re-reading is not something an author should require his reader to do, especially not in a fast-paced light novel like GSOH. I had the feeling of an author not re-reading and editing his own work a decent length of time after he'd written it, which tends to clear up minor discrepancies of this kind. It would also pick up the occasional literal and typo; there were very few but there were some.

There were also a few small flaws; enough to stop the reader in their tracks, but all very easy for the writer to iron out. The only really significant one: the diary entry in the Prologue tells us there is concern for a missing PA. We then learn Juliette has been found dead in her apartment. It is difficult to see how she could have been missing if she was in her apartment; this would surely have been searched as soon as there was *any* concern. It might seem a very minor point, but if it raises an unnecessary question in the reader's mind then it needs attention. I also didn't get a throwaway line ('*Definitely trawlers in the wind*', p46) or one of the references; *Elmer Fudd* pp52 &53). That's not to say it's not my problem rather than the author's; a reader can't always expect to get every reference, but an author should be reasonably sure that a very large majority will, otherwise they don't serve their purpose and trip up the smooth reading process.

The standard of English throughout was very high. Here is an author with an excellent command of his language, crafting words in interesting and unusual ways to make his writing shine. '*A moonscape of builders' adventures with solids*' on p14 was an outstanding example; there were many more.

In summary, I very much enjoyed this piece of work. In my opinion, with some editing and a little polish it would be highly publishable. The inventive and original plot is handled beautifully, the characters are strong, well-defined and empathic, the writing is exciting and we want to read on. Great stuff.

Further Notes

Facts in fiction

I wondered about the author's use of what sound like real pub names in real locations. I'm not sure whether this means the pubs really exist; certainly the towns do. If they are made-up names, then fine; it's good at giving an air of realism and I really like the way actual places are used and described throughout the extract. It gives context and a base of reality to the whimsy. However, if the pubs really do exist, the author would be well-advised to change the names to fictional ones for fear of litigious landlords!

I also personally wouldn't write a day as well as a date in the diary entries. Again, I appreciate it conveys realism, but it does mean a possible year can be identified. Maybe this isn't a problem for the author.

Personally I would also avoid giving the full model name of the camera as referred to on p19 as this will inevitably date the book. I'd stick with '*Nikon digital camera*'. Nikon of course is important, as it highlights Nicola's liking for good quality, expensive things.

Author Nicky J Poole has kindly given Fiction Feedback permission to place this review of his novel on the website.

He has published GSOH via Lulu: <http://www.lulu.com/content/1984992>