

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *One Jump Ahead*
AUTHOR Mark L. Van Name
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COVER ART Stephen Hickman

Précis A former mercenary is bio-engineered with outlawed nanotechnology and is the only known survivor of the ill-fated Aggro experiments. He teams up with an intelligent armored vehicle named Lobo and they get caught up in a corporate battle for control of the jump gate aperture near the developing colony world called Macken.

During the ongoing adventure he meets an old friend from his mercenary days, has to work with SAW - the organization he worked for before Aggro - and botches a kidnapping rescue. In the end he gets it right and makes a harrowing escape relying on the mysterious gate aperture and its dislike of violence.

Protagonist Jon Moore
Antagonist Ron Slake

What I liked I liked the interesting use of technology, because of Moore's bioengineering, he can converse with all the intelligent machines, even mundane ones like drink dispensers. The portrayal of them as gossipy creatures works well. I also liked the love/hate relationship with Lobo and its maturity and the end. The characters are well-developed and the plot moves briskly toward an exciting conclusion. The way he makes his escape was clever and unseen.

What I didn't like I would like to see more of Lobo's character revealed. I also wanted to know more about the Aggro experiments.

Final Comments This is Van Name's first novel and it is a great first effort. It was very readable (I knocked it off in three days) and his style is just different enough from the Ringo and Weber style to be his own. I couldn't help but think that Van Name is a fan of the Bolo books by Keith Laumer. The PCAV is very much like the Bolo vehicle; intelligent, well armed and a great machine to have around when the brown stuff hits the fan. Even the name is an anagram. I also liked the mystery of the jump gate apertures, they are not manmade and no one knows exactly where they come from.

The sequel to this book is due out in July 2008 and while I probably will wait to get the paperback, I definitely have added Van Name to my list of authors I want to keep reading. I hope that in the sequel we get to know more about Jon's background and get to know Lobo better.

Rating 