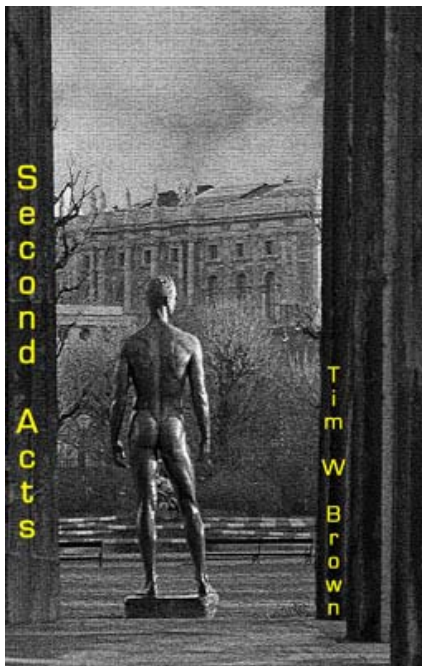


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Your micro-review roundup: 29 November 2010



Second Acts

By Tim W. Brown

Gival Press

[http://www.cclapcenter.com/2010/11/your\\_micro-review\\_roundup\\_29\\_n.html](http://www.cclapcenter.com/2010/11/your_micro-review_roundup_29_n.html)

To call Tim W. Brown's new novel *Second Acts* a piece of time-traveling science-fiction is not really quite right -- although it uses such a situation as its set-up (University of Chicago scientists from our age travel back to 1833), it's treated as more of an expository device than anything else, with the story itself mostly being about these modern creative-classers permanently stuck in the past and how they deal with it over years and decades. But then, this isn't really a rational, hard-fact historical drama either,

and at times approaches even gonzo fairytale territory: note for example, after realizing how important it is to not draw attention to himself, how the first thing the first time traveler does is start running around prematurely "inventing" things like electric lights and oil as an energy form, wanting to become rich and famous but instead becoming a fugitive criminal, because of forgetting about related safety measures like insulation and rubber that had to be invented along with these former trailblazers, and hence causing massive tragedies in every city where he sets up shop; or note how his time-traveling romantic partner, a co-worker turned mistress, regularly whines about things that any normal 21st-century citizen would rightly know about the early 1800s before arriving (that it smelled, that it was dangerous, that sewage ran openly in the streets, that women were treated like second-class citizens); or note how when the mistress's husband comes chasing after them, technically making him the third time-traveler in history, the first thing he does is pick up a transvestite Indian guide named Bunny who has the mystical ability to understand that he's traveled through time.

And that maybe gets us closest to understanding what Brown meant for this novel to be -- in reality a look at Americans in the post-industrial early 21st century, and how much we take the things around us these days for granted, precisely by delivering a funny quasi-historical tale showing all the messy steps it took in this country to get us there. But then, this book's title also indicates much about what the story concerns; because as the years progress, we watch as some of these characters end up adapting well to the simpler, less safe times around them, creating in effect entire second acts in their lives, while some of these timeonauts are just unable to shed the baggage they brought with them from the 21st century, stubbornly trying to shoehorn it into 19th-century standards and forever failing. It's a hybrid of a book to be sure, one that crosses through many genres without stopping for good at any of them; but in this case I found such a thing delightful instead of tedious or gimmicky, and recommend it to the same kind of people who like Monty Python, Joss Whedon and Terry Pratchett. It's not for everyone, but those just mentioned will love it for sure.

Out of 10: **8.4**

Filed by [Jason Pettus](#) at 11:27 AM, November 29, 2010. Filed under: [Literature](#) | [Literature:Fiction](#) | [Literature:Nonfiction](#) | [Reviews](#) |



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