Out Here In The Out There: Essays In A Region Of Superlatives

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Description
From the Kansas prairie to the California coast, these ten essays explore the idiosyncrasies of the American Southwest. The glitz of Las Vegas casinos, the devotion of Oklahoma football hooligans, the manufactured magic of Disneyland -- all are points of interest for Philip Heldrich, who finds in his own adventures paradoxical truths about our culture, our traditions, and the American Dream.

Poet and pop-culture aficionado Heldrich searches for the lyrical within his small midwestern meatpacking town and beyond. For Heldrich, lover of words, there is beauty to be found at the local dump: magazines (Kansas Farmer), discarded beverage bottles ("Golden Sound Basil Seed Drink"), even machine names (the "cram-a-lot" baler is a favorite). The resulting essays are a happy melding of social commentary with the best sort of travel writing. A finely crafted ode to target practice and male bonding set in a high-country meadow in Colorado quietly evolves into a memorial for a lost friend. Another piece perfectly captures the surreal nature of the academic conference, made even more dreamlike by taking place in Norman, Oklahoma, five hours before a championship football game. (Heldrich succumbs to Husker and Sooner mania.) Driving around "out there," whether it be Disneyland or the Central Plains, the author puts pen to paper, accurately capturing the essence of American culture.

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The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. The question of whether we are alone in the Universe has haunted humanity for centuries, but we may now stand poised on the brink of the answer to that question, as we search for radio signals from other intelligent civilizations. This search is often known by the acronym SETI [search for extraterrestrial intelligence], a difficult one. Although groups around the world have been searching intermittently for three decades, it is only now that we have reached the level of technology where we can make a determined attempt.