

NEW RELEASE

Forbidden Cargo
**ABOUT THE
NOVEL**

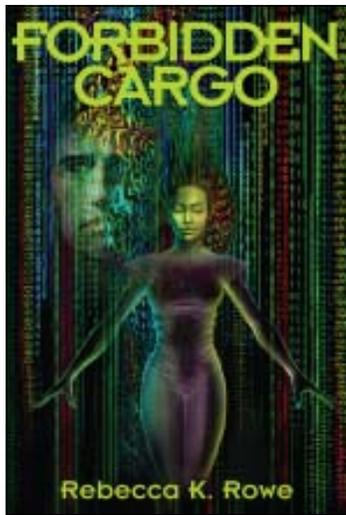
WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE!

The government has labeled them “a crime against humanity”.
The *Order* swears they’re sublime.
But do they really represent the next
stage of human evolution?

Forbidden Cargo

by Rebecca K. Rowe

Growing up on Mars hasn’t been easy. But it is the only life Sashimu has ever known. Inside the safety of their *Martian complex*, Sashimu and her friends excel at their studies and are looking forward to graduation. Its life as usual in 2110 — but, unknown to Sashimu and the other *Imagofas*, it is a forbidden life!



To speed up human evolution, the *Order* had covertly engineered a new generation of human Nano-DNA beings and dubbed them the *Imagofas*. Created against the government’s dictates, the government wants proof of the *Order*’s illegal activity. Two of the *Imagofas*, Sashimu and her best friend Thesni, are kidnapped and brought back to Earth to stand before a tribunal as evidence of the *Order*’s atrocities against humanity.

But, during the trip from Mars to Earth, something goes horribly wrong and the kidnapped *Imagofas* are forced to become fugitives. Separated from each other, Sashimu and Thesni desperately seek the help of strangers to escape Earth’s hostile environment.

Along the way they enlist the aid of a hard-core gamer known only as *the Cadet* and befriend the renegade artificial intelligence code-named *Prometheus*.

The *Imagofas* will risk everything to escape Earth for Mars. They are, after all, wanted by the government — **DEAD OR ALIVE!**

Forbidden Cargo

Forbidden Cargo by Rebecca K. Rowe

EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing / August 2006 (USA)

Trade paperback / ISBN-10: 1-894063-16-3 / ISBN-13: 978-1-894063-16-6 / 352 PAGES / 14.95 USA

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EDGE

Rebecca K. Rowe



I grew up on Mars with Sashimu and Thesni the Imagofas pronounced (imă-jōe-fās); that’s what I’d like to tell you, but I won’t because I didn’t.

For better or worse, I was born and raised on Earth (like many of us), where I discovered a few things: hobbits, Spock, dating, horseback riding, corporate America and Baudrillard.

Over time, I’ve learned to travel and became sadly addicted. I think now, if I have the chance, I’ll live in Kobe, Japan. Briefly, I’ve lived in lots of other places: California, Melbourne, Australia, D.C., Connecticut, Virginia and Aix-en-Provence, France. No matter where I’m living, I’m a Colorado girl, so branded behind the left knee. Denver happens to be where I am, as I write you this note.

In-between and while working, and after kind of growing up, I did my undergrad at the University of Denver and a Master’s there in Journalism/Mass Communications. I also went to the University of Southern California and received a Master’s in International Relations so maybe I’ve developed a fetish for chalkboards and classrooms. Beyond that, well, I’ve done a lot of technical writing for places few people have ever heard of outside of IT, except MapQuest—where you may have downloaded a map and I met my husband.

Today, when I’m not writing, I read everything and enjoy works by Haruki Murakami, Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino or young adult novelists like Philip Pullman or Science Fiction authors the Strugatsky brothers, Richard Adams, Greg Egan, Sheri Tepper and...that list is almost endless, or a fantasy novel by Susanna Clarke and shorts by Kelly Link or Bruce Holland Rogers. And then, when not writing or reading, there is the world of film with directors: Kurosawa, Tarkovsky, Kubrick, Herzog, McAbee’s offbeat musical *The American Astronaut*, and Miyazaki’s eight anime films or Otomo’s *Akira* or Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* or well, that list also is too long. *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* is a recent personal favorite. Getting outside once in a while is also a good thing so I’m a runner and also walk the dog, as long as there are no squirrels. The dog wants to dine on live squirrel; she dreams of it and even runs up trees in her sleep.

That’s probably more than you wanted to know about me so I’ll stop here. If you get the chance to read *Forbidden Cargo* and the others soon to come, more than anything, I hope the actionquest gives you some small pleasure and strikes a flame in you for a new train of thought.

Rebecca K. Rowe lives in Colorado. *Forbidden Cargo* is her first novel.

Rebecca K. Rowe

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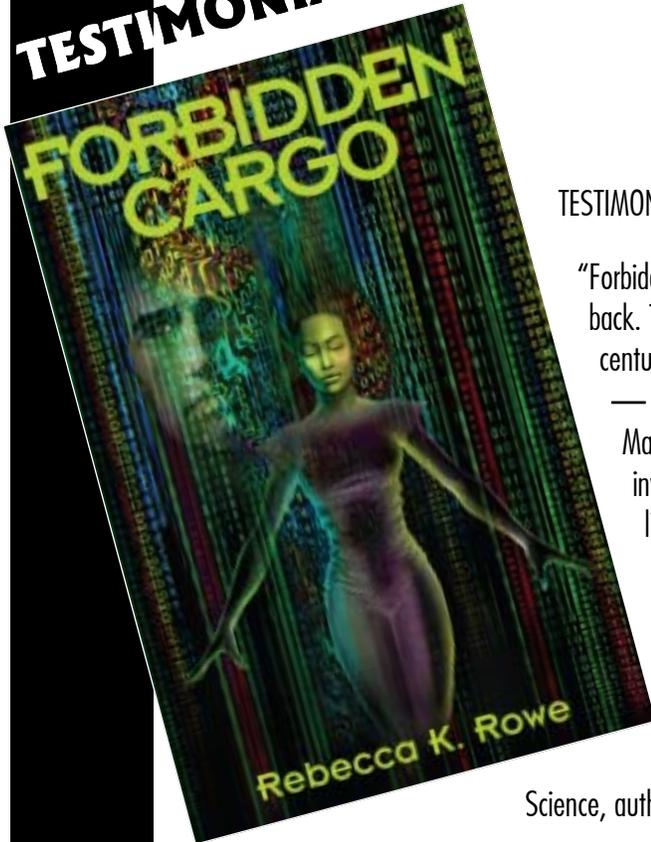
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Forbidden Cargo
WHO SAID
WHAT

TESTIMONIALS



Forbidden Cargo

by Rebecca K. Rowe

TESTIMONIALS

“Forbidden Cargo hits the future running at full speed and never glances back. Though author Rebecca Rowe’s literary persona is indisputably 21st century, her science fiction DNA is imbedded with classic enhancements — a sprinkle of Robert Heinlein stem cells, coils of Neuromancer and The Matrix, and a breathless plot that would do justice to the breakneck inventiveness of A. E. Van Vogt.” — Edward Bryant, Author and literary critic.

“Rebecca Rowe’s Forbidden Cargo is a gripping and moving novel that makes you think about where humanity will be a century from now. Rowe draws you into a virtual world so vividly rendered that it is both entirely believable and utterly fantastic.” — Dr. David Grinspoon, Curator of Astrobiology, Denver Museum of Nature &

Science, author of Lonely Planets.

Testimonials

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EDGE

[The Washington Post]

BOOK WORLD

12 BOOK WORLD

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY

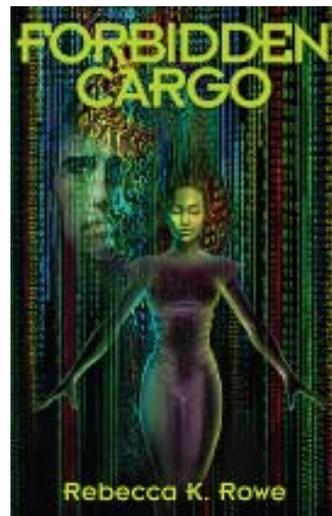
Women on Mars and werewolves on Earth. *By Paul Di Filippo*

Sisters Under the Skin

Dyed-in-the-plasti-flesh sf readers value estrangement above almost all other literary effects: human lives technologically amped, pulled inside-out, turned topsy-turvy and reflected in a funhouse mirror, yet still hanging together with their own logic.

Rebecca K. Rowe excels at this. In her sparkling and inventive first novel, *Forbidden Cargo* (Edge; paperback, \$14.95), Sashimu and Thesni are beautiful 18-year-old women living on Mars. They are a new breed of humans designed as the next stage in evolution. Kidnapped to Earth, the two escape and begin an odyssey through the greedy hands of competing factions intent on destroying or co-opting them.

Rowe's world is full of strange new ways of living — and dying. Her rich descriptive language and arch dialogue potently reflect her surreal world: "He kept an eye out for bluegrazers; he'd know them by their rotten, blue-edged mouths." Dealing with issues of freedom and responsibility, as well as epistemological and existential quandaries, Rowe still manages to deliver a slam-bang adventure.



Forbidden Cargo by Rebecca K. Rowe

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EDGE

Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by The Book Review Forum

Set in 22nd Century Earth, this is the story of two young women caught in the middle of a power struggle regarding the future of human evolution.

The Order has set up a research facility on Mars, where they have created a race of nano-DNA hybrids called imagofas, thought by many to be the next step in human evolution. The Council, on Earth, considers imagofas to be a crime against humanity. The idea is hatched to bring back evidence from Mars of the order's activities, to put them out of business, once and for all. The two women, Sashimu and Thesni, are kidnapped from Mars and brought to Earth as "evidence", after which their life spans will be short and very unpleasant.

Something goes wrong at the Earth spaceport, and the two manage to escape, though separated from each other. In the meantime, Creid Xerkler is the inventor of a virtual reality system called

Molecular Advantage Machine, or MAM. It allows instant access to all of Earth's knowledge, but the connection is made through the wearing of a special suit. Another reason why Sashimu and Thesni are considered evil is that they can access MAM without the suit. Xerkler is very implicated in this anti-Order plan, but he spends much of the book in an artificially-induced coma (someone wants him out of the way).

While staying away from the Council, the two meet some interesting individuals. The Cadet is an expert gamer and finder of information, and Prometheus is a MAM meta-intelligence looking for sentience. It becomes clear that Xerkler is the key, but the only way to reach him, and fix whatever is wrong with him, is from the inside, through MAM.

This gem of a book has it all. It's got virtual reality, technology and imagination. It also has an interesting story, with which the author does a fine job. This is not just a really good first novel, it's a really good novel.

Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by Matthew L. Moffett, School Library Journal

Adult/High School—This novel blends high-concept sci-fi storytelling with flashy visual descriptions and action-packed sequences. In 2110, Xerkler, the inventor of a complex machine that grants access to all human knowledge, finds himself pulled into the service of a government council to prove the existence of the Imagofas, a race of advanced humans developed through illegal genetic experimentation. But Xerkler already knows of their existence, and he sees them as the next step in the evolution of humankind. What follows is a politically charged thriller that careens across Earth, Mars, and the nebulous world of cyberspace. Rowe's inclusion of Eastern philosophy, mostly through the enlightenment-seeking character named MAMintelligence, works as a thoughtful and interesting thread, but it may not be sufficiently explained for readers not familiar with the very casual references. The beginning of the novel is slow as Rowe explains the background of the large cast of characters, but the material is well worth digging through. Once readers get beyond the book's first third—a challenge that dedicated sci-fi fans will take on—the novel transforms into a fun and illuminating read.

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sf

FICTION



Forbidden Cargo

By Rebecca K. Rowe

The evolution will not be televised.



Mars and Earth, 22nd century. Sashimu and Thesni are Imagofas, young women genetically engineered by the Order to channel the Molecular

Advantage Machine (MAM), a kind of Internet on steroids, without any outside aid. Kidnapped and brought to Earth by the Council in a plot to destroy the Order, the women are separated when their ship is wrecked in Earth's orbit. With the support of some unlikely characters—including The Cadet, a virtual gladiator, and Prometheus, a MAM entity yearning for consciousness—the two struggle to be reunited and to return home.

EDGE. 352 pages. \$14.95. ISBN: 1894063163

Bookpleasures.com ★★★★★

"This gem of a book has it all. ...

[Forbidden Cargo] is not just a good first novel, it's a really good novel." PAUL LAPPEN

SFRevu

★★★★★

"[The novel] is well crafted, with reasonably three-dimensional major characters (at least the women), and a stimulating interwoven plot. With its nano-tech perspective and infatuation with futuristic politics, this book talks to fans who prefer their science fiction with a hard social science dimension." CAROLYN

FRANK

Emerald City

★★★

"The book is a first novel, and Rowe isn't quite up to carrying off the power of her ideas. ... The complexity of the plot shows that Rowe has a lot of promise as a novelist." CHERYL MORGAN

The Harrow

★★★★★

"*Forbidden Cargo* is a complex and imaginative first novel. ... It's a cyberpunkish thriller full of narrow escapes, political machinations, virtual combat, and deeply memorable characters, all flavored with a touch of Eastern philosophy and a nod toward contemporary debates in biotechnology." DRU PAGLIASSOTTI

Washington Post

★★★★★

"[Rowe's] rich descriptive language and arch dialogue potently reflect her surreal world. ... Dealing with issues of freedom and responsibility, as well as epistemological and existential quandaries, Rowe still manages to deliver a slam-bang adventure." PAUL

DIFILIPPO

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EDGE

Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by: Brian L. Enke, National Space Society

Back in the early 1990's, novels like *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash* painted a vision of the future where most aspects of society are controlled by universal networks of computers. These powerful works of fiction gave birth to the term "cyberspace." A whole new "cyberpunk" generation believed the message, lending instant credibility to a dubious techno-social experiment known as The Internet. The rest is history, though much of that history remains to be written.

Forbidden Cargo, by author Rebecca K. Rowe, traces its heritage to a vibrantly dark cyberpunk future, an intricate blend of virtual and physical realities. Society is sharply divided into above-ground luxury and below-ground poverty, a feasible consequence of today's socialistic experiments. Factions of drones, religious sects, drug lords, and techno-wizards struggle to co-exist in the dangerous warrens of the Denver Underground, occasionally interacting with politics, law & order, and business conglomerates from above via ubiquitous "MAM" computer networks. Each faction of society operates with internally consistent rules and ethics. Information is power, and power is life.

Rowe convincingly smashes the novel's cyberpunk heritage with her realistic portrayal of Earth's off-world colonies. Spaceflight is routine, and Mars is the new frontier. Its thriving settlements are safe havens for scientists who perform experiments that are far too dangerous or disruptive to be condoned on Earth. The grip of the MAM is weak on the frontier, leading to revolutionary research that can eliminate the bonds of repression or destroy all of humanity.

Within this perilous future, *Forbidden Cargo* takes the reader to the next logical step: the evolution of humans who can sense and manipulate the spidery tendrils of the MAM directly without

requiring technology to plug in. An exiled scientist on Mars has bred several enhanced human nanogens, called "Imagofas." Back on Earth, the powerful Council is none too pleased. They seek proof of this disruptive threat by kidnapping an Imagofas and bringing her to Earth to stand trial. Their paid mercenaries actually bag two young Imagofas, Sashimu and Thesni.

At this point in the story, Rowe's richly woven society begins to simmer and boil. Several factions, each with agendas at odds with the Council, conspire to free (or kill) the Imagofas. Separated by a lunar spaceport "accident," Sashimu and Thesni must learn to navigate the Underground and the MAM in order to find each other, survive, and return to their home on Mars. Readers experience the dysfunctional culture of Earth through the eyes of the two alien women, an effective technique that amplifies the societal diversity. We care about the characters because we share their displacement.

Forbidden Cargo is an exciting page-turner, a non-stop explosion of action and adventure filled with memorable characters. My personal favorite is Prometheus, an artificial intelligence (AI) struggling to find sentience by capturing a virtual catfish with a virtual gourd – a devious challenge posed by its creator, Creid Xerkler, the father of the MAM. Prometheus embodies another rich side-plot in the story, the dangers and promise of AI, a thread that brilliantly parallels the main storyline of the human nanogens.

NSS members will enjoy the balance of lunar and Martian settlement in this novel, as well as the promise of cheap access to space opening up the high frontier to grand ambitions and societal evolution. The spaceport on the Moon launches us toward adventures beyond. A domed city on the Martian frontier – the safety of home – constantly calls to us. Will we listen?

Eighteen
Time Hugo
Nominees!

The New York Review of Science Fiction

www.nyrsf.com

January 2007
Number 221
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Forbidden Cargo by Rebecca K. Rowe

Calgary: Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, 2006; \$14.95 tpb; 352 pages

reviewed by David Mead

Rebecca Rowe is a recent graduate of the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop, where she studied with Suzy McKee Charnas, Gordon Van Gelder, and Nancy Kress, among others. With *Forbidden Cargo*, her first novel, she joins a distinguished company of young writers—such as K.A. Bedford and Cory Doctorow—who will have a strong say in the shape of the science fiction of the future.

The events of *Forbidden Cargo* are set about a century from now, on Mars, the Moon, and Earth. Reflecting the influence of cyberpunk and Japanese *anime*, which Rowe admires, the society in which the story happens is mysterious—a maze of Kafka-esque government agencies, cybernetic spaces, and inexplicable conflicts of interest among vast monolithic mega-corps. The principal characters are harried “from pillar to post”—a little like rats in a maze—by forces over which they have little or no control, or even understanding. Here our “maze rats” are two young Martian women, Sashimu and Thesni. They are “Imagofas” (from “image of the future”) or “nanogens,” genetically modified humans with nanotechnological enhancements. The fruits of a covert research project sponsored by a mysterious political group called “the Order,” these young women are kidnapped and taken from Mars to Earth in order to be the living proof of the Order’s violation of regulations controlling the nanogenetic modification of the human genome, in a political trial organized by the conservative “Council,” the official government of Earth.

At first pawns in the increasingly violent political struggle between the Order and the Council, which officially considers them inhuman things that threaten to supplant humanity, Sashimu and Thesni—strangers in a strange land—struggle to reunite with each other, sort out friend from foe, and find a way home. Their only real weapon is their ability to access and manipulate the cybersphere, called Novus Orbis (the “new realm” or world, as opposed to the old physical realm, the Vetus Orbis), directly, without needing MAMsuits or other interface devices, although they also have the power to empathize at deep levels with humanity, even to curing physical injuries.

The fundamental dialectic of the novel is the struggle between the forces that would preserve an artificial, highly-controlled *status quo*—on Mars as on Earth—and those who see and accept change as a profound, unavoidable consequence of technological development. The opening scene of the story establishes this tension very nicely, placing Sashimu on a tower roof in a large biosphere near Hellas Basin on Mars. This wholly artificial habitat is composed of “great trees, lawns and flowers, all imported from Earth” by the Council. The buildings have ivy-covered walls! Mars, at least here, has been made over in Earth’s image. Outside the biosphere, however, a terrible dust storm rages, defining the true

nature of the Martian environment which the Imagofas are being developed to live in and evolve with. They are the technology which will bring real change, and they are a technology which has been outlawed. In fact, they are not recognized or treated as human by the most conservative members of the Council; at best they are animals (their kidnapers use a veterinarian to care for them on the voyage to Earth), at worst mechanicals to be destroyed. We see a similar clash of vision on Earth, where the Council is rewriting the operating system of the cybersphere to impose its absolute control over the Novus Orbis and eliminate the more or less porous software that hackers, gamers, and legitimate operators exploit to develop new technologies. (We can see in this an echo of the commercial opposition of the Microsoft Corporation and other proprietors to the “open source” movement in computing represented by Linux.)

Bringing Sashimu and Thesni to Earth is a terrible mistake, for they trigger a violent confrontation between the Order, the Council, and the great commercial houses, enterprises called Domi (plural of Domus), which really rule the solar system and its various bureaucracies, factions, parties, etc. With the help of the Cadet (a virtual gamer whose violent battles on behalf of corporate sponsors are broadcast through the Novus Orbis), Creid Xerkler (the father of the Novus Orbis), and a number of other sympathetic players, the nanogens thwart the Council’s plans and show the world that they are human in soul and spirit, if not in genetic makeup.

Forbidden Cargo is Rebecca Rowe’s first novel, and as you might expect has a few flaws, although none is fatal. For example, I found it difficult to accept the premise that we can get to Mars—with the trees, ivy and lawns—by 2110, the putative date of the story’s events. And I found some of the nomenclature curious and disjunct; specifically, the use of Latin in corporate names (Domus Ignis, Domus Aqua), the computer network (Novus Orbis), fleshly reality (Vetus Orbis), and so forth seems contrived. And Rowe needs to improve the handling of “exposition of antecedent events”; the nature of the Council and Order, of the Imagofas, of the *mise-en-scène* in general, was fuzzy and puzzling for quite a long time. It may be appropriate for the Imagofas to be puzzled by their new environment, but it’s quite another thing for the reader. And I wondered why the great commercial houses didn’t provide housing, health care, and so on for their gladiatorial heroes—especially Domus Aqua for the Cadet. If my corporate image depended on the Cadet’s performance, I’d keep him fit, healthy and on a tight rein, or I’d get someone else to fight my battles.

That said, this is an interesting story which treats a number of important themes. Rebecca Rowe is a writer to be encouraged. I look forward to reading her next novel. ▶

David Mead lives in Corpus Christi, Texas.

The New York Review of Science Fiction January 2007 15

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Paperback Fiction

ROWE, Rebecca K. *Forbidden cargo*. Edge. (P.O. Box 1714, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2L7) 352p. c2006. 1-894063-16-3. \$14.95. **SA**

Although a first novel, this shows great promise, with tight plotting and well-developed characters. It's 2110 and two illegally engineered Imagofas have been kidnapped and brought from Mars to Earth by the Council to discredit the Order by their mere existence. The Imagofas, also called nanogens, are part human and part nanotechnology. Some fear them as barbaric aberrations of humanity; others see them as the next step in human evolution.

The story centers on Creid Xerkler, who originally helped create the project that was secretly developed on Mars, and the two Imagofas that have been brought to Earth as well as those who would help them. Rowe's take on where we will go with technology and her virtual reality sequences are seamless and believable. This

provides an engrossing story with a cover that reflects the futuristic theme—smeared zeros and ones in the background with a provocative female Imagofas in the foreground. Sherry Hoy, Lib. Media Spec., Tuscarora JHS, Mifflintown, PA

Forbidden Cargo
by Rebecca K. Rowe
Edge, 352 pp, \$14.95

Forbidden Cargo is a debut novel.

The year is 2110. On Mars, a secret project to create the next step in human evolution. The world has developed the M [molecular] A [advantage] M [machine] a virtual instant access experience to all humanity's Knowledge. Cried Xerkler, it's creator is unwittingly entangled in a plot by the council to prove the existence of an illegally engineered race called Imigofas or nanogens. Revered by many, they're considered by the council to be a dangerous aberration and a threat to mankind.

In their quest to prove this crime against humanity, the Council abducts two Imagofas from Mars and smuggles them to Earth, but the abduction takes an unexpected twist and the Imagofas become fugitives. The Council wants them dead, others want to capitalize on their existence. The Imagofas just want to go home.. To escape, they must rescue Xerkler, with the aid of the Cadet, a hard core gamer, Ochbo, a cleanlife pervert, and Prometheus, an enlightenment seeking MAMintelligence, and get back to Mars.

This is an engrossing book where science and science fiction meet in a complex future that is both incredible and believable and moves with the speed of light. Try and put it down between plot twists. Go ahead. Try... - **Pam Allan**

KLIATT, November 2006

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EDGE



Sashimu and Thesni are kidnapped from their secret Martian complex to be brought back to Earth as evidence of the Order's illegal experimentation in nano-DNA hybridization. But just as they enter orbit, the ship is destroyed and the two Imagofas are separated and on the run through the Underground.

As the two fugitives are being hunted by both Order and Council, they find unlikely allies in the Cadet, a master warrior in a not-so-virtual extreme combat game; Prometheus, an artificial intelligence trapped in contemplation of an ancient koan; the Ultimate Librarian, who has done all he can to make himself part of his own machines; and Ochbo, a clean-life outreach worker who recognizes the Imagofas as those foretold by the Magus.

But their enemies are just as powerful: Earth's governing Council needs the two women, dead or alive, to prove their illegal bioengineering case, and the investigation is headed by self-possessed council-woman Joli Xerkler — whose own husband is deeply implicated in the issue. Moreover, the domus organizations are eager to build up their own power using the Imagofas as pawns; especially the unscrupulous Angel, who will betray anybody if it means more money or more legitimacy for his shady Domus Phrack.

Forbidden Cargo is a complex and imaginative first novel from Rebecca K. Rowe. It's a cyberpunkish thriller full of narrow escapes, political machinations, virtual combat, and deeply memorable characters, all flavored with a touch of Eastern philosophy and a nod toward contemporary debates in biotechnology. Rowe or EDGE need to submit Forbidden Cargo for some sci-fi first-novel awards, because this book is definitely a contender.

Forbidden Cargo

Midwest Book Review, The Fantasy/SciFi Shelf

Rebecca K. Rowe's FORBIDDEN CARGO (1894063163, \$14.95) is set in 2110: a firstborn daughter of illicit nanogenetics is kidnapped and shipped to Earth as evidence in a tribunal: for her existence is a crime and her creators will do anything to destroy the evidence. Hunted on all sides as a fugitive, Sashimu must find a place where she can survive – and finds some unlikely allies in unexpected places. A fine thriller and science fiction story evolves with splendid twists of plot.

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Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by Regina Schroeder, Booklist

In a future in which the MAM (molecular advantage machine) makes possible the virtuality of Novus Orbis and the sum of human experience can be found if one knows how to look, genetic engineering is illegal. Some believe it will be necessary, however, among them Creid Xerkler, one of the MAM's creators. A group of Xerkler's peers have created, in a secret project on Mars, the Imagofas, a blend of human and machine capable of immersing in virtuality without intermediary tools. Government agents determined to destroy a "dangerous aberration" kidnap two Imagofas. The Council and the Order, major powers in this future world, fight over the Imagofas' fate, forgetting entirely the humanity of their quarry. There are those on the Imagofas' side, however, including Xerkler, a gamer called the Cadet, and another of Creid's creations, Prometheus, the spirit in the MAM. Rowe's promising debut subjects some pretty standard issues of the junctures between human and machine to a thriller's pacing and, with only a few bumps along the way, sees them entertainingly through. Regina Schroeder



Forbidden Cargo by Rebecca K. Rowe

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Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by Chandra Rooney

Look no further sci fi enthusiasts, anime fans, and casual video gamers, because this is your summer reading book. Rebecca K. Rowe's *Forbidden Cargo* is a fun page-turner that's heavy on the action.

Best described as causal cyberpunk, it brings Neal Stephenson's excellent *Snow Crash* to mind, but *Forbidden Cargo* is a less ambitious story with a tidier ending. A little bit *Final Fantasy*, a little bit *Armitage*, even a touch of *TRON*.

Two female nanogens from Mars are kidnapped and brought to Earth. There they become tangled up in a political power play and the after-effects of a morally questionable experiment in smart-intelligence. They search for each other and a way to return home while getting involved with fly games, religious movements, and love.

On the whole the plot is solid. It contains twists and turns that are usually explained. Rowe has a lot of characters, and the book spends chapters with each one. This allows Rowe to move the individual threads forward while never losing sight of where her characters are. However, for the first one hundred pages the effect is a bit disconnecting. It isn't until the plotlines begin to combine that I feel I have enough time with each character to settle into their story.

My favorite plotlines revolve around the Cadet, Sashimu and Prometheus. These are Rowe's interesting and well-developed characters, and that's reflected in their personal and intersecting plotlines. They deal with the Cadet's quest and gaming career, Sashimu's attempts to locate her "sister," and an AI trying to solve a koan.

Whenever Eastern philosophy is presented to western readers who aren't familiar with it there's an opportunity for confusion. Rowe, however, shines. She handles the potentially complicated matter with grace and ease granting it a satisfying and comprehensive conclusion. Rowe also combines Greco-Roman and Japanese mythos to create a fusion mythology that subtly yet effectively works within her story. I particularly enjoyed her use of tengu and kappa, finding the instances added to the anime atmosphere of the book.

Unfortunately, *Forbidden Cargo* occasionally suffers from a common problem of most summer blockbusters. The romantic subplots are predictable but provide necessary motivation. This is worth mentioning, as in other places character motivations seem undeveloped or unexplained, which results in character behaviour reading as a tad contrived. Hopefully the fast-moving plot will keep most readers from noticing these instances.

For the most part the dialogue is tight—simplistic. There's a lack of flowery speech in future Denver. The language becomes formal when appropriate—usually as characters speak to members of authority or higher classes. Various exchanges throughout the book suffer from slightly weak dialogue. Although it's not "bad," it's not "great," either.

The exception is by far the best writing in the book: "My dream was to paint his soul alive. Once, Prometheus and I sought to force things into light; now we sink into infinite darkness."

Beautiful.

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Most of the concerns I found while reading this book were basic debut novel blues. Awkward structure, improper grammar—that sort of thing. While they distract me from reading, they're forgivable as this is Rowe's first novel.

The one thing that I could not overcome is the names. For example, the main protagonist's name is "Sashimu," but I constantly found myself misreading it as "Sashimi" (raw fish.)

I think the issue with "Sashimu" comes from how isn't pleasant to say. It's awkward and trips up your brain as you read it. The same can be said for "Imagofas," the name that Rowe gives to the nanogens.

I'm also concerned by the acronyms. Mostly they're fine, and I can see how they add to the world-building. However, some of them are a little cheesy—ICK, for example.

Despite these issues, I enjoyed reading *Forbidden Cargo* and I felt mostly satisfied with its ending. The moments of greatness outweigh the awkwardness, and I would definitely read the next novel Rowe writes.

Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by: Hebdomeros

This debut novel from Rebecca Rowe blends the high concept sci-fi storytelling of Robert Heinlein with flashy visual descriptions and action-packed sequences that recall anime films and videogames as much as William Gibson's cyberpunk classic *Neuromancer* (Ace Books, 1985). In 2110 Xerkler, the inventor of a complex machine that grants access to the entirety of mankind's knowledge, finds himself pulled into the service of a government council to prove the existence of the Imafofas, a race of advanced humans developed through illegal genetic experimentation. But Xerkler already knows of their existence. Along with a few other humans, he sees them as the next step in the evolution of mankind. What follows is a politically charged thriller that careens the reader across Earth, Mars and the nebulous world of cyberspace.

Rowe's inclusion of Eastern philosophy, mostly through the enlightenment-seeking character named MAMintelligence, works as a thoughtful and interesting thread. She also works in a lot of word-play references, particularly through character and setting names, to Anime films and Manga comics. I found it pretty amusing, but the references will obviously be over your head if you're not familiar with these areas.

The beginning of the novel gets a touch bogged down in explaining the background of the large cast of characters; so much so that I almost gave up on it. But once you work about 1/3 of the way through, the novel transforms into an action-packed page turner that will satisfy sci-fi fans searching for a fun and quick read.

Excelsior.

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Nano-tech adventure stars teens on the run

By **Fred Cleaver**

Special to The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 11/24/2006 09:53:30 PM MST

"Forbidden Cargo," by Rebecca K. Rowe (Edge Science Fiction, 352 pages, \$14.95)

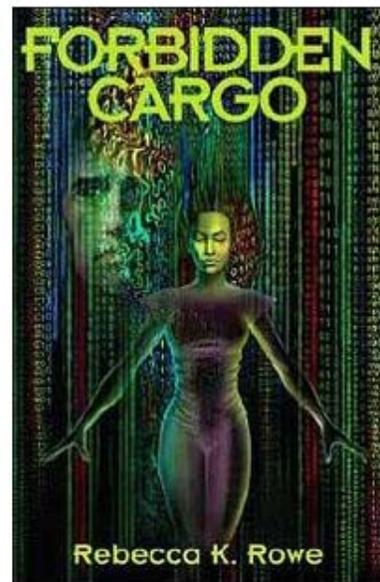
In 2110, when altering DNA to make a more advanced humanity is forbidden on Earth, the project is moved to Mars. Sashimu and Thesni are 18-year-old Imagofas, the result of nanotechnology and genetics. The girls have grown up on Mars and know it is their destiny to develop the planet.

They are kidnapped and returned to Earth to be used in a political battle between the Interplanetary Council and the Order. The police power is held by the Order, which attacks the ship transporting the Imagofas. In the subsequent crash, Sashimu and Thesni are separated. Sashimu is taken to a hospital under a mistaken identity while Thesni is carried off by one of the kidnapers who wants to sell her to the highest bidder.

Behind the scenes are Councilwoman Jagi and her husband, who was one of the founders of the Imagofas project and secretly supports it. Councilwoman Jagi hires the Cadet to find the Imagofas.

The Imagofas are in danger from the police, the government, criminals and religious orders. One possible friend is an illegal artificial intelligence who has spent decades seeking to answer the zen koan on how to catch a fish with a gourd.

"Forbidden Cargo" was published in Canada, but the author lives in Denver where the action takes place. Rowe's first novel is a well-paced adventure based on a deeply imagined background of nano-technology and directed evolution in which the web of multiple plot threads comes together.



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Review of *Forbidden Cargo* by Rebecca Rowe

The following review appeared in issue #131 of *Emerald City*, dated July 2006. The issue in question can be found online at <http://www.emcit.com/emcit131.php>.

The Coming of the Martians

By Cheryl Morgan

Edge is a Canadian small press whose books I keep meaning to review and never quite got round to. Finally I have found a space in the schedule for the debut novel of Rebecca K. Rowe. *Forbidden Cargo* appears on the surface to be cyberpunk, but actually it is yet another twist on the Frankenstein theme. Let me explain what I mean.

We begin on Mars, where mankind and the planet are getting to know each other. On the one hand, terraforming is making the red planet more habitable. On the other, genetic engineering is being used to develop humans more suited to their new environment. The first generation of Imagofas is entering adulthood and the kids are looking forward to doing some serious work.

Unfortunately, genetic engineering of humans is illegal. The Interplanetary Council banned it years ago. Reactionary

Councilors such as Joli Xerkler are afraid that messing with human evolution will create a race of supermen who will destroy or enslave ordinary humans. On learning that the Order, a powerful scientific research organization, is developing the Imagofas, Xerkler arranges to have one kidnapped and brought to Earth for a show trial.

That's the set-up, and Rowe does a good job of making things nicely complicated. Other players enter the game. Commercial organizations such as Domus Aqua want the Imagofas for the scientific secrets behind the development. Angel, the crime lord hired by Xerkler to make the snatch, bags two Imagofas girls, hoping to sell one of them. And the Order, desperate not to be exposed, tries to destroy Angel's ship, resulting in an explosion at the spaceport, and both Imagofas separately ending up loose on Earth with no friends and running for their lives. The Cadet, a "gamer" (effectively a professional gladiator) ends up being hired by both Xerkler and Domus Aqua to find the Imagofas, both of them

thinking only one is to be had. This would have been the deal of a lifetime if he hadn't fallen in love with one of the beautiful fugitives.

There's more too. For example, the religious cult based around prophecies of a new race of humans, or the political organization dedicated to freeing cyberspace from commercial control. Most interestingly, Joli Xerkler's husband, Creid, is a former Order chief scientist. He knows all about the Imagofas, but has been afraid to tell his bigoted wife. What's more, he has an even more explosive project of his own. The personal complications for Joli, being forced to choose between her husband and a political career based on extreme speciesism, makes for a potentially powerful novel.

Unfortunately the book is a first novel, and Rowe isn't quite up to carrying off the power of her ideas. There are a lot of sections where she tells you what characters are thinking and feeling. Some of the dialog feels stilted. And there are some odd-looking sentences. The book could have done with a good copy editor. We all lose our grip on grammar occasionally and write things that just don't parse. I have Anne to put me right when that happens. It looks like Rowe didn't have anyone.

This is a real shame. The complexity of the plot shows that Rowe has a lot of promise as a novelist. She has also managed to wrap everything up without a cataclysmic final shoot-out, which I rather like. If her next book has the same quality of the plot and an improvement in the writing she'll be on her way to a successful career.

Forbidden Cargo - Rebecca Rowe - Edge - trade paperback

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Forbidden Cargo

By Mark Graham, Special to the News

Plot in a nutshell: Local author Rebecca Rowe's debut novel takes place in 2110, first on Mars, then in space and, finally, in a futuristic and unrecognizable Denver.

Despite amazing technological advances, including the Molecular Advantage Machine, through which any person has access to all knowledge, there is a ban against tampering with the human genome. But for decades a secret Martian laboratory has been developing a strain of individuals called Imagofas who combine human and artificial chromosomes. These Imagofas would appear to be the next step in evolution and are the focal point of tension between the two governing organizations on Earth, the Order and the Council.

The Order is behind the Martian experiment. So when the Council discovers that the first Imagofas are reaching adulthood, it hires a sleazy spaceship captain to kidnap one and bring her back to Earth.

Meanwhile, a wealthy crime family would love to have an Imagofas as a trophy and guinea pig, so the captain snatches two of these hybrids.

During their abduction, flight to Earth and subsequent escape, the two Imagofas discover abilities even they were unaware of. Yet everything seems stacked against them. In an explosion when the ship lands on the moon, the two are separated, and much of the novel follows their attempts to find each other. As the story progresses, several subplots, involving government intrigue, romance, gaming and religion weave their way through the narrative.

Sample of prose: "As an Imagofas, Sashimu belonged to Mars. She watched the storm sweep toward her, all too conscious that she and her fellow Imagofas must become the guardians of their planet . . . It was their destiny to infuse their barren world with life."

Pros: Rowe extrapolates current technology into a believable future. If you like melodrama, the heroes save the damsels several times.

Cons: Too many subplots cause confusion. And if you don't like melodrama, all the last-minute heroics might seem silly.

Final word: Despite some flaws, this is an impressive first novel. Rowe is a name to watch in science fiction.

Forbidden Cargo

Reviewed by D. Maslowski

RKR paints a vivid picture of life in 2110. Her dramatization of fear and ignorance is reminiscent of social commentary on par with Gibson or P. K. Dick. However, RKR makes her point without being preachy and wraps it gloriously in the vein of a fun Cyber Punk gone nanotech wet ware novel. Her use of characters and situations form the thread of an interesting ethical and moral dilemma applicable to today's society. For a first novel this is an exceptional book on many different levels.

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Forbidden Cargo

Chris McCallister, reviewer Rambles.NET (24 March 2007)

Set in our universe in the year 2110, a colony of scientists has (illegally) mixed nanotechnology with genetic engineering to create the next step in human evolution. The result is the "nanogen" or, as they refer to themselves, the "Imagofas" or the Image of Fate.

As the Imagofas are reaching adulthood and discovering the nature of their advanced abilities (e.g., rapid healing, keen senses, ability to tap into the future's version of the Internet, called the MAM, without equipment), two of them become embroiled in a power struggle between two factions on Earth: the Council is the ruling body for Earth and its colonies, while the Order is the autonomous defense, security, police and intelligence arm of the Council. While both the Council and the Order publicly oppose illegal tampering with human genes out of fear that humanity would lose its sense of, well, humanity, some members of each faction secretly condone and support the research.

When a crime boss on Earth arranges to kidnap two Imagofas, he plans to sell one to a Councilwoman who opposes the development of nanogens so she can use it to discredit the Order and further bolster her own rise toward Council leadership. But, the crime boss wants to sell the other Imagofas to one of the domus, which are similar to the Great Houses in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (i.e., powerful family-run financial dynasties).

If it sounds complicated already, that's just the beginning, as there are several other major players who get involved, including Ochbo (a technological wizard who opposes restrictions placed by the government on public access to the MAM), the Cadet (a highly skilled MAM gamer who is also an excellent spy), Creid (the Councilwoman's husband, who invented the MAM and who does not share his wife's anti-nanogen sentiments) and Prometheus (a super-agent created by Creid who exists only in the virtual reality of the MAM, but strives to become more real). What nobody counted on was that the Imagofas in general, and the two kidnapped ones, Thesni and Sashimu, have not only extraordinary abilities, but also a powerful nascent sense of themselves as a new and separate race, including their own culture and religious beliefs.

If this sounds potentially confusing, it is. The sequences where the characters enter the virtual reality of the MAM are dreamlike, where everything might not be what it appears to be; things that happen in "Novus Orbis" (the virtual world of the MAM) can greatly affect "Vetus Orbis" (conventional reality).

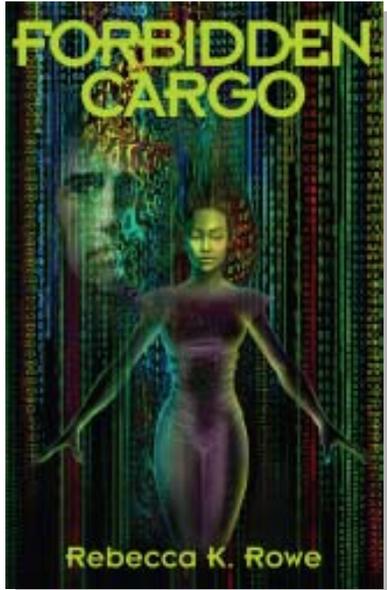
However, if you are starting to want to flee this world of chaos, please don't, as you would be doing yourself, and the author, a disservice. Despite the strange, dreamlike quality that often reigns in this tale, it is very well written, the pace is just fast enough so you teeter on the edge of wanting to flee, but you never slip over that edge into chaos, and the characters are powerfully written. Sashimu, Thesni, Creid, Ochbo, Prometheus and Councilwoman Joli are all three-dimensional, credible characters with complex but realistic agendas and good blends of strengths and flaws.

While I did have to reread a few paragraphs when I started to get lost in the fuzziness between virtual and real reality, it was well worth the effort as this is an exciting, action-packed science-fiction adventure story, that pushes the envelope by making us ask ourselves what has to be true to call something "real."

This novel is the first by Rebecca Rowe, but I suspect -- and hope -- it will not be the last. While this story can easily stand alone, I am betting that it is just the beginning of a series. The Imagofas, and the complex future they inhabit, will be fertile ground for many stories to come.

About The Book

When asked to tell *all about Forbidden Cargo*, the author said:



Forbidden Cargo is a science fiction novel for readers who are "young at heart". Especially for Internet boom & busters who grew up professionally in companies that made it important to change the dress code to casual and who brought *fuss ball* into the office for programmers who worked 24 x 7, slept on a cot in their office and lived, ate, and drank *web idealism*. It is for all readers who have had the sublime experience of developing their own language, inside jokes and a radically new way of looking at the world.

Forbidden Cargo captures both this idealism and its aftermath. The undeniable fact that technology both *gives* us something and *takes* a lot of *something else* away.

Forbidden Cargo is for the slashdot.org-ers, the register.co.uk-ers and the growing open source movement where the programmers are technically savvy, and where technology is both work and play. Where the boundaries are blurred. Where professionals are often gamers as well as coders and just as readily enjoy Japanese anime as well as Fourier Transforms.

It's for those of us who never ever really wanted to grow up. Those who attend the midnight release parties for a *Harry Potter* book, and wait in line for hours to see the first showing of *Lord of the Rings*, and spend the weekend in a windowless, basement cube debugging code so it can be available for free on the Net.

Forbidden Cargo is, above all, a book about technology and what it means to us.

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Interview Questions and Answers



Rebecca K. Rowe

Just who is Rebecca K. Rowe?

A SF&F writer and poet who lives and writes in Colorado.

Where do your inspirations come from?

I find myself most inspired when I am immersed in the unfamiliar—another culture, country or world of ideas. That said I also love discovering the fantastic in the everyday. I guess you could say that I am in a constant state of unfamiliarity.

My greatest inspiration comes during travel, particularly when I am in places where I cannot read or understand the language. It is in these places that I best understand who and what I am. Unfortunately, I cannot travel enough and must find that feeling in other ways. So, I surround myself with music and words with the hope of discovering something new.

What is the focus of your work?

My work has focused on the intersection of society and technology, the idealism that accompanies discovery and innovation and the inevitable disappointment when the objects of discovery and innovation are actually applied by the world at large. Along with this is the mythology of science and technology, where almost spiritual lines are crossed.

I am fascinated by the processes of scientific research and discovery and how, throughout history, such passion and genius are so often accompanied by unbelievable eccentricity.

At some level, my work is also an exploration of how girls and women fit into the world outside the archetypes of mothers, objects of desire and whores.

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What is this novel about?

Forbidden Cargo is an exploration of scientific innovation and how such innovation can have unintended consequences.

Creid Xerkler is a retired inventor and father of Novus Orbis — a new world created by bridging the human mind and a virtual universe through nanotechnology. His work leads to breakthroughs in nanogenetic engineering and artificial intelligence, the consequences of which he will meet face-to-face.

When Sashimu and Thesni are abducted from a research facility on Mars and brought to earth to stand trial as evidence of a clandestine project in nanogenetics, Creid risks everything to protect them. Sabotage and a harrowing shipwreck leave Sashimu and Thesni fugitives on Earth where they must discover their own special powers to survive, helped by an enlightenment-seeking artificial intelligence and a mercurial, honor-bound gamer.

What book are you reading, and where is your favorite place to read?

Books: - The Best American Short Stories 2005
 - Sheri S. Tepper's *Grass*
 - Takeshi Murakami's *Little Boy*

Throughout my life books have provided a place for me to escape to from wherever I was. Because of this, I love to read wherever I am.

What qualities do you value most professionally?

Passion: People who do what they do because they love it
Simplicity: At times complex and cryptic interactions can provide adventure, but there is nothing like clarity and straightforwardness when you need to get something done.
Humanity: For all the abstractions we create, when it all comes down to it we're all human. Right?

What are you still determined to learn to do?

Time Travel: Having been unable to attend the *First Annual Time Traveler's convention*, I am determined to attend the First Annual Time Traveler's convention. In the meantime, I will settle for the ability to meditate.

Photography: I have been documenting workshops put on by Tory Read, a really inspiring photographer. She has been teaching the workshop attendees (and me indirectly) how to use photography as a means to be honest about what we do and

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who we are. It's odd, but when you think about all of the thought that goes into taking and posing for photographs, you realize how much of personal photography is actually an act.

If you were a member of a tribe, what would be your special role in it, and why?

I would be a witchdoctor—because of my magical powers, of course!

Describe one recurring dream you have.

Okay, as long as this won't be used for any sort of psychoanalysis.

I'm in an elaborate house, some sort of enormous mansion. There are stairs, wood or stone, but more often wood—rickety, old, spiraling upward. I'm being chased up the stairs; my pursuers are cloaked. I keep running up the stairs to save my own life. When I reach the roof, I realize it's a complex of buildings with multiple roofs, numerous chimneys. I continue running, sometimes hiding. As a last resort, I flap my arms ridiculously, only to realize that I can fly. I'm soaring, sometimes sinking.

And when I turn back, they are too.

What would you save from your home if it were burning?

My dog, my cat, my laptop and perhaps, my husband. Time permitting, I'm sure there are certain objects that I would try to retrieve, but in the end I've always valued that there's not much that I can't do without.

What question has never been answered for you?

How do you catch a catfish with a gourd?

What would surprise most people to learn about you?

I'm still thinking about this one.

If you could have any five people over for dinner, who would they be?

- Oscar Wilde
- Li Yu w/ translator (who is quite taken with Mr. Wilde)
- Sappho w/ translator/lover

What do people think of Rebecca K. Rowe's other works?

Poetry: "Unique analysis with a brilliant sense of how words and sounds interrelate"
— Sol Magazine

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Short fiction: “A wonderful story! Very original, well constructed and full of interesting information” – Denver Women’s Press Club on “Forward-Backward Proof”

“A powerful story, well presented, ambiguous and tantalizing” – Denver Women’s Press Club on “Forward-Backward Proof”

Please list some other characteristics that a typical reader of your book might have.

- Appreciates explorations into the implications of technology, particularly nanogenetics
- Enjoys online gaming and still has enough time left over to read
- Enjoys computer and operating system concepts without being overly fastidious

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