



The Fortress

S. A. Jones

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Patriarchy meets its match in S. A. Jones's speculative novel *The Fortress*.

Jonathon was once a rising company man with an insatiable appetite for the young women who worked beneath him. When his wife, Adalia, discovered his predatory infidelities, she gave him an ultimatum: either submit yourself as a supplicant to the Fortress for a year, or leave. Jonathon chose the Fortress.

To enter the Fortress, men agree to cede total control to the Vaik, an established, enigmatic society led by women. Such men have two roles: to work and to propagate, both at the women's bidding and never with complaint. They are not to ask questions. They are not to say "no." They are to become insignificant.

Because he has always been a beneficiary of sexist systems, Jonathan considers the Vaik's demands to be degradations. Though he acquiesces, in his coiled center, he fantasizes about holding the women to account. Still, he works hard and forms a delicate friendship with a fellow supplicant, Daidd, and with Ulait, a young Vaik who takes a liking to him. But too late and despite all that's at stake for him, Jonathon finds that he's not so great at unquestioning compliance.

The text plies at societies' gender hierarchies with intelligence, reversing the standard to startling effect. As Vaik women demand pleasure from the men who toil beneath them, questions arise about the limitations of implied consent. Every such question can be reversed to indict contemporary society; on close examination, every indignity that Jonathon suffers is reflected tenfold in real time.

Each raw turn in the novel holds a counterargument that people are significant and should be treated as such. So resisting the notion that gender inequality can be waited out, *The Fortress* is a compassionate and piercing speculative novel.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2020)

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