Down And Out In The Magic Kingdom

I was doing a search in the library's database, and I came across the title *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* by Cory Doctorow. Further investigation showed it to be a science fiction book about Walt Disney World in the future. Not usually my type of novel (and I strongly prefer to read non-fiction anyway), but since we're Disney affectionados, I couldn't resist the read. It took me over a month to read it, and that's not even soley because I'm so busy. The book is difficult to read — author Doctorow does a nice job at placing the reader in the characters' futuristic universe, but it's almost too much — he neglects to provide an explanation of certain things. For instance, the characters all have "Whuffie" and "HUDs", and these concepts are constantly revisited throughout the story, but it's never explained exactly what these things are! My interpretation is that Whuffie refers to a meter in one's body that measures a person's positive characteristics, experiences, and emotions — and others can see your Whuffie level. A person with low Whuffie is shunned in society, and sometimes even denied entrance to Disney World. HUDs seem to be a person's computer — it almost seems to be a part of their brain. They can look up stuff and send things to each other instantly with their HUDs like directions to places. It seems to be kind of like today's internet, yet it's built right into people's brains. So, yeah, you can see why it was slow reading as the reader had to get around all of these unfamiliar concepts. But onto the story itself…

In the future when *Down and Out…* is set — and I don't know what year that is, he never specifically says — Disney World is now a retro-park; something that is preserved only because it's an example of the great works of our current time. The

main character, Julius and his girlfriend Lil (who was raised in the Magic Kingdom) are on a mission to save the Magic Kingdom and keep the attractions as they are: old-fashioned rides through vintage dioramas. There is a group of people trying to "rehab" all the rides and give them a futuristic makeover, and they do get ahold of the Hall of Presidents — they make it so that the guests can actually see what it *feels* like to be Abraham Lincoln and the rest of the former Presidents. It is the goal of Julius, Lil, and their friend Dan to keep the rest of Liberty Square (a section of the Magic Kingdom), especially the Haunted Mansion, away from the "ad-hocs" as the rehabbing group is called. Throw in Julius' murder (don't worry, he's been "backed up" and can reclaim his life in a clone) and the fact that he now has to find out who killed him and keep it from happening again, and that's how the plot thickens.

Overall, it was a very interesting read, but probably not something I'd re-read. It was worth stepping out of my usual non-fiction genre for the experience to read a science-fiction tale, but it wasn't anything stupendous. The story was interesting, and the author did a great job of detailing life in the future, even if it was at times confusing to the reader. I kept feeling like I was coming in on a sequel having missed the first part. I thought there'd be more details about the Magic Kingdom, and in that respect, I was disappointed. But if you like sci-fi books and you've been to Disney World, I recommend this book only if you read a lot and have lots of spare time. On a grading scale, *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* gets a C- from me. Up next for me is *My Lobotomy* by Howard Dully- a non-fiction book about a guy who was involuntarily given an "ice-pick" lobotomy as a 12-year old.