



Super-Squirrel Book Reviews. Started February 2021. SciFiOne.net

175=====

Oct 16, 2024

The Burning Issue Of The Day (Lady Hardcastle Mystery #5)

by T E Kinsey

2024 Grade C

As with most books in a series with the same characters, this one suffers from sameness. Usually other characters and the situation are used to make up for the deficiencies. That did not work on this one. I could not read for long without getting bored (nice for naps) and it took me a couple of weeks to finish it. I won't be reading any more.

174=====

Sep 26, 2024

Dragondrums (book 3 of the Harper series)

by Anne McCaffrey

1977 Grade A-

2010 Grade A+

2024 Grade A-

The first 2/3 of this installment of the Harper series again includes the prejudices of the previous books. But it follows Piemer, a young male apprentice from book 2. It also gets much more interesting when he leaves the school on an assignment and extremely interesting after he escapes to the south.

I can Recommend this one.

173=====

Sep 20, 2024

Dragonsinger

by Anne McCaffrey (Book 2 in the Harper series)

1977 Grade A+

2010 Grade A-

2024 Grade B+

Seven days in the Harperhall (music school/college). It follows Menolly (protagonist from Dragonsong) from apprentice status (immediately after Dragonsong) to journeyman after seven days and introduces many new characters. That's it. There

is no other story.

And there is so much prejudice, maltreatment, inequality, and every "ism" known to man, that I wondered how bad the author's early life was. Since she was born in 1926 and attended boarding school, it might have been bad by modern standards.

I can't really recommend this one, especially for reading right after book 1. Still, it is a good book.

172=====

Sep 14, 2024

Dragonsong

by Anne McCaffrey

1977 Grade A-

2010 Grade A

2024 Grade A+

Wow. Many books maintain their quality. This one just keeps getting better! It is only 176 paperback pages long and I read it in one physical day. The young woman protagonist is treated quite badly in the first part (30-40 pages) but the rest of the book makes up for it. I did speed through small parts of the maltreatment..

She lives in a remote fishing village that does not approve of woman musicians. She runs away for the second part and lives alone in a dangerous rural world where she actually thrives and makes friends with "fire lizard" hatchlings. The third and final part starts when she is rescued when in deadly peril. At which point she lives in what is called a wher, a place where "dragon riders" live and protect the planet from sky born danger. At the end of that she leaves to join the leading music school on the planet.

YES this is science fiction. That is made very clear in the Forward.

It is also Very RECOMMENDED.

171=====

Sep 11, 2024

Beyond Eden

by David Duncan

1976 Grade B

1995 Grade A

2024 Grade B+

Kind of out of date at this point but a rather fun read. Style wise it has some data dump style half page paragraphs. But they are easy to speed read. Just jump to the end of the paragraph. I did that. The rest is easy to follow and fast reading. Story wise it is about an old desert water project that starts growing thing too productively. I doubt this would be even considered in our current world. I would still lightly recommend it with those conditions.

170=====

Sep 7, 2024

The Light That Never Was

by Lloyd Biggle Jr.

1979 Grade A+

1994 Grade A

2012 Grade A

2024 Grade B+

Biggle is noted for writing socio-political novels dealing with one of the fine arts and with persecution of some group. This time it is painters and aliens. One of his noted novels in this category is "The Still Small Voice Of Trumpets." "The Light..." was noted by a critic as being "Refreshing different." If that means excellent story but not expertly written, I agree. I found

there was too much detail, some of which was unnecessary, and it was too predictable and long. I also found it difficult to speed read and could only read for about 30 min before going to or falling asleep. Still, the story is very good and I recommend it as a first read only.

169 =====

Aug 31, 2024

Dream Park

by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes

1983 Grade A+

2024 Grade Z

Although I rated it grade A+ 40 years ago, I could not get into it this time and abandoned it early, on page 76 of 434. Up to that point it was all character introduction and world building. As for the world, it is an unrealistic expansion of gaming idea to real world games. As for the characters, they were all so similar that I lost track of who was who. It is probably a good first time read though. But I have others in my collection to read..

168 =====

Aug 22, 2021

The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress (1966-68)

by Robert A. Heinlein

1967, 1976, 1991, 2011, 2021, 2024 grade A+

As you can see, I read this again, 6th time. It is still grade A+ and the previous review is also on this post.

My original paperback version is 300 pages long. It was wearing out so I bought a new hard bound copy. The story is told in three parts.

The first part is fully half the book. It is almost all character development and world building (which includes setting up the reason the moon colony needs to be an independent nation). This is my favorite part of the story.

The third quarter is the lunar leaders difficult trip to earth and the politics of trying to get recognition. I don't care for politics but still enjoyed this section.

The last part is the fast moving war. The colonists win but a lot of people die including some family and friends. Indeed, the two supporting characters, without whom the war would have failed, die. This part was pretty much riveting and the end is strong and good.

Recommended!

167 =====

Aug 13, 2024

Foundation (book 1 of the series)

by Issac Asimov

1989 Grade A+

2024 Grade C

When I decided to read the Foundation series again, I was worried about it being a little dry and slow. Still, I started with the prequel, Prelude To Foundation. Prelude was delightful compared to this, the original Foundation. This book was pretty much continuous tedious political dialog droning on and on. There is a grade A story underneath and Asimov is a grade A writer. I managed to finish it but with difficulty. It was very good at putting me to sleep. Not recommended any more. I speed read it when I could and won't be reading it again. Sorry.

166 =====

July 23, 2024
The Eternal Frontiers
by James H. Schmitz
83A+/24Z

1983 Grade A+
2024 Grade Z

Although I rated it grade A+ 40 years ago, I could not get into it this time and abandoned it early in chapter 5.

165 =====

July 29, 2024
The Holovid Hero (Green Charisma Chronicles 1)
by David M. Pearce

1995 Grade B+
2010 Grade B+
2024 Grade B+

I've wanted a copy of this book for my bookshelf since I first read it under the title Bug Hunt on the editing service Scribophile. Writing and publishing a book can take quite a while as you can see. It is available on Amazon now.

The story is just plain fun. It is a bit like reading a SciFi action movie with many interesting characters and species. It often reminded me old SciFi monster bug movies, updated to Starship Troopers or Japanese animation levels. If it has any cons they would be that it is about 25% too long (I wanted to get to the climax earlier) and rather graphic on the gore in places. On the movies I keep in my collection, that have the same problems, I often edit out those parts. (This includes A budget films like Mission Impossible.) If the gore bothers you, well you decide if you want to read it. Otherwise it is a fun and pretty fast read. It has many places to stop but is easy to pick up again and makes you want to pick it up again.

163=====

July 29, 2024
Four From Planet 5
by Murray Leinster

1975 Grade A
2024 Grade C+

While this book would have been extremely relevant when it was written in 1958, it is not anymore. Instead it is just long and tedious and difficult to easily speed read. It all takes place on earth and all the characters are human. A space ship crashes in the antarctic with four young people in it, apparently from another time. Every government goes bonkers. Two science types help the kids "escape." So the story is seen from the protagonists POV, but they are just being pushed by the governments and populations. I speed read it and won't be reading it again.

162 =====

July 15, 2024
Prelude To Foundation
by Issac Asimov

1989 Grade A+
2024 Grade B+

When I decided to read the Foundation series again, I was worried about it being a little dry and slow. Still, I started with the prequel. Prelude To Foundation is indeed padded, dry, and slow but interesting. I suspect I will never read it again, but if I do, I will skip the entire Mycogen section from P135 to P275 (out of 435 pages). Nothing is really accomplished there. There will be some continuity errors in the later parts of the book, but nothing critical that is not explained later. It is just too

long otherwise.

161 =====

June 04, 2024
The Twist Of A Knife
by Anthony Horowitz

2024 Grade Z

I suspect this modern mystery might be a fun read. I just got bored in chapter 2 and abandoned it. Chapter 1 was quite interesting. Chapter 2 was a data dump of the backstories of various characters in a setting from the past. I don't care for data dumps or flashbacks and gave up after trying various speed reading techniques.

160 =====

May 31, 2024
Masadonia
by Clifford Simak

1979 Grade B+
2005 Grade A-
2024 Grade B

Simak's characters and locales are laid back and midwestern. He is often called a pastoralist, which is a good description. The end was a little weak in my opinion. I did skip some long paragraphs as needed but not very much.

The story is about an attempted commercialization of an odd alien time travel source. Yes there are a lot of holes in the story but not enough to cause problems, and it is a lot of fun. The story is also predictable with the interference by the government, news, religious, legal, and other groups.

As I said, it is quite a lot of fun to read. It also did not take long to read, and was easy restart after a break

Recommended.

159 =====

May 25, 2024
Freedomhold (LFC book 2)
by Romana Drew

2016 Grade B+
2024 Grade B

The basic story type is geeks verses bullies, and it is fairly dark. It deals with slavery and the end is quite dark. It takes place about 150 years after the first book, so it is completely stand alone. The Cadori do achieve complete freedom by the end but have a hard time getting there. Yes, I did speed read as needed.

RECOMENDED

158 =====

May 20, 2024
League of Free Cadori (LFC book 1)
by Romana Drew

20xx Grade A

2016 Grade A
2024 Grade A+

This story is still so damn good it brings tears to my eyes. The characters are fabulous. The prose is excellent. The world building is amazing. It is basically about two young adults coming of age. They are just about to graduate and enter the real world (college, jobs, and marriage). And then their lives are interrupted as their country is invaded. The fact that not a single person is human is irrelevant.

This is a complete standalone novel. There is no cliffhanger. It has a beginning, middle, climax, and conclusion. You do not need to worry about reading the sequels to finish the story, although they are excellent too. The story is mostly light and friendly. It only gets dark near the climax and has a positive end.

RECOMENDED

157 =====

May 12, 2024
Ringworld
by Larry Niven

1977 Grade B
2008 Grade A
2024 Grade B

Ringworld is definitely classic grade A hard SciFi. But the story is only grade C. Most of it is a constant barrage of hard SciFi facts told from the POV of 4 characters with poor and similar personalities that I had a hard time caring about. In fact, when I got to the end, I turned it over thinking "That's it?" And yet it is 330 pages and seemed to take forever to read. I won't read it again.

Recommended for the extraordinary hard SciFi facts though.

156 =====

Apr 17, 2024
The Bad Weather Friend
by Dean Koontz

2024 Grade Z

This was a free book of the month from Amazon. It was uninteresting, I did not like the characters, and I abandoned it early.

155 =====

Apr 14, 2024
Watchful Wisteria (book 4 in the Cozy Witch Mysteries)
by Angela Pepper

2024 Grade C-

Book 4 in this series of cozy fantasies did not work for me. It was almost all cozy fantasy with no other storyline. I started speed reading very early and never stopped, In fact I speed read the so called climax even more. The protagonist was less effective than before and the morphing house sub-plot was never resolved. On top of that I did not like the new family character who seemed more annoying and boring than anything else. I won't be reading anymore of these stories.

NOT recommended.

154 =====
Mar 27, 2024

The Trouble With Tycho
by Clifford D Simak

1982 Grade A-
2024 Grade B+

This short (115 page) paperback novel has clearly been cut down to fit an ACE double novel. I found several missing transition areas I had to read twice to make sure I did not miss anything. But it is still a fun classic old SciFi story.

Simak is one of the great writers of old SciFi and tends to be a little abstract. His average book quality is grade B although some of his later novels are grade A. The end of this story is rather repetitive and verbose but easy to speed read. A miner on the moon investigates the dangerous mystery of the missing missions into Tycho crater, solves and fixes the problem, and survives. Not only that, he finds the mother load of valuables.

153 =====

Mar 23, 2024
The Practice Effect
by David Brin

1986 Grade A+
2024 Grade A-

A grade A story with grade B prose. A man steps through a portal and ends up on another world where crude tools get better with use, the opposite of good tools wearing out - reverse entropy as another reviewer said. The first two thirds is very good as the protagonist explores the world, how it works, and the social structure. The last third is mostly journey and war which got boring in all its details. I speed read much of that, especially the fighting in the war. Otherwise, quite good.

Recommended.

152 =====

Mar 12, 2024
The Monitor, The Miners And The Shree
by Lee Killough

1984 Grade B+
2004 Grade A
2024 Grade A-

This enjoyable SciFi novel has hovered about the same A- grade each of the three times I read it. It is a complex story with lots of speculations, no humans that I can verify, an alien planet, and many different species. A government monitor and a team of scientists show up on a proscribed planet to examine the progress of the intelligent natives, the Shree. They discover it is being illegally mined when they are attacked.

But the book's prose is just a little weak. I lost track of the various species in the early team and their names, and never really knew what they looked like. That aspect became lot better when the protagonist was living alone with the Shree. But there is quite a bit of introspection and repetition in that section Including a chapter in a courtroom. I did speed read some of that. Still very enjoyable as I said.

Recommended.

151 =====

Mar 4, 2024
The Lincoln Hunters
by Robert L. Forward

1983 Grade A
2024 Grade A-

I have read this book three times but don't have a date for the first time. The first time, it blew me away with the amazing story telling and it still does now. I did speed read a few small bits this time. Most of them were at the end when I was hurrying to finish because I was short on time, not because of content.

The story is about time travel. I found a few holes this time and it is rather tragic and also a little repetitive in places. Thus the speed reading. A man and his three man crew are sent back from the 2500s to the mid 1800s to record a lost Lincoln speech. Many things go wrong with the trip. Much of the story takes place in the past.

(BTW, wire recording was a real thing in the 1950s. I own an old home wire recorder although the speaker has disintegrated from age and the vacuum tubes are probably dead. It did work when I obtained it in the 70s.)

This book is Highly RECOMMENDED.

150 =====

Feb 27, 2024

The Flight of the Dragonfly

by Robert L. Forward

1985 Grade A

2024 Grade A-

Very hard SciFi with massive and logical technical explanations of a possible laser driven solar sail space trip to another star system and the exploration of the planets and life there. It is very good but even as a hard SciFi fan, there was a bit too much science. I would have removed a bit of it. Instead, the publishers later released a longer version called Rocheworld, which I only rated grade B. Yes, I did skip small bits of Dragonfly.

The actual story is excellent with strong interesting characters and enjoyable action. It is 332 pages long, followed by 43 pages of reference material, which I skipped. And yet, there is no epilog of what happened to the aliens. I was disappointed about that. Overall though, an excellent book.

Recommended.

(Please note that "Flight Of The Dragonfly" and "Rocheworld" are not the same book no matter what Goodreads or Amazon say. Rocheworld is the same story but expanded.)

149 =====

Feb 14, 2024

6 X H (original title= The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag)

by Robert Heinlein

1977 Grade B

2009 Grade B

2024 Grade B

- 1) Grade B-. 120 pages. The "Jonathan Hoag" story is a novelette. It has Heinlein quality and starts well, but it feels padded. Overall I found it dreary, thought the end weak, and speed read some of it. The rest are short stories.
- 2) Grade A. 16 pages. In "The Man Who Traveled In Elephants" Heinlein reveals his romantic side in an enjoyable personal short period story.
- 3) Grade A-. 14 pages. In "All You Zombies" a time travel agent recruits himself in a classic time loop story.
- 4) Grade Z. 18 pages. I skipped "They" because I only rated it grade C last time.
- 5) Grade A+. 22 pages. The wind is alive in "Our Fair City," as much a period political satire as an enjoyable fantasy.
- 6) Grade A. 22 pages. "And He Built A Crooked House" is an enjoyable & odd romp through alternate dimensions.

One could also call this collection "six sides of Heinlein." Overall, it is worth reading.

148 =====

Feb 02, 2024

The GodWhale

by T.J. Bass

1982 Grade A-
2024 Grade Z

This time I abandoned the story in chapter 2. It is very well written, and I can see from it's complexity why I rated it grade A the first time. There is lots to explore. But chapter 1 is also very negative. And Chapter 2 is very esoteric and does not seem to have anything to do with chapter 1. I have plenty of more enjoyable books to read. So I switched.

147 =====

Jan 27, 2024

The Beast

by A.E. van Vogt

1981 Grade A
2024 Grade B

A.E. van Vogt is another historical SciFi writer. I always knew there was something odd about his books and I shouldn't read them too often. Now I know why. This story starts very well, level headed, and at a grade A level, with a man finding a crashed engine in a field. He starts to make it functional until it is taken away from him on page 34. From there on it changes gear so much I could not believe it. By the time it ended, the story is so outlandish I could not suspend my disbelief. I used quite a bit of speed reading from the moon on.

But it is an interesting and unusual read and worth reading once.

146 =====

Jan 19, 2024

Black Easter or Faust Aleph-Null

by James Blish

1981 Grade A
2024 Grade B

The famous SciFi author wrote a fantasy. A very dark hard fantasy that takes place in a modern world and is heavily steeped in theology, but still a fantasy. I actually didn't care for this one the second time around. Be sure to Not read the last few words of the story ahead of time. I read them accidentally, and found it to be too much of a spoiler. (Faust Aleph-Null is actually a shorter previously published version of the story.)

The story is full of black and white magic, magicians, priests, demons, gods, demigods, and conceited humans. I speed read through many of the tools lists and I think all of the demon name lists. They were not important. Yes, it is very good, but it is not my kind of thing anymore.

145 =====

Jan 19, 2024

Where The Forest Meets The Stars

by Glendy Vanderah

2024 Grade B

This book was given to me for Xmas. Apparently there were claims that it is SciFi. It is NOT SciFi! It is a very well written fairly predictable family drama.

Three damaged characters accidentally meet and form a functional unofficial family unit. When some criminals catch them, the shit hits the fan. Of course the police and family services people totally blow it as expected. They are more the bad guys in the story than the criminals. It would be a tragedy if a functional family unit were to be left alone to exist smoothly (I'm being facetious).

Personally I am very tired of damaged characters and backstories. I also think the book is about 25% too long, and after all

that detail, the final chapter seems to lack enough transition. I did speed read some of the last 1/3 of the book. But there was never any doubt that I would finish it. The characters are very distinct, real feeling, and easy to identify with. It was so well written, smooth, & interesting that it was hard to put down at times. Oddly, it was a little hard to pick up again too, because I knew there was just going to be more of the same.

144 =====

Jan 10, 2024

Kuldesak

by Richard Cowper

1983 Grade A+

2024 Grade A

I think this book is misunderstood by many people. It is not all about god or sex. What it is, is a very complex and intellectual cultural SciFi story. The humans in the book have lived isolated in a machine controlled society for 2000 years. All cultures evolve in that amount of time. For us, 2000 years ago the ancient Egyptians were still active! There is no more religion or sex in the book than there is now. It is just different!

I can see that the prose might confuse readers. Language evolves too, and the author has used some of those changes in the prose. So, some words do not mean exactly the same as they currently mean. Some have almost no understandable meaning. What is a planted person? Add to that a start with no human POV, and it can be confusing. But stick with it. The story quickly shifts to the human protagonists POV, becomes interesting as they explore the world, and eventually becomes rather exciting. All will be explained.

Frankly, it is an incredible novel.

RECOMMENDED!

143 =====

Jan 04, 2024

The Ark

by Christopher Coats

2024 Grade Z

A new dystopian novel. But instead of being about recovery from, or living in dystopian times, it is about preparations for the catastrophic event. The story actually starts with a Prologue about post recovery (I think) and then flashes back. Thereafter the chapters start with a day number. That number is a countdown till the apocalypse, as near as I can tell. It would have helped if I had figured that out sooner.

The prose was a little wordy right from the start and I never made an attachment to any of the characters. The story has a little science at the start about a long term sleep project and a deadly comet. Those kept me reading. But it seemed to be turning into a sort of government espionage story. The government did not want the secret reveled. When the second set of anti-government characters was eliminated in rather unpleasant and overlong chapters, I gave up. I did check the post comet area and tested speed reading, but I still did not like it.

I finished 70 out of 284 pages.

142 =====

Jan 01, 2024

Resurrection Days

by Wilson Tucker

1983 Grade A-

2006 Grade A

2024 Grade A-

This is kind of a "fish out of water" story. A man from 1940s Indiana "wakes" up in the future and is rather confused. He

has to figure things out quickly in order to survive. Needless to say, he causes rather a lot of havoc.

The world building is incredible. The city the author has built is like nothing I have ever seen before. The characters are just too good to ignore, and one is on their side almost instantly.

It is a lot of fun but is overwritten enough to speed read lightly in places. I also lost track of the author's "map" of the future city several times. But I just kept reading and it worked out fine. I don't think the losing track was my fault.

Recommended.

141 =====

Dec 20, 2023

The Fury Out Of Time

by LLoyd Biggle Jr.

1982 Grade A+

2002 Grade A

2023 Grade A-

There are three worlds in this 223 page book and a journey in each world. The world building and character development are great in all three worlds even the one in present day earth. Part one is in the present. The delightful & grumpy protagonist sees an "explosion" and investigates. The whole world gets involved in the investigation and the device that caused it. Part two is in the far future and explores a whole new civilization. Part three is in the far past and even the aliens are fun to read about.

The journey in part three becomes a little tedious and the end is sketchy but it is a decidedly good book even though my rating has gone down each read. Biggle is a good story teller.

Recommended.

140 =====

Dec 12, 2023

Assignment In Eternity

by Robert Heinlein

1979 Grade A-

2009 Grade A

2023 Grade B-

One single chapter short novel (Gulf=84 pages) and one long short story (Elsewhen=38 pages).

"Gulf" is one of Heinlein's standard futuristic super-agent stories. The agents are supposedly an extra smart next generation of humans. The first half is pretty good action except for the torturing to death of a young innocent woman and the obvious mistakes the agent was making left and right. The next half is all philosophy and fake science which I speed read massively. The last few pages are a final mission where everyone dies. This is not really worth reading except as an intro to this story type before reading a longer later version. Grade B-

"Elsewhen" is quite a bit more fun as a professor sends some students to alternate realities/times. So we get four stories within a story with an adequately satisfying conclusion. This one is quite worth reading. Grade A

139 =====

Dec 5, 2023

Wild Talent (1954)

by Wilson Tucker aka Man From Tomorrow

1982 Grade B+

2009 Grade A

2023 Grade A+

Wow, Tucker is a very good story teller and telling a story is basically what all novels are about. This story just grows and grows and grows. I don't think I speed read anything. At this time it would be classified as a SciFi period spy novel. The real history of those years appears to be correct. The one thing that makes it SciFi is the protagonist.

As a kid in the 1930s, he discovers he has telepathy. In the 1940s a few government agents discover the ability when he is drafted during WW2. From then on, he is used to spy on people so much, his life is not his own or very pleasant. But that does force him to grow and increase his powers. He escapes to freedom in the 1950s.

It is incredibly solid social SciFi that I had a hard time putting down. I never had any problem knowing the characters or the locations. One note, the story is not fully told in chronological order. I started on chapter 2 and read through chapter 15 (my note in the book recommended that). Then I read chapter 1 and the final chapter, 16. You might be able to skip chapter 1 altogether. Those two chapters are basically the end of the story. Chapter 1's prose is a bit off read that way, but I liked it.

RECOMMENDED whatever way you read it.

138 =====

Nov 25, 2023

S.O.S. From Three Worlds (1967)

by Murray Leinster

1984 Grade A-

2023 Grade B+

The second book about Calhoun and the ship from the med-service heading out to do regular health checks on planets. This one has three interesting stories averaging 45 pages each. None of the check ups turn out to be routine of course. The stories are interesting takes on what can go wrong, but the prose is old and very verbose. I had to do a lot of speed reading when the prose started to repeat itself.

137 =====

Nov 25, 2023

The Mind Traders (1962)

by J. Hunter Holly

1983 Grade A

2023 Grade A-

This book is quite definitely grade A! It is also the most nasty and tense psychological SciFi thriller I have ever read.

One human teams with an alien and goes to their planet to figure out who is kidnapping humans. The aliens have a kind of telepathy/empathy that controls their entire society, which is not human in any way. The author has a degree in psychology and has done a masterful job of describing the aliens, their society, and its affect on the human.

The problem is it is too masterful. I had some trouble suspending my disbelief that the human could survive at all, let alone succeed in the investigation. The story is so tense through out, with little comic relief, that I could only read for about 45 min at a time before I needed a break. I felt the ending could have been stronger to match the rest of the novel. I did skip to the end of a few paragraphs when it got too much for me.

Is it good(?), a strong Yes. Do you want to read it(?), depends on whether you want this level of tension. I don't plan to read it again. Fortunately it is less than 140 pages and easy to read.

136 =====

Nov 20, 2023

Planet of the Damned (1962)

by Harry Harrison

1981 Grade A+

2023 Grade A-

A typical fast paced, fast moving, Harry Harrison SciFi adventure. The protagonist has three days to prevent two very alien planets from destroying each other in thermonuclear war. War is only averted in the last few minutes on the last few pages. There is some repetition in some of the paragraphs in the later parts of the book which I skipped. It was still a pretty vivid and fun read.

135 =====

Nov 15, 2023

The Mutant Weapon (1959 book 1 in the Med Service series)
by Murray Leinster

1984 Grade B

2023 Grade B-

I read "The Mutant Weapon" again because the second book in the series is listed as grade A in my records. The prose here is old and repetitive but interesting enough. When the author started repeating material he had already given me, it was almost always at the end of a long paragraph so I just skipped on to the next paragraph, an easy speed reading trick.

The story is about a one man med service ship that finds a planet ready to colonize but not occupied. The ship is attacked. The doctor figures out what is going on and solves it. It is actually a good story and I'm glad I read it. But the style is visibly old.

135 =====

Nov 13, 2023

The Hidden
by Romana Drew

2023 Grade A

"It's easy to die. Staying alive is hard work."

"The Hidden" is a SciFi survival story with fabulous world building and character development. It is a very real feeling story with the protagonist's sanity and life in danger. The author takes it right to the edge and then puts in just enough relief to relax the reader. Everything the protagonist does to survive is described succinctly so I never got bored. Yes there is tragedy too that fits exactly as needed. A Perfect Balance, and I suspect a difficult story to write.

Despite everything being alien, the story could happen now to a college student who was raised on a small farm with outdoor skills, if you could find a suitable uninhabited island to dump him on.

A lot of the relief is from the POV of other people on the planet and what they are doing about the protagonist and the villains who perpetrated the crime. It all ties together at the end into an exciting conclusion. It also fits between the other two novels of the long story arc but stands solidly alone as a self contained novel.

RECOMMENDED.

To be published via Amazon Dec 2023.

134 =====

Nov 8, 2023

Murder In The Rose Garden (An Eleanor Roosevelt Mystery)
by Elliot Roosevelt

2023 Grade B+

This is a true mystery in that the reader does not know who did it until the end. It is also a bit of a gritty period police detective story because it mostly follows a "police" investigation in a harsh time in history. Thus some of the ways people are treated were not nice. It is not a cozy mystery.

The prose is economically written so it is easy and fairly fast to read. There is only some superfluous material in the 3rd quarter. The world is the USA 1936 White House which is interesting and described very nicely. The characters are quite vivid.

I found the book in a roadside free library - the best book I have found in one of those.

133 =====

Nov 3, 2023

Virgin Planet (Psychotechnic League book 5)

by Poul Anderson

1979 Grade A

2023 Grade A

Poul Anderson was one of the great SciFi masters who actually used science in his world building but wrote stories about people. In this case the world is populated only by women. Their colonization ship crashed on the planet. The scientists and doctors managed to set up a parthenogenesis process so they could colonize anyway. But with resources and education failing, and the limited source type for cloning, the world developed a cast based feudal tribal system. There were feudal style wars and the "doctors" were the uber lords. Into this lands a survey ship, with one male aboard who promptly gets captured. The women don't know if it is a monster or a man but he represents power- and another war starts!

The world building and character development are excellent. The story is an adventure tale with lots of personality clashes and is just plain fun. The Psychotechnic League is not really visible in the story. In fact, if you didn't already know it was part of the series, it would make no difference at all. I finished the 150 page paperback in 3 days. (There is no erotica if the title is worrying or luring you.)

RECOMMENDED. Be sure you get the right book. There seems to be spurious listings on Goodreads with the author listed as Xox.

132 =====

Oct 31, 2023

A Specter Is Haunting Texas

by Fritz Leiber

1975 Grade A

2023 Grade B+

The unique feature that made this book Grade A is the exuberant, flowery, stilted prose. It was so strongly toned that it was almost Shakespearian at times and sometimes took a whole chapter to make one point. It is definitely worth reading once just to experience the prose.

Unfortunately, there can be too much of a good thing and I started heavy speed reading half way through.

The story is set in the far future where Texas covers/rules almost all of the North American continent and every kind of prejudice and stupidity you can think of has been exaggerated beyond belief. The story is basically a heavy farce/satire of the social/political aspects of life. Everyone uses and cheats everyone else even if it physically hurts them. Into this walks an innocent skinny feeble man raised in zero gravity and wearing an exoskeleton. I had trouble believing he survived the trip at all. But when written, all those problems were much worse than now so it was a real eye opener.

The book is recommended reading once just for its uniqueness.

131 =====

Oct 6, 2023

Dragon's Island (1950) aka The Not-Men

by Jack Williamson

1980 Grade A-

2023 Grade B+

Another good old story burdened by out of date writing and science. This is a genetic engineering story. It all takes place on earth and is basically the manufactured more advanced mutants verses the humans although not in armed conflict. There is quite a bit decent action, tension, and story. But it is a bit pedantic about the mental ruminations of the protagonist, the structure of genetics, and repeated descriptions of the past. Some of that even slowed down the climax, which was too open ended for me. I did guess who the protagonist was early on and some of the other characters. Some of the events were predictable too but not all of them! I also ended up speed reading to skip overwritten places.

I enjoyed the story and do not regret reading it a second time. But I cannot recommend it and do not plan to read it again. The world has moved on.

130 =====

Sep 21, 2023

Wisteria Wonders (book three in the series)

by Angela Pepper

2023 Grade B

Chapter one in this story is one of the best I have ever read - fun, surprising, upbeat. Sadly, the rest of the book has little in common with chapter one and has a lower tone - downbeat and repetitive. I did speed read a little including areas repeating earlier material for new readers, and depressing areas full of sad angst. But it was still enjoyable with adequate character development and expansion of the magical world of Wisteria. The last chapter was just plain annoying, from the overlong standard celebration party to the ominous "to be continued" final sentences. It is not good to leave a reader in a downbeat state of mind.

Overall, I enjoyed the story, and it is worth reading. But I consider it disposable.

129 =====

Sep 12, 2023

The Seedling Stars (1957)

by James Blish

1980 Grade A+

2023 Grade A-

Pantropy, genetically engineering human gametes to make people who can live in an alien ecosystem. It's an alternative to terraforming. The trick is, the engineered people are new, have no memories of the past, and no one to teach them. They have to learn to survive, develop their own culture, and maybe even evolve to the environment. The concept has been around for a long time. Blish coined the name.

This book has four stories published separately in the anthologies of the 1950s. Each is about pantropy but each stands alone. They range in length from 9 to 60 pages and grades from A to C. The longest is apparently the most popular. It was indeed a grade A adventure story even if I had trouble suspending my disbelief that a "man" the size of a microscopic paramecium could have intelligence. Good book.

128 =====

Aug 31, 2023

The Maker of Universes (1965)

by Philip Jose Farmer

1980 Grade A

2023 Grade BZ

This roughly 200 page book is basically out of date by my prose standards. The protagonist steps through a portal from earth to an artificial planet in an alternate universe. In the first quarter of the book, he learns about the planet & universe and adapts to it. That is the SciFi veneer to the story. The rest is pretty much fantasy with strange creatures and medieval level cultures. They may have been created by an alien "god," but it still reads like fantasy. It reminded me of Burroughs and Chalker novels.

The second quarter starts a journey story with, travel, meeting new "tribes," battles, and repeat. I estimate the total fictional travel time at two years. The story jumped ahead months at times so not every footstep is followed. But, even with skips, the story was droning on and I got bored. It was either abandon it or skip ahead. I skipped 50 pages to the last quarter. There were a few tolerable continuity problems but it worked adequately. Even then it droned on and I speed read the rest of the book.

Farmer is always pretty strange. Good for what it is, but not recommended.

127 =====

Aug 23, 2023

The Peregrine (Book 4 in the Psychotechnic League series. aka Star Ways)

by Poul Anderson

1978 Grade B

2023 Grade A

Where book 1 of this future history series is in the near future and now suffers from events that did not happen syndrome, this book is far enough from earth and the present that there were no content problems that way at all. In fact the characters in the book have never seen earth and it is almost impossible to identify the League at all.

The first half of the book is all character, culture, and world building. In fact it is a little slow but very well done and enjoyable. The largest action area comes early in the second half. That is catastrophic and long and leaves the people fixing things before a battle. I had some trouble suspending my disbelief there but overcame it. After the battle there is some more culture building. The end again has an action peak in the resolution of the story. The last couple of pages are a bit tragic but not unexpected.

Obviously, I enjoyed the book much more this time since I graded it an A instead of a B. Recommended if you like the story type listed above.

126 =====

Aug 16, 2023

The Hanging City

by Charlie N. Holmberg

2023 Grade Z

Abandoned. This fantasy story was not holding my attention, and I found the first person prose hard read for some reason.

125 =====

Aug 16, 2023

Tiger By The Tail

by Alan E. Nourse

1978 Grade A+

2023 Grade B

I can see why I liked this book of nine short stories 45 years ago. They are striking stories and very well written. Most of them are tiger by the tail type stories in that the people have bitten off more than they can handle. But now I find them unbelievable, frustrating, predictable, and all about losers. Don't get me wrong, they are exciting, just not for me like most short stories.

124 =====

Aug 06, 2023

The Winged Man

by A.E van Vogt and E. Mayne Hull

1980 Grade A

2023 Grade A-

This has a rather good SciFi story but has become a little dated in technology and prose. It was written in 1944 by Hull for the periodical 'Astounding Science Fiction.' The story was expanded by van Vogt for novelization in 1966. I doubt the expansion helped a lot except to provide a new audience and more income to the copyright holders. The prose became a little too internalized and repetitive at the end, and I used light speed reading. But I did enjoy the story and it is still on my OK to read again list.

Ships from various eras are transported to 25000 AD to solve the battle between the remaining two factions of humans on a damaged earth. Only the XO of the 195x era earth submarine can solve the problem.

123 =====

Jul 30, 2023

Alien Sea

by John Rackham

1980 Grade A

2023 Grade B

This actually has a more complex story than the last ace double novel I read, but the pace and the prose are not as well done. The story follows a B-roll "camera-man" who records emotions for editors to add to videos. He accidentally gets involved in a multi-world plot to conquer earth, falls in love with an "alien" human, and eventually helps prevent the disaster. The world building, character development, and story are actually quite good. I can see why I rated it grade A the first time.

Chapter 1 is basically a prolog that takes place 2000 years before the main story. As near as I can tell, it can be skipped entirely, the same as most prologs. Since the prose is overwritten, tedious and a bit ponderous throughout the book, I would suggest starting with chapter 2. I speed read many long paragraphs by just skipping to the start of the next paragraph. It did not seem to create significant problems.

122 =====

Jul 23, 2023

Castaways World (1963)

by John Brunner

1980 Grade A

2023 Grade A

That was a fast and fun read - 80 pages of fast moving material in an old Ace double novel. It is a survival story but not the hard SciFi I expected. Two large cargo ships full of refugees from a destroyed world crash but in different places on an uninhabited jungle planet. There is good world building, but the story is about the people. The problem solvers, the problem makers, the useful, and the useless. Can the leader accept his job and make a functional group that can survive and build a society. The plot follows the group that realizes they are there to stay and starts doing what is needed to survive. They eventually have to rescue the other group, but it is all about people, sane and insane alike, the frictions between them, and the strain struggling to survive causes.

This is not a great and meaningful novel. But that isn't always needed for an enjoyable read.

121 =====

Jul 22, 2023

The Last Planet (original title Star Rangers)

by Andre Norton

1979 Grade A-

2023 Grade B+

Pretty standard Norton. Good story but her characters always seem a little off probably because of the sexism of the 50s. She was a woman writing male characters in science fiction stories when the audience was mainly male teens. I also never fully cared for the mentalism in the stories, with battles being fought via mind control. It was too much like dreams. But

when I started reading SciFi, there was a lot of Norton available and the basic story is sound. I'm just not as tolerant of the problems now. I did speed read as needed, not too much, but noticeable.

The story is the end of an era and the start of a new one. A patrol ship of a dying empire crashes, and the characters have to start a new life on the last planet. The beginning of the ending.

120 =====

Jul 15, 2023

Clone

by Richard Cowper (Real name John Middleton Murry Jr.)

1979 Grade A+

2023 Grade A

The basic story is about Alvin (a Clone) reconnecting with his 3 brothers and their "awakening." But what the content is really about is the absurd society Cowper has built. The society is an overpopulated world (mainly England is shown) derived from 1972 society, and it makes fun of just about everything from sex to politicians. And it's all done in formal British prose. I was often chuckling after reading a section. Very Enjoyable.

Recommended

119 =====

Jul 14, 2023

Complete Psychotechnic League Vol 1

by Poul Anderson

1984 Grade A

2023 Grade A-

I read five of the original "Psychotechnic League" books in the 1970s-80s, but I only have 4 and 5 in my collection. They are no longer in print under the original titles. I wanted to read the start again so purchased this Kindle title hoping it had the same content. I think it does. The League future history series is indeed out of date as others have said. But, if you ignore the dates, it is good. I had no trouble.

The content is a selection of short stories, novelettes, and a short novel. The league is in its early days, but it does have agents (the focus of the stories) trying to fix the societies on various planets. The content can be little harsh but that is the reality of the fictional history at this point. The stories are not gross enough to put me off. Except for a bit of repetition in the longest story, the writing is excellent.

I enjoyed Anderson's afterward where he praised Heinlein for inventing Future Histories and explained the reasons for the new release.

The book might not be worth reading repeatedly, but I do Recommended it.

118 =====

May 15, 2023

Asimov's Mysteries

by Isaac Asimov

1978 Grade A+

2023 Grade A-

The word "Mysteries" was used loosely by the publishers. These thirteen Science and SciFi short stories are more like crime dramas than true mysteries. Often the only thing present is the actual crime with no detective work at all, just an odd twist at the end. They are still great stories, but my standards have changed. Thus the altered grade. Still eight of the stories are grade A!

Recommended.

117 =====
May 3, 2023
A Fall of Moondust
by Arthur C. Clark

1977 Grade A
2023 Grade A

Classic hard SciFi and an immensely good book. Hard SciFi often has two problems, it tends to become out of date pretty fast and it is often very dry. This one is not very out of date, but I will admit to skipping over some paragraphs this time. But it is so amazing that it still ranks up with the best. The moon is populated. The story is about a rather unique accident. Can the trapped passengers and crew be rescued in time.

Highly recommended.

116 =====
Apr 24, 2023
Flandry of Terra
(Book 5 in the series)
by Poul Anderson

1978 Grade A
2023 Grade B+

Another SciFi Spy book, but rather different. Anderson's prose is so beautiful that it is almost poetic. No wonder he has so many awards. This book is 3 stories of 56, 88, and 145 pages. The first and second are grade A. But last one drags on too long. It never gets boring but the story, style, and end do not really support that much length. Other than that, there were no problems.

Fun book.

115 =====
Apr 13, 2023
The Stainless Steel Rat's Revenge
(Book 2 in the series)
by Harry Harrison

1981 Grade B+
2023 Grade B+

This SciFi Spy novel is basically a fast fun romp that hits all the high points of dangerous spy, SciFi, and action stories. And it does not let up for very long. I did find some of the torture scenes a bit too much and marked them to skip next time, but other than that, there were no problems.

Fun book.

114 =====
Apr 6, 2023
A Picture of Murder
(Lady Hardcastle book 4)
by T E Kinsey

2023 Grade B

Reading these cozy mysteries is like relaxing in your most comfortable clothes. In other words, enjoyable. I love how the author includes period words and less used words such as "supercilious" - it describes so many people. The author also leaves out the common cliches such as the police not liking the amateurs. I might suggest changing venues or something in

the next story though because the story did slip a bit this time.

As for the mystery I figured out the motive and two of the characters involved pretty quickly, but I did not figure out the twist to the whole story even when the final clues were presented. Perhaps that was because I did not believe the clue could be true. In the afterword the author confirmed the clue actually could not do what it is commonly believed. I am also a film fan of most eras and so have more knowledge of film history than many people.

Still it was an enjoyable book and worth buying.

113 =====

Mar 25, 2023

Chemistry of Love

by Sariah Wilson

2023 grade Z

This is a romance (not my normal thing) but I liked the title and the premise of a person in a chemistry lab in love. So I tried it when Amazon offered it for free. The characters were adequate but the prose was massively introspective, and tedious. What I read of the story I found predictable. Those are the main reasons I abandoned it. As for the chemistry lab, after my 40 years in a chemistry lab, to say it seemed a little off is putting it mildly. There was a lot of speed reading before I gave up.

112 =====

Mar 24, 2023

Beyond the Barrier

by Damon Knight

1987 grade B+

2023 grade B+

"He sat down and watched the great sheet of wrinkled cloud drift slowly ..."

"What is a zug?" Professor Naismith does not remember the first 30 odd years of his life, only the last few. That all starts to change near the beginning when an odd student asks him "What is a zug?" after his university lecture. The story gets wilder after that, and it takes him the whole book to find the answer. In most of the story, he is reacting to other people pushing him, which gets annoying (I did skip over small bits). But the world building is fantastic, and the prose, which included the first quote, is fast reading. The content is a bit nasty in places, and I did guess a few small things ahead of time, but not enough to spoil an interesting story.

Recommended, I think.

111 =====

Mar 19, 2023

The Empire of Time

by Crawford Kilian

1984 grade B-

2023 grade B

An old and a bit odd dystopian alternate worlds action based hard SciFi novel. But I like hard SciFi because of the world building which is good. This one is only B level because it is too gritty and nasty. Earth prime colonizes alternate earths via time travel. That never fully made sense, but suspend your disbelief and it works just fine. Agent Pierce works for a policing agency that shuts down problems in the alternate worlds - or so he thinks. It turns out the evil things he has done have just been blocked from his mind. When the blocks are released, his actions change. I did not speed read it. It is too quickly paced for that. But I have over a dozen pages marked for skipping in the unlikely case I read it again. Still enjoyable.

110 =====

Mar 10, 2023

Over Her Dead Body

by Susan Walter

2023 grade Z

I thought I had a good one here in part one, but it fell apart in part two. Each of the six parts is told from specific alternating points of view. In part one the two female leads and the story were very interesting. But part two switched to two male leads I found boring and the first half was a repeat of part one. The second half turned into a tragic romance as near as I can tell and was boringly introspective. Massive speed reading took place throughout all of part two. I think the murder takes place in part three, but by then I was bored and checked the Table of Contents to see how long it was. I saw there was an epilogue and read that instead. It finished the the story quite well. My guess is the story was, in movie terms, a melodramatic Rom-Com Mystery which makes sense because the author is a Hollywood writer/director. The prose was mechanically good and easy to read, but the story presentation was not my thing. It needed editing. I read 33%.

109 =====

Mar 7, 2023

Dark City

by Catherin Lee (Eric Warren?)

2023 grade Z

Kind of an ugly police detective series with a predictable start. I made it to 8% before abandoning it.

108 =====

Mar 7, 2023

I'll Stop The World

by Lauren Thoman

2023 grade Z

Third person present tense prose and unlikable high schoolers. I gave up early, at 1%, mainly because of the prose.

107 =====

Mar 7, 2023

Silence is Deadly (Book 4 in the Jan Darzak series)

by LLoyd Biggle Jr.

1978 Grade A+

2002 Grade A+

2012 Grade A+

2023 Grade A

A SciFi Detective Mystery from one of the best story tellers, and world and character builders in the business. The book starts with an action sequence from later in the story and then restarts at the beginning to fill in the background for first time readers. Stick with it. The story picks up when the journey begins.

The protagonist was a detective on Earth and is now the leader of the galactic synthesis which keeps watch over the space faring member planets and non-space faring non-member planets like Earth. When their world-size computer spits out a warning about a problem, he goes to investigate. In this case a planet whose inhabitants have no hearing.

The prose is excellent but is a little verbose and repetitive in places causing a small amount automatic speed reading. Otherwise it is easy, fun, interesting, and fast reading.

RECOMMENDED.

106 =====

Feb 24, 2023

Flip-Flops and Murder

By H.Y. Hanna

2023 Grade B-

I would put this in the light mystery category. A young London woman visits her rich aunt in Florida only to find her missing - and then a murder takes place. She has to solve the murder and find her aunt because the aunt is a suspect. The prose is very good and easily read. But the story and many of the characters are very stereotypical. Some automatic speed reading did take place. I did not solve the murder ahead of time, a good thing, but I did see many things the characters never mentioned. The character and world building were good (I did see some truisms from England that are not true in the USA. For example I do not think there is a standard "full American breakfast.") Overall it was a fun read even if not significant literature. I doubt I would read more in the series though.

105 =====

Feb 17, 2023

Murder At The Dolphin Hotel

By Helena Dixon

2023 Grade B

A rather good cozy mystery. First the mystery is complex and interesting. Second, there is a lot of investigation by the amateur detectives. Third, the characters are interesting and likable when appropriate. The world building and character development are excellent. I was never lost in time or place. The only negative is the prose is a bit verbose and slightly repetitive - automatic speed reading kicked in as needed. (I'm so glad I forced myself to learn to speed read, although it's not really necessary on this book.) I can recommend this novel.

104 =====

Feb 15, 2023

Hollywood Tough

By Stephen J Cannell

2023 Grade Z

I found this police detective crime novel in a small roadside free library, read some, and put it back! The best word to describe it is "eww." The story started at a high end Hollywood mogul's party but degenerated to the gutters in only 30 pages. The characters were sleazy at best, killers at worst, and mostly just very broken people all described in ugly terms. Even the detective lost any veneer of sophistication very quickly. There was no one to like, so I left.

NOT recommended.

103 =====

Feb 6, 2023

Arson in the Art Gallery (Book 1 in the Getaway Bay series)

By Catherine Lee

2023 Grade C+

This cozy mystery is more cozy than mystery and has a very standard plot. A mom and daughter move from a large city to an easy fixer upper house in a small coastal village; mom 55, daughter; young adult. There is really not much investigating going on, but there is a lot of mom interacting with relatives, neighbors and police. Pretty fast and fun but also repetitive, predictable, and not very memorable (I've forgotten who did it already). Automatic speed reading did take place.

103 =====

Feb 2, 2023

Exodus (Book 5 in the series)

By Steve White and Shirley Meier

2023 Grade Z

I read 30% of the book before I abandoned it, so it is Not a bad story. I just found it more difficult to keep track of the who, what, and where of the story than it was worth. I expect the author to do that for me. Some continuity errors were so big I never figured out who and when the POV was in relation to the previous portions I had read. It might be more understandable if a person has read books one thru four first, but the cover did not say it was book 5 when I found it in a little roadside free library.

102 =====

Jan 28, 2023

Friday Night Bites (Book 2 of the Pet Psychic Kindle collection)

2023 Grade B-

This fantasy mystery probably falls in the cozy category but it is a little too harsh and negative for me to agree. As is common with the second book of a series, there is not a lot of character expansion. I got tired of the protagonist repeating how tragic her life has been, and did skip paragraphs that dwelled on that. I also got tired of the antagonism between the dog and the protagonist, and the mention of the mafia boss which seemed superfluous. Otherwise, the prose is quite florid, vibrant, and enjoyable. The mystery is quite good although one of the clues was pretty obvious. I kept waiting for the investigators to catch on, but then I deal with a lot of animals and know the signs. Pretty much a fun easy read.

102 =====

Jan 24, 2023

Ralestone Luck

by Andre Norton

2011 Grade B

2023 Grade B+/A-

This young adult adventure novel by Ms Norton was written when she was in High School and clearly illustrates her master writer abilities. It is not childish in any way. The Ralestones are three siblings age 26, 19 and 17. They inherit an old but well kept bayou mansion and have to find the secrets to save it from false claims. It is masterfully written from the 17 and 19 year olds' POV. I never lost interest and only skipped over a few of the longer paragraphs. Even those were simply because I have read that kind of material before.

101 =====

Jan 16, 2023

All Cats Are Gray

by Andre Norton

2011 Grade B

2023 Grade A

This is a single SciFi short story. It is quite good! But then it is by one of the SciFi old masters.

100 =====

Jan 16, 2023

Meru (Alloy Era book 1)

by S.B. Divya

2023 Grade Z

I did not get very far. I managed to finish chapter one despite the odd language use, undefined fictional words, and weak world building. Forty years ago I might have put up with it. In fact I once read a novel where every verb was regularized. I also read a first draft that was so good but so poorly written that I had to sort of throw my mind out of gear to follow it. But when I started chapter 2 in this one, I just gave up. Sorry.

99 =====

Jan 14, 2023

Great American Deception, The
by Scott Stein

2023 Grade C

This is a SciFi detective farce. Great America is not current USA. It is an enclave in the USA with hyper accentuated USA facets. And it is a beautiful setting for the author's farcical character development and world building. It is so strange that I almost gave up after chapter one. But I persisted and it got better as the author poked fun at many things with puns and hyperbole. But, I am not a fan of farce, and it often goes on too long including page length paragraphs. For me, it often became boring and repetitious. I ended up intentionally speed reading rather large areas. It might not be my thing, but if you like this kind of material, it is well done and I can recommend it.

98 =====

Jan 5, 2023

Wicked Wisteria ("Cozy Witches" book 2 of 8)
by Angela Pepper

2023 Grade B-

Because Cozy Witches is a Kindle compilation, there is no useful table of contents. Thus it is hard to tell how far into a story the reading has progressed. So far the books seem to be about 40 reasonably short chapters each.

The author mentioned zany in the biography at the end. That is an appropriate term. If you like reading about the zany actions of the odd characters in the strange world they live in, then enjoy, because that part is well done and fun. If you prefer a bit more plot, character development, and world building, be warned, those are limited. The MacGuffin that drove the plot was a bit abstract and the conclusion not quite satisfying to me.

Personally, I could usually only take 30 to 45 minutes (about 3 chapters) at a time and tended to drop into light speed reading automatically. Still I enjoyed being in the world with the characters the author built, and I intend to read the next one.

97 =====

Dec 28, 2022

Farnham's Freehold
by Robert A. Heinlein

1974 Grade A+

2011 Grade A-

2022 Grade B+

While this novel still enjoys Heinlein's master level writing skill, the story is rather out of date. It is so steeped in 1950-60s politics, personalities, and prejudices that it is more of a speculative period story than true SciFi. It starts with an amazing 10 page (out of 260) chapter that fully introduces the characters and situation, and then initiates the disaster - some of the most compact, comprehensive, and effective writing I have ever read. The next chapter completes the disaster. The next third of the book is a post nuclear war survival story. Most of the rest deals with the society of the future (in effect the aliens). The book is concluded by a not quite short enough escape with a delightful end. As of 2022 I would have to say the story is rather preachy, predictable, and ponderous, and I did speed read lightly and automatically. I cannot give it an unqualified recommendation. But if you are interested in a severe honest look at what survival might be like and at racism, it is excellent.

[Yes, the alliteration was intentional. They are all words I thought of while reading the story ;)]

96 =====

Dec 17, 2022

The Paper Magician (book one of the series)
by Charlie N. Holmberg

2022 Grade C-

The first 7 of the 17 chapters are pretty much a masterpiece of character development, world building, and emotional connection with the protagonist, an apprentice magician who works with paper. After the master magician is attacked in chapter 8 and the apprentice goes to the rescue, it falls apart in a big way. It is an abstract look at flashbacks of the master magician's life combined with odd dreams as the apprentice tries to escape the sequence and the villain. I don't like abstract, flashbacks, or dreams and I speed read massively to chapter 14. I still speed read a little in the final chapters, but much less. The end is good although it could be a little more concise and concrete in my opinion.

This is the fifth Holmberg I have read, some of which I enjoyed at an above average level. This is also the last Holmberg I will read.

Not recommended.

95 =====

Dec 10, 2022

Starship For Sale

by M.R. Forbes

2022 Grade C

The book is a cliff hanger in every sense of the word which was rather disappointing. Nothing was accomplished despite the high quality writing and overall fun. I rarely slipped into speed reading and liked the characters, their development, and the world building. The book would be grade B if it had an end. But cliff hangers are deal breakers.

Many story lines were left unfinished. The cancer was not cured, no money was earned, no debts were paid off, the debt collectors were still after them, and no villains were vanquished. Thus the book is just character development, world building, and fights all the way through. All of that is enjoyable although the two 20-something guys seemed a bit dumb in places even for inexperienced males. Fortunately the Kindle version was not expensive. Never the less, I will Not be buying more from the author. Who knows if it will ever end. It might just go from cliff hanger to cliff hanger. I emailed the author and never got a response.

The details in the story are totally original but the McGuffin is very common. The premise is a highly skilled video gamer is given the opportunity to go into a SciFi or fantasy setting for real. I think half of the Manga I watch uses this theme. Certainly the 1984 movie "The Last Starfighter" used it.

94 =====

Nov 28, 2022

Castle Roogna (Xanth book 3)

by Piers Anthony

1979 Grade A-

2022 Grade B+

Xanth books are more about exploring the world of Xanth and all the odd pun based magical plants and animals than about the primary story arc. Each character has a magical talent. The protagonist's talent in this book is he makes inanimate objects talk to him. His quest is to go back to the past and retrieve a potion. The exploration tends to go from predicament and solution over and over and in Great detail. Because of that repetition, it only held my attention for about 35 minutes at a time. I did start speed reading eventually although not much because it is a little hard to do. Still, it is a good book.

93 =====

Nov 15, 2022

Wisteria Witches (Wisteria "Cozy Witches" book 1 of 8)

by Angela Pepper

2022 Grade B-

I picked up the Cozy Witches Kindle set from Amazon for a low price figuring there was little to lose. I was right, this one was enjoyable. The novel is mostly a character interaction and development tale. There is not much world building because

the magic is pretty standard and a red house covered in wisteria and inhabited by the previous owner's ghost in a small west coast town does not need much more description than that. The character development story does not flag for the first half. After that, it does get a bit repetitive as parties and other events are basically repeated. But the mystery is enjoyably solved in the last quarter. It might be a disposable story but it was an enjoyable light read and I will read more.

92 =====

Nov 05, 2022

The Great Explosion

by Eric Frank Russell

1980 Grade A

2022 Grade A

This early 60s SciFi story might be impossible, but if you're an irreverent cynic like me, it is wonderful. I read it 40 years ago but remembered parts of it the whole time wishing I could read it again. Now I did, and it is still just as delightful. Earth sends out a mega-ship to look-up earlier emigration worlds colonized by single minded groups for the purpose of turning them into colonies under earth control. Needless to say, it does not work. All while the author makes subtle fun of everyone!

Recommended

91 =====

Oct 28, 2022

The Raven Spell (Conspiracy of Magic 1)

by Luanne G Smith

2022 Grade C

Hard fantasy set in dirty Victorian London. Good world building, adequate character development, and an interesting premise, but the story is nasty, predictable, ugly, and I did not care about any of the characters. I found the prose verbose, a bit repetitive, tedious, and with very long paragraphs. I can see why the modern audience likes the author's material, but I did not and speed read a lot. This was a free monthly Kindle promotion. It was good enough to finish, but I do Not plan to buy more.

90 =====

Oct 19, 2022

A Trace of Memory

by Keith Laumer

1978 Grade B+

2022 Grade A-

Wow. I had forgotten how much fun simple Action Adventure SciFi was. And there was plenty of each in this book. The protagonist was always escaping some problem by brains or brawn or both. The story traveled all over earth and then off to a second planet with the action pausing only for short interludes. Yes, the survival through rock em sock em fights and escapes became a bit hard to believe eventually, and the all internal brain fight at the end got a little abstract, but only minimal speed reading was necessary. It was the first book in a long time that I wanted to read more than only my regular daily 45 minute session. I must have borrowed this from the public library in 1978. Now I have my own copy.

Recommended for just plain fun.

89 =====

Oct 14, 2022

Keeper of Enchanted Rooms (Whimbrel House 1)

by Charlie N. Holmberg

2022 Grade B+

A period cozy fantasy romance with a very interesting premise. It is about 1850, magic is being diluted by interbreeding, so

an organization works to preserve any magic they can. The heroine is sent to a recently inherited haunted house to figure out what is going on and try to tame it for the new owner. In the process the romance begins. At the same time an old nemesis, who eventually threatens everything, is explored in short asides.

The character development detail is excellent. The haunting was fascinating. It may be a bit verbose but I didn't skip any of it. However, I figured out early on the sections with the nasty villain Silas Hogwood could be skipped once the current status was obtained (a few paragraphs). It made the reading much more enjoyable because he detracted from the main storyline too much. I did not read the prologue,

The conclusion is a bit too long because of the high detail level, introspection, repetition, and self doubt slowing it down. It is not good to slow down the action with retrospective. I speed read most of those slow areas.

Still, it is a really good book and I recommend it.

I obtained the novel via a free Amazon promotion. Don't let that put you off. I have read some of her other books (good and bad) and intend to buy Paper Magician next.

88 =====

Oct 5, 2022

Bewitched In Blood (Hellhound Protectors book 1)

by Jen Katemi

2022 Grade B-

Another person was reading this in a FB bookclub, so I checked it out on Amazon where the Kindle version was free at the time. This is what I call hard fantasy which equals witches, shifters, demons, hellhounds, fighting, and general nastiness. It is also a dark romance and Graphically Erotic in places. The prose is first person present tense and a little clumsy in my opinion. My brain kept shifting into editing mode and wanting to fix problems. Sometimes I wish I had never learned to edit. The story was good enough so I knew from the start I would finish the book, but the amount of speed reading kept increasing all the way to the end. Definitely worth a try if you like this genre, it's but not my thing.

87 =====

Sep 30, 2022

The Ceres Solution

by Bob Shaw

2022 Grade C

Bob Shaw, interesting stories with good conclusions but with unpleasant characters and situations. In this one, both protagonists are damaged and self doubting. One is physically damaged and the other mentally. And those are only the protagonists. This story is also too wordy and I speed read a lot. Disposable at best.

86 =====

Sep 24, 2022

The I Inside

by Alan Dean Foster

1984 Grade A

2001 Grade B+

2022 Grade B-

The grade keeps going down because the prose is too introspective and repetitious. It also takes a long time for the protagonist to realize he is special. But I guess he was "built" to think that way. Other than that, the story has interesting action and becomes quite entertaining once it leaves earth. It also ends very well. The character development and world building are strong. I did lightly speed read repetitious areas and don't plan on reading it again, but it is enjoyable enough to recommend as a first read.

85 =====

Sep 16, 2022
Jupiter (Book 3 of 3 in the original Taxyon space series)
by Aurora Springer

2022 Grade B

The novel starts a little slow with a necessary bit of review, but once the space travel from the Rishalt system to the Earth system starts, it picks up rapidly and is pretty exciting. At the end there is some repetition, and it is slightly slow. Both of those I speed read lightly. The overall story is interesting and wraps up the loose ends. My cynicism makes me doubt the speedy resolution by the governments, but I suspended my disbelief. The story makes an enjoyable conclusion to the first triad (pun intended).

There are more books in the Taxyon series now, but I think they involve new characters. I doubt I will read those, but the author has some stand alone novels. I will probably buy one of those.

84 =====

Sep 9, 2022
In The Market For Murder (aka The Spirit Is Willing)
(Lady Hardcastle book 2)
by T E Kinsey

2022 Grade B+

These novels are more about putting the readers into the world of the story than solving the mystery. In this case it is a small rural town in 1909 England. And Kinsey is very good at putting the reader there. There are also several other mysteries to be solved during the story. I actually forgot what the initial murder mystery was by the time the end came, let alone who did what. Overall I liked books one and three a little better, but it is a very enjoyable cozy mystery. Grade B+ as were the other four Kinseys I have purchased. I will be buying more.

85 =====

Sep 02, 2022
The Children of Shiny Mountain
by David Dvorkin

1983 Grade A-
2022 Grade B-

There is actually a very good SciFi story underneath everything with many revelations about humans. But it is NOT expertly written, it is reasonably predictable, and it required a lot of speed reading. I don't have the patience for it all anymore without speed reading.

The distant colony worlds of man have become decadent, massively polluted, dictatorial, the population basically company slaves, and they have forgotten their origins. When the earth is found, an origins historian is ordered to the planet to prove it is man's true origin while the rest of the crew starts to convert it into a tourist trap. He goes native and eventually saves earth from domination and destruction. This is his story from beginning to end, written from his point of view, in his old age.

There is quite a bit of world and culture building in the first parts. I only lightly speed read those. The middle parts, when he finally reaches earth, are actually very enjoyable. It falls apart when he has to leave, never fully regains its strength, and had to be massively speed read to the end.

84 =====

Aug 26, 2022
Sea-Horse In The Sky
by Edmund Cooper

1982 Grade B
2022 Grade A-/B+

This book turned out to be much better than my grade from 40 years ago, especially the start. Sixteen people wake up in the

middle of a 100 yard street that goes no where. There is nothing but a hotel on one side, a market on the other, and "grassland" for miles around. Surviving and figuring out the puzzle are very interesting. The world building is excellent. It is so well mixed in with the character activities the reader does not realize it has happened. The characterizations are wonderful. It is only near the end when they start solving the puzzle that the story becomes a little too abstract and bogs down slightly. It certainly did not take long to read.

Expertly written! Recommended.

83 =====

Aug 23, 2022

Exiles

by Ashley & Leslie Saunders

2022 Grade Z

This is way too ugly a dystopian novel for me, both situation, story, and characters. I gave up at the start of chapter 4 when one protagonist is captured because of false identification. There were dystopian SciFi novels in the 60's but they tended to be on the recovery side and at least slightly positive. Now people just seem to live with the mess.

LA is a "cesspool" after an earthquake destroys "everything." The unwashed masses of poor live in the crime and disease ridden slums in the old polluted LA river runoff channel. (I saw that brim to brim full in the 60s. Maybe it does not happen anymore.) The selected fortunate live in a university level campus enclave that appears to be a cult run by an ultra wealthy leader who "donates" to the poor.

Maybe it gets better but I didn't see it since I did not like anything about it. The prose is good but it's still not recommended.

82 =====

Aug 23, 2022

The Deep Range

by Arthur C. Clark

1981 Grade A

2022 Grade A-/B+

This is indeed a good book. But it is a little out of date. It was written in 1957 and the SciFi was supposed to take place in 2032. Things did not proceed as envisioned which is a common problem with near future hard SciFi. The premise is that man is farming and ranching the oceans much as it was done on land in the 50s, and the world government trains people to be wardens of the whales used for the same things cattle were used for. The early part of the book does not mention what we now know, but, don't worry, Clark covers most of them later in the story. The world building is subtle but good.

The actual story is a life long a psychological character study of the protagonist. He has PTSD from a space travel accident when he starts training as a warden/ranger in the oceans. That is part one and the longest part of the book. It never got dull until he had a breakdown and tried to commit suicide. I did speed read some of the suicide. I also speed read similar places in the remaining two sections which lead to him becoming a bureaucrat. Be careful with the speed reading though, because all three "parts" tend to end abruptly in those areas and very well.

Recommended with reservations.

81 =====

Aug 13, 2022

Freaky Deaky Tiki [Kindle Edition]

Moonstone Bay Cozy Fantasy Mystery. Book 3.

by Amanda M. Lee

2022 Grade B+

I needed something light and reliably fun so I bought this. I was not disappointed. It is very character oriented, fast and easy reading, never boring, and has an outspoken and sarcastic new character. Although I did not fully care for the new character, she did liven up the story. The author is apparently starting a new separate series with that character. This time the various

"witches" on the island have to fight a nasty supernatural "cult." I liked this installment better than book 2.

80 =====

Aug 04, 2022

Power Lines (book two of the Powers That Be series)

by Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

1997 Grade B+

2011 Grade B+

2022 Grade C

A good story has world building, character development, and a story. Almost all the world building was done in book one. The only new characters to develop this time were the villains. Most of the story seems to follow the villains who are truly stupid, evil, mean, and nasty. The story is eventually about the inhabitants "defeating" the villains but the almost trivial end does not justify the means.

Clearly my tolerance for mean people and nasty behavior has dropped. And this story has a massive amount of insensitivity including to cruelty to children, attempted rape, animal beatings, environmental destruction, and false imprisonment. The story also jumps from character to character so often it was frustrating. I ended up speed reading a massive amount, marked places to speed thru and skip only to find I never want to read it again. The odd thing is my notes from 2011 all mention the same things but not so forcefully.

NOT recommended.

79 =====

July 19, 2022

Cachalot

by Alan Dean Foster

1982 Grade A

2001 Grade B+

2022 Grade B

This story did not fully hold my attention this time. It is actually very good, but it was easy to stop at any time. My guess is the average grade is around B+, and it should be an interesting read for most fans.

The premise is: what would happen if a few of every species of earth cetacean is moved to an all ocean planet and allowed to evolve pretty much undisturbed for about 1000 years. Now some whales are destroying the small human colonies that live on the few atolls or on floating "cities." A commonwealth investigator / marine biologist is sent to find out why.

The world building and character development are good as is the writing. I don't recall speed reading anything but the "god like" conclusion which was a bit predictable. I think I just didn't care that much for the characters this time.

78 =====

July 19, 2022

The Magic Goes Away

by Larry Niven

1981 Grade A-

2022 Grade B

This is actually a pretty short fantasy novel. There are only 190 pages of fairly large print, fast, and easy reading content and many, many illustrations ranging from 1/2 page to 3 pages. I've lost my taste for barbarian & magician fantasy which is the reason for the grade reduction. But this is a good one with beefcake, cheesecake, and two old magicians trying to put magic back into a world, which is now mostly low tech sword and sorcery. There is a sequel to this which I did not care for the first time.

77 =====

July 15, 2022

Shoot at the Moon
by William F. Temple

1982 Grade B
2022 Grade B

This story is a SciFi mystery and an unusual one at that. The author keeps the SciFi details minimal for the first half and more. Instead he concentrates on the five odd characters which is pretty interesting. An obsessed billionaire hires an experienced pilot to fly him to the moon in a computerized atomic spaceship he had hired others to build. The other three crew are family and friends- all scientific, but also mentally damaged people. The purpose of the SciFi is to isolate the people so the story can be told. The story is told from the pilot's POV. As a character study, the book is quite good up to the murder. After that there is way too much introspection which I had to speed read. The conclusion is good, though, and brings the SciFi much more into the story. I did guess the overall concept of the conclusion but not the details.

I can't recommend this book but at least I know why I graded it B 40 years ago. (B basically means "maybe.")

76 =====

July 10, 2022

Sentenced to Prisms

by Alan Dean Foster

1986 Grade A
2001 Grade A
2022 Grade A-

This is basically a survival story. The story actually starts with chapter two. The rather obnoxious protagonist is briefed about a mission to find out what happened to the survey station and team on the recently discovered planet "Prism" which has crystalline life. He is fitted with the newest, toughest, and best armored survival suit and sent off. Eventually the suit is damaged and he has to survive on his own. That much was predictable and the cause of my disbelief that he could survive the unfriendly life when the suit could not. After that the story gets incredibly better! Foster has created amazing alien life forms that mimic every other life form I know but with wonderful differences. Everything is resolved by the end of the story and there was no reason for the disbelief.

Based on my notes from the first readings, I skipped chapter one, which causes the next 70 pages to be a sort of flashback. I skimmed it later and could not see that it is necessary for the story. It is probably there to lock in readers. I did skip to the ends of a few paragraphs throughout the book, but that is trivial. The prose is easy and fast reading. The story is exciting. The characters are interesting and develop wonderfully. The world building is awesome.

Recommended, with or without chapter one.

75 =====

July 5, 2022

Killobyte

by Piers Anthony

2022 Grade C

This is basically an exploration of what might happen if an MMORPG is combined with full body VR equipment. Not only that but the two protagonists are damaged characters in the real world and might die for real if they are locked in and killed too many times in the game, which is exactly what a hacker does. Sadly there was too much introspection and tragic backstory to hold my interest. There was enough interest to make me want to finish it but only with massive speed reading all the way to the end.

I found this in one of those curbside free book exchanges. It will be returned there tomorrow.

Not recommended.

75 =====

June 14, 2022

Tunnel In The Sky
by Robert A. Heinlein

1978 Grade B+
2009 Grade A-
2022 Grade A-

I actually read a two day short out of a Simak collection between books 74 and 75. Which means I finished this one quite quickly. That's one of the problems of really good books.

The survival test ran long, very long. Could the 18 year old and the others of similar ages survive and what effects will it have. Except in the political third quarter, the story is excellent. I did speed read a little in the political bits, but new readers shouldn't need to. This is one of Heinlein's transition books from late teen protagonists to adult stories. It was written in 1953 so you will see the various social prejudices of the era. You will also see smatterings of Heinlein's philosophies. You will just have to suspend your disbelief. It is worth it.

Recommended.

74 =====
June 7, 2022
Ware the Cats of War (Crescent City Coven)
by Chris Lowry

2022 Grade Z

I read about 20% of this and gave up. I did not like any of the characters, their actions, or the story being told. If you don't mind a mean witch coven story, it should be fine.

73 =====
June 6, 2022
Planetfall - A Story of the Dark (Alexis Carew book 0.5)
by J.A. Sutherland

2022 Grade Z/B-

I read about 22% of this and gave up. I read it before in 2018 and forgot to record it = grade B-.

71 =====
June 4, 2022
Ion War
by Colin Kapp

1978 Grade A
1999 Grade B+
2022 Grade B-

This novel does not hold up to repeated reading. Instead of being intelligent, it is pretty much all action and much of it is violent and cruel. It is also a bit repetitive. I ended up doing light speed reading throughout the book. The end was a bit predictable and "hand of god" method too. I marked it as a do not read again story. But if you like this kind of thing, have never read it, and can buy an inexpensive copy, you might like it.

70 =====
Jun 1, 2022
Rishalt (Book 2 of 3 in the Taxyon space series)
by Aurora Springer

2022 Grade B

This is a SciFi-Romance novel which is not a combination I come across often. As a scientist, I have always had trouble

suspending my disbelief about cross species mating but it is not new. It was prominent in the first Star Trek series. In this book, the constant reminders of the romance between the separated characters was annoying and comes under the category of "I already know that." But they were easy to spot and skip over when I felt like it. The romance was never overdone.

On the other hand, the SciFi is good. That combined with the authors smooth easy to read and follow writing style made the novel very worth reading. I already purchased book 3 for future reading.

69 =====

May 27, 2022

Wicked Witch

(book 10 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)

by Tess Lake

2022 Grade B-

This is the final story in the Torrent witch series and I enjoyed it. I think the whole series might be commercially publishable if a good editor pared it down to six or seven books total.

I skipped over books 7, 8 and 9 because I got significantly bored with the repetition in books 4 and 6. I thought it might be more interesting if some of the middle content was missing. It was. I only had to do short bits of speed reading on long paragraphs or short term repetitions. There were continuity errors but they were tolerable. In fact the major continuity error of the missing boyfriend is resolved in this story as are all the other long story arcs.

Over all, I would recommend skipping books 4 and 6 and maybe book 7 or 8. Once the protagonists' boyfriend is established you can skip up to him going missing which should be in book 9 or 8.

Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

68 =====

May 18, 2022

The Puppet Masters

by Robert A. Heinlein

1977 Grade B+

1995 Grade B+

2022 Grade B+

Good solid SciFi but a book of its era. In 1952 the USA was still recovering from WW2, trying to get the economy back to civilian operation and still worried about freedom. There was an active propaganda campaign to get back to the family structure with women at home, and men at work, and both buying new products. And anything or anyone that might reduce freedom was considered a problem. So society was sexist, and communism was bad. The book reflects both.

This story is an alien invasion by intelligent parasites that take over humans and make them do only what the aliens want - a common SciFi theme. What makes it good is Heinlein's superb writing. What brings it down is the gritty nature and the persistent losing battle when the solution was pretty obvious. Some of it was repetitious, and many of Heinlein's common themes stand out. I did speed read small portions.

I think this may have been a template (possibly unconscious) for some of the later novel, "Friday." It certainly has the protagonist working for the same type of organization and boss. It also has some very similar locations, scenes, and attitudes.

Conditionally Recommended.

67 =====

May 15, 2022

Odd Girl Out (Quadrail book 3)

by Timothy Zahn

2013 Grade B+
2022 Grade B

This is basically just a long running battle. The individual firefights are brief in the fictional reality but long in the book. They are separated by quiet segments that are brief in the book but often include days long travel to other places and planets. I "lost count" of how many times this sequence was repeated and started jumping to the next paragraph to speed things up when it got tedious. It did not help that the protagonist was always a few steps behind the antagonist as he reacted to the enemy attacks over and over again. Even the end was presented as reaction instead of proaction.

This story does have an end though. It is not serialized. Nothing is resolved with the long running enemy of the series but this incident is over.

Still, it is a smoothly written and reasonably interesting story with good characters. I would suggest first reading Night Train To Rigel though (book one in the series). Most of the world and character building takes place in book 1. Book 2 is probably not necessary. I forgot to read it this time and there were no problems. If you like this kind of storytelling, which is common in modern books and movies, you might like this one. For me it was problematic.

66 =====

May 7, 2022

A Baffling Murder At The Summer Ball (Dizzy Heights Mystery #2)

by T.E. Kinsey

2022 Grade B+

Another fun and light 1925 period mystery from Kinsey. Just right for breaking the somber mood of most other books, which is why I bought it. The Dizzy Heights is a live jazz band playing in an isolated manor house this time. They have to solve the murders before the roads clear or else the police will just rule it suicide.

It does get a little mundane after the murders and before they actually start solving it, but I did not speed read much, if any. I don't remember. It is possible to figure out who committed the murders, which is rare in mysteries. There was one clue during one of their discussions which ruled out everyone else. How was not clear until later. Kinsey was honest about it though and stayed true to the clues.

Recommended.

65 =====

May 2, 2022

Little Fuzzy

by H. Beam Piper

1977 Grade B

1995 Grade A-

2022 Grade B+

I wonder how many books use a company exploiting a planet to the detriment of the inhabitants as the villain. I ask because I noticed that similarity with Powers That Be and League Of Free Cadorie which I read recently. They are all very, very different but have that in common.

In Little Fuzzy a new sentient race is discovered which would void the company's contract - so they fight it. The fight gets nasty in places of course. The reason it is in the grade B range is the middle of the book has a lot of pseudo-legalese. I just don't care for legalese or the villain's POV anymore - personal preference. I did speed read those and a few other wordy places. But it is still an enjoyable novel. I certainly read it fast enough. (I guessed who had disappeared the Fuzzies but not how.)

Recommended.

64 =====

Apr 30, 2022
Web of Truth
(book 4 of Fractured Empire - The complete Cadicle series of 7)
by A.K. DuBoff

2022 Grade D

This story has three parts. I don't remember what is in part one. Part two is almost pure melodrama. Probably only part three (short) contains material necessary for the long story arc. I had to do massive speed reading on part two including skipping whole chapters. I suspect the whole book can be skipped. I'm pretty sure I am going to abandon the series. Not recommended.

63 =====

Apr 30, 2022
This World Is Taboo
by Murray Leinster

1983 Grade B-
2022 Grade C-

Wow, this is very old and out of date, very repetitive, and very hard to finish. Leinster is one of the better SciFi authors. But this book is not good anymore. I actually stopped about half way through and read another novel before coming back to finish this one. I also speed read massively. Not recommended.

62 =====

Apr 21, 2022
Powers That Be
by Anne McCaffrey and Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

1995 Grade A
2011 Grade A+
2022 Grade A-

The story is basically socio-political SciFi, but it is also fantasy based on Irish legend. The amazing thing about the writing is the world building is All done via the characters.

The planet and the occupants have a secret. The reader knows what it is, but the off worlders trying to take over do not. The occupants are excellent characters and have a lot of depth and development. The off worlders are extremely annoying and lack character depth. Whenever they are written about, information the reader already knows is repeated. The world building is also repeated, not as much, but a bit too much later in the book. Be sure to remember the character names. There are a few I needed a moment to recall later in the story.

The first half is excellent and I don't think I skipped over any of that. Feel free to skip or speed read later as needed, I did, although not a lot. It is easy to figure out when to skip because the paragraphs get rather long.

Recommended!

61 =====

Apr 15, 2022
Rendezvous With Rama
by Arthur C. Clark

1974 Grade A+
2000 Grade A
2022 Grade A

Future hard SciFi at it's best. A 50x16 kilometer object enters the solar system on a cometary trajectory and the six planet human consortium sends a crew to investigate. It turns out to be a space ship. Approximately the first half of the story is almost completely technical and is a little dry in places, especially the political crap which is throughout the book. I did speed read or skip as needed especially the political bits. But when one of the crew starts to fly to the other end of the Rama, it gets exciting. Be ready to read pretty steady, because the story becomes exceptional.

Recommended!

50 =====

Apr 10, 2022
Rocket Ship Galileo
by Robert A. Heinlein

2007 Grade B+
2022 Grade B

It is odd to read SciFi written in 1947 even if it is by Heinlein. It takes place in the near future after 1947 (exact date unknown). One scientist and four 18 year olds convert a single stage reusable cargo rocket to nuclear power and fly it to the moon. The electronics are tube based, the ship lands horizontally (never explained), and the computer has "cams." They also end up defeating left over Nazis, who bomb them on the moon, and flying the Nazi ship home. The book is clearly out of date in many ways. But most of the flight dynamics seem pretty good and Heinlein wrote about people. He was very good at it.

I won't read it again, and cannot recommend it, but I still enjoyed most of it.

59 =====

Apr 4, 2022
Integral Trees, The
by Larry Niven

2002 Grade B
2022 Grade B

Touted as a "Stunning New Novel," it is indeed stunning, but not great. It is hard SciFi and Niven uses the movements of the characters to "build the world." The problem is it was never fully clear to me how the environment works, despite the drawings at the start, and thus, it was slightly confusing. It is still a stunning place.

Another problem was the characters. They are humans stranded from a seeding ship centuries ago. They have reverted to various primitive tribes. They are nasty to each other inside each tribe and war with the other tribes on contact. I realize this is Niven's way of moving the characters around the "world," but they are not nice people. There were also a lot of them with no specific stand out character to like. Sometimes, after a POV change, I had trouble figuring who was who.

Still, the book was quite enjoyable. I did speed read a little but not much, and I can recommend it.

58 =====

Mar 29, 2022
Shadow Witch
(book 6 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)
by Tess Lake

2022 Grade C

This story was just too repetitive and tedious for me. The repetition included material from the previous novels and from within this novel. The tediousness was from an over abundance of daily life minutiae. Both of them included incredibly long

paragraphs. I started speed reading early on, could only take reading three chapters at a time, and it caused me to skip from the middle of the book to the last few chapters. All this at the expense of the new story line. I will probably skip the next several novels and just read the last one.

Not recommended. Sorry.

Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

57 =====

Mar 23, 2022

Friday!

by Robert Heinlein

2022 Grade B

2022 I failed to notice I had read it only 4 years ago and read it again. The early chapters are way too padded for greatness at that short interval. It is also very pedantic drilling home Heinlein's views on government, prejudice, sexual mores, and etc.. I "speed read" and skipped over much of the early material to about the middle as well as completely skipping chapter two (2) which is too brutal and graphic. After that I speed read lesser amounts but did speed read small portions all the way to the end. It is still quite good if read that way.

56 =====

Mar 15, 2022

2084: The End of Days

by Derek Beaugarde

2022 Grade Z

I tried to read this on Kindle, and I think there might be a good story. But it is smothered in exposition, has page long paragraphs, and is poorly formatted. There is no indentation at the beginning of new paragraphs (or blank lines between them). Between the physical reading difficulties and the prose problems, I gave up.

55 =====

Mar 14, 2022

Dune

by Frank Herbert

1975 Grade A

2022 Grade A-

Still a grade "A" 500 page classic but showing its age. The whole novel is basically political SciFi. The multi-planet empire is an updated feudal system with a treacherous emperor and each planet ruled by a duke. The novel actually consists of 3 sub-novels.

The first is a 200 page story called Dune. Duke Atriedes tries to take over control from the evil Duke Harkonen on the emperor's orders. The story is routine and ends sadly, but it is very moody, dark, and intense, something that does not come thru in the 2021 movie. The second 150 page story is called Muad'Dib. Duke Atriedes' son Paul joins the natives of Dune and learns their ways. This section is excellent and has tremendous world building. The final 150 page story is The Prophet. Paul successfully leads the natives in a war against the Horkonens and the Emperor. This section is world building, action, and political.

For an experienced reader, the Harkonens are pretty boring, unimaginative villains. I skipped whole chapters about them and skimmed others. Many secondary characters are also a bit dull and were skimmed. Paul's mother is the most important secondary character. But she was also dull in places and I speed read them. Paul is the main character and I don't recall skipping any of his story except in battle. I found I did not really care what happened to any of the characters but really

liked learning about the world Herbert created.

Still, it is an amazing book and it is Recommended.

BTW, the 1984 movie captured some of the mood and depth. The SyFy miniseries and the 2021 movie did not. The 2021 movie is about half the novel, is superficial, and is updated to entertain a modern audience (a good thing). I watched it sped up 13%. The updates did include some major differences and even errors though. I assume movie 2 will finish the novel.

54 =====

Feb 25, 2022
Bloodhype
by Alan Dean Foster

2022 Grade C+

Touted as being a Flinx novel, it basically isn't. Flinx is a minor secondary character who enters the story briefly about 1/3 of the way through and has his one and only good long scene shortly there after. He then shows up a few more times to save the day in the background. The story mostly follows a couple of government agents and a freighter captain who are trying to stop trade of the nasty drug, bloodhype. The rest of the time (way too much of it) is spent with various nefarious characters. Most of the world killing monster (the VOM) and the AAnn scenes can be skipped. Other bits can be speed read. I won't be reading this one again.

53 =====

Feb 20, 2022
Holiday Witch
(book 5 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)
by Tess Lake

2021 Grade B-

This novel was a fun, light, fast read. The Torrent family is interesting to read about if not too often. There is quite a bit of repetition from both earlier novels and internally. I just speed read those bits mostly by jumping to the end of an overlong paragraph but also sometimes skipping over a bit that does not move the new plot along. The protagonist is supposedly on a holiday from just about everything but, of course, gets pulled into solving a magical mystery.

If this novel had ended with chapter 24 of the 25, it would have been an excellent end for the series, it was that enjoyable. Chapter 25 just sort of sets up novel 6. I'll get there eventually when I need something pleasant to read.

Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

52 =====

Feb 16, 2022
This Darkening Universe
by Lloyd Biggle Jr.

2022 Grade B+

The quality of the third and last Jan Darzak SciFi detective story depends on the POV. Darzak is not really the lead character in the story. He is just the observer of some unknown force killing off whole planets at a time. So his parts are a bit depressing and tedious. I did speed read some of them.

When his older "assistant" and the young doctor with her children come on the scene, the story is grade A. There are many threads that come together at the end. The middle ones are difficult to put down.

Recommended.

51 =====

2022

Freedom Hold

by Romana Drew

2022 Grade A

The second story in the Cadorie timeline takes place about a century after The League of Free Cadorie. At this point the Cadorie resistance against the Langon invasion of their world turns to active rebellion. It is intense in places. The Cadorie do it small and smart, but, as with all wars, people get hurt and die. In many ways, this book is better than the first with quite a bit more action and a solid positive end.

The chapters are short, interesting, and fast reading. The first nine or so deal with the Langon enslavement of a group of Cadorie who "work" for them. Those chapters are gritty in places. But stick with it, the information is needed and when the young female protagonist escapes to Freedomhold, it becomes very, very smart and good. There are two other traumatic spots but the reader sees them mostly blunted via second hand news and video reports.

The story is carefully crafted, strong, emotional, social SciFi action and was hard to put down most of the time. The characters are vibrant and alive, the world building is solid, and the lighter sections delightful.

It is very enjoyably and
Highly recommended.

50 =====

Jan, 2022

Lonely Hearts on Mars

by Aurora Springer

2022 Grade B+

This is a SciFi-Romance five chapter short story. I purchased a Kindle novel, liked it, and signed up for the author's mailing list. This story was a gift at that point. The first three chapters are very good SciFi. In Chapter 4 or 5 things start to go wrong as a crisis and the romance are set up. I did not feel the protagonist was being intelligent enough anymore. But she handled the crisis well, and the story was good. It probably needed about one more chapter to flesh it out. It was an enjoyable read.

49 =====

Jan, 2022

Hey, Zeus

by Wynn Jared

2022 Grade C+

This is one of the oddest SciFi books I have ever read. Very irreverent, sarcastic, and mocking of just about everything in our modern society from the flying dildo to the cult religion. I would Not recommend it for all readers. The story starts and ends very well and is quite interesting. However I almost abandoned it in the middle. Eventually I figured out that the prose switches between four points of view and only two are necessary. After that I only read the chapters with at least one of the protagonists in it, Zeus or Cory. It was much better that way. Eventually they all meet up and swap partners. From then on it is interesting and leads to the climax. It is well written and is easy to follow. If you like this kind of thing, I suspect it is great. You decide.

48 =====

Jan 22, 2022

The Chronocide Mission

by Lloyd Biggle Jr

2022 Grade B+

Social SciFi with amazing world building of the society and excellent character development. The first two thirds is barley SciFi with the exploration of the brutal future dystopian feudal society. The book is not too graphic, but this future is not a nice place. The mission is to prevent this society from ever developing and that is the last third - which was difficult to put down. The end was predicted early on, but the details of getting there are what make it interesting. The first and last chapters, bookend the content and are delightful.

The book is not grade A because it is overwritten. I'd guess it is about 20% too long. Each chapter is from a different POV, and some seemed out of place. This structure made selected chapters easy to speed read though. The POV swapping was not a problem because the prose is extremely well written third person. I never had any problems.

This is the kind of novel Biggle specializes in and it is Recommended.

47 =====

Jan 12, 2022

The League of Free Cadorie
by Romana Drew

2022 Grade A

This is a full length literature quality social SciFi novel.

The story takes place on an alien planet with an indigenous alien population living in harmony with their environment. They may appear to be non-technological and not advanced, but that is because the planet has limited fuel resources so they keep their tech small. The world building is excellent.

The character building is even better. The characters are vibrant, varied, and alive - both villains and protagonists. Although there are no humans, the people are easily matched to human characteristics. Individuals are easy to keep track of and identify with. The villains are on a corporate space ship and decide to mine for minerals despite the planet being inhabited - a rather arrogant race.

This is one of the best stories I've read in a long time. The style and story remind me of - "Dragon Singer" by McCaffrey and "The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress" by Heinlein. The story is detailed, has depth, and is never dull.

Highly recommended.
Review by John Burt

The League of Free Cadorie
by Romana Drew

I was first introduced to this world via occasional posts on a Facebook page by the writer, Romana Drew, who was sharing a story about Robin Mayfield bit by bit as she built it into a book. Thoroughly enjoying this, I purchased "End of Innocence" (League of Free Cadorie) when the offer came up. It sat on my shelf for a while until after the Robin Mayfield was finished.

It didn't take long to be willingly dragged to the same world. The book is well written, easy to read and hard to put down. I'd like to say it's a classic tale of what happens when a more advanced race meets a less advanced race, but it's far more complex than that and delves into the varying emotional stresses of both good guy and bad guy. The imagery is such that your mind is there, right there, and you miss the places when you're finished, hungry for more of the story. I thoroughly enjoyed it from beginning to end - except that there's more to come and that hasn't been published yet! I'm also of the opinion that the original title served it better.

Review by Pete Howe

46 =====

Jan 11, 2022

Project Hail Mary

by Andy Weir

2022 Grade B+

Disclosure - I am a chemist, a follower of all physical sciences and engineering, and I have always liked hard SciFi. So I liked this book, despite its problems, a lot more than the grade might indicate.

The story is told in two alternating points of view. Both are from the same person. The main story is on a spaceship at another star, with many problems to solve. This is in first person present tense which did not work as well as it did in *The Martian*. The second is from the past on earth and explains why and how the protagonist got to the present. That is third person, past tense and is actually better written and more interesting. It also had my favorite character Ms Stratt.

The story is very interesting but long and gets a bit repetitive and tedious. I never reverted to speed reading, but I fell asleep three times during the early space ship scenes. The story also seems contrived or forced. Like it was done to fit the writing style rather than fitting the writing style to the story. Overall, I'd say it should about 20% shorter.

The world building is amazing and includes one of the most unusual and interesting intelligent aliens I have encountered. The learning of each other's language and the bond that develops between the human and the alien is beautifully done and very strong.

I did have problems suspending my disbelief, although I was able to overlook them. I'm old enough to not have enough faith in humans to believe the whole world could cooperate at that level or that one man could know as much as the protagonist. Also, some of the problems the protagonist had to solve were not considered by scientists on earth. Why not? They knew the danger to earth involved a sun and a planet. Why were no provisions made to test or sample planets? Some of the other problems seemed to violate the redundancy rule that was mentioned so many times. Both science specialist astronauts doing an experiment with an explosive at the same time pre-launch?!

So that is why it is grade B instead of A. Still, it was a damn fine read with an exciting climax and a superb end. It was hard to put down at times and easy to return to.

Highly Recommended.

45 =====

Dec 29, 2021

Fabulous Witch

(book 4 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)

by Tess Lake

2021 Grade C

This story never quite grabbed hold. One of the problems with using the same characters and location over and over is it limits the character and world building opportunities. So the new story and situation have to be exceptionally strong. This story was not. In fact, in the author's own words, it was just a series of fiascos. As near as I can tell the family of witches is in exactly the same state at the end of the book as in the beginning. But I've already forgotten the details.

This one can be skipped.

Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

44 =====

Dec 19, 2021

Ossian's Ride

by Fred Hoyle

1982 grade A

2009 grade A
2021 Grade B+

180 pages of literature quality SciFi. The SciFi only enters the picture in the last 20 pages. The first 160 pages are a sort of a spy adventure journey story. The protagonist travels from Dublin to the odd industry under investigation on the west coast of Ireland - mostly On Foot. He of course encounters unusual people and problems as he slogs across most of the countryside of Ireland. You can follow it easily on a smart phone map.

Unfortunately, the book is old and a bit of a slog both figuratively and literally. It is truly beautifully written and very detailed. But it became tedious within an hour on each reading session. Fortunately, there are good stopping places. There was very little tendency to speed read but I did a little. I can see why it earned an A grade the first two times I read it, but the world has sped up since then and I like stories to progress faster now.

Recommended with reservations.

=====

43

Dec 10, 2021

Generation

(book 1 of 10 in the Shadows Of The Void series)

by J.J. Green

2021 Grade B or B+

This is a fast fun read of an action based space opera. For some reason I can't put my finger on, it didn't seem to have enough depth. Yet, the characters were very alive, unique, identifiable, and enjoyable. The protagonist is great. The story is slightly predictable for an experienced reader, but still quite good. It does end in a medium level cliff hanger. This installment's story is completed and the characters are safe - the aliens have been defeated, but the ship is stranded. The book might not be in the SciFi "literature" class, but some SciFi literature I have is very out of date. This is a good modern read. I still have not decided if I will buy more. I think yes, but the combination of grade, cliff hanger, and Ten books puts me off.

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42

Dec 3, 2021

Starrella and the Lost Girl (a short story in the Secret Supers series)

by Aurora Springer

2021 Grade C

Superheros and fantasy that appears to be targeted to a quite young audience. The superheros were apparently created from humans by another race. Standard superpowers, plus gadgets, and telepathy with their familiars. That is where the fantasy enters: A flying horse that can morph into a conventional horse or pigeon. There is also a flying jaguar which I think morphed into a house cat. There were others but I had some problems keeping track of the characters and their familiars having not read the previous novels. It wasn't really a problem.

There is nothing wrong with the story and I did not have any trouble finishing. But, as a hard SciFi fan, it is not really my kind of material.

=====

41

Dec 2, 2021

The Survival Game

by Colin Kapp

1977 grade A+

1995 grade A+

2021 grade A+

Writing reviews for books this good is harder than for ordinary stories. Are there any cons? The first few sentences are very complex and a bit difficult to read. After it got started, I stopped noticing any reading problems. Maybe it could be a bit longer, but it is complete and has a solid end.

As for the pros, there are not enough superlatives. It is an incredibly complex story that is so much more than a survival game on a hostile wild planet. A modern writer would probably have 500 pages instead of 200. But it is Never confusing. The characters are lively, likable, easy to visualize and keep track of, and develop throughout the story. The world building is massive with multiple planets, ships, and cultures, but is simply told. There are no wasted words and it is a fast easy read. The story thoroughly examines the clash of two cultures via an intermixing incident between the ancient "old logic" Star Kings and the younger "new logic" adaptable Terrans.

Very, very recommended. It is available used or on Kindle.

=====40

Nov 28, 2021

Infiltration

(book 1 of the Mindspace series)

by A.K. DuBoff

2021 grade B

The short review = A fun, Grade B, SciFi, government agent adventure. (In other words, a female Bond in space.)

This takes place in the Cadicle universe after the Fractured Empire series ends. Although I have not yet finished that series, I wanted to read a DuBoff with a female protagonist. She works well! The story was a bit standard and predictable, even the end. But it was still quite enjoyable and kept me reading. Parts of it were exciting enough that I did not want to stop reading. Some of the alternate points of view are weak and tended to take me out of the story. I speed read many of them and I think most of the villain POVs could just be skipped. I am not sure if I will commit to the series and read book 2.

Recommended with reservations.

=====

39

Nov 17, 2021 - Nov 21, 2021

Nor Crystal Tears

by Alan Dean Foster

1983 grade A

2003 grade A-

2021 grade A

The first meeting of the insectoid Thranx race with the human race and the prejudices they had to overcome.

It is told mostly from the Thranx point of view and starts with the protagonist as a grub in a communal nursery learning, growing, and waiting for metamorphosis. That part was a little slow and I found myself sort of auto-speed reading. It is more interesting during his early adult years, but there were still a few other slow spots. It picks up immensely when he finally manages to leave the farm. The Thranx are quite human despite the differences.

Once the protagonist finds the humans, the primary story begins and it speeds up with a bang, to the point where I did not want to stop reading. The primary action ends after about a fictional year. At the end there is a gap to allow us to see if the experiment worked. Excellent characters and world building with no confusion about who is speaking, what is happening, and what the motivations are. And always interesting. I'm kind of disappointed it is over now.

Very highly recommended SciFi.

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38

Nov 15, 2021
Bonds of Resolve
(book 3 of Fractured Empire - The complete Cadicle series of 7)
by A.K. DuBoff

2021 Grade B

This book started out so great, grade A level. An apparently new protagonist starts the story. She is a teen from earth who has been recruited into the Taranan Selective Service - a military psychic-powers organization. She was apparently an outsider on earth and has low self-esteem. Her character development is incredibly interesting as is the world building of the training. But, just as she starts to have self confidence about 2/3 of the way through, the story switches to the young protagonist from the last book.

He is a sort of introspective superhero and is quite boring. She, of course, "bonds" with him and by the end of the book has as little story as a simple girl friend. The reader never even gets to see the end of her training. Maybe it will be in the next book, maybe not. I'm sure she has a part to play in later installments, but, in this case, the last third of the book is grade C.

There are also interruptions throughout the main storyline to follow an even more boring villain. I speed read all of those and I think many, if not all, of the middle segments could have been skipped completely. Only the first and last are necessary to the series. Those were grade D.

Recommended with reservations. The author's female leads are much more interesting than the males.

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37

Nov 07, 2021
Hidden Witch
(book 3 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)
by Tess Lake

2021 Grade B

Book 3 is a fast, easy, light, and fun to read cozy, fantasy, mystery, and romance (had fun with lists there). Who is setting fires to structures in town? Is it the visiting magical teenage "relative," or the protagonist, or one of the nasty real estate developers. Who is the mystery boyfriend and will the protagonist's boyfriend ever return from Canada?

The magic in the story is still used in interesting ways. Again the mystery is mostly solved through the interaction of the protagonist with her sisters, parents, aunt and other characters in the small "haunted" beach town. I figured out some of the mystery before the reveal which is mostly a blunder into it type story. But I still enjoyed it.

Quite Enjoyable.

Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

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36

Nov 01, 2021
Watchers of the Dark
by Lloyd Biggle Jr.

1979 Grade A-
2002 Grade A-
2021 Grade B+

SciFi detective story D2. The galaxy is being attacked. Apparently the rest of the galaxy is so civilized they have to hire a crude earth detective to figure out who is doing it. Jan Darzak's main tool seems to figuratively be, poke it with a stick and see what happens.

The rating went down a bit for two reasons. First I read it too soon after book 1 of the series. Seond, Darzak failed to investigate several routes I thought of earlier in the book. But he had reasonable excuses. For one he was pretty busy trying to survive and fit in so he could even ask questions. Despite the problems, he did eventually investigate the things I saw and solved the mystery. The book is grade A at the end.

Recommended

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35

Oct 23, 2021

All The Colors of Darkness

by Lloyd Biggle Jr.

1977 Grade B+

2002 Grade B+

2021 Grade A-

SciFi detective story D1. Jan Darzak has to figure out who is trying to sabotage earth's new matter transmitter system and why. After that he has to survive and save everyone. It is fairly old and a bit out of date, but it does not show much and is not enough to break the book.

I found the first chapter a bit confusing. But once Darzak enters in chapter 2, it becomes clear and quite interesting indeed - Darzak makes interesting aliens. I think it got a slightly lower grade before because it was competing with the other great SciFi authors of the era. Now most of the new stuff I read is "cozy" style fantasy and mystery with the rare promotional SciFi thrown in. There are 5 Darzak novels that I know of.

Recommended

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34

Oct 15, 2021

Future Adventures: Eight Complete Adventure Science Fiction Novels, Kindle

Watcher's Web (book 1)

by Patty Jansen

2021 Grade Z

I read the dust jacket description and then started the novel. The dust jacket made me suspect I was not interested. The start confirmed it and I moved on to the next book. There's nothing wrong with the book that I know of, it was just not my kind of story.

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Oct 19, 2021

Future Adventures: Eight Complete Adventure Science Fiction Novels, Kindle

Europa (book 2)

by Aurora Springer

2021 Grade B+

Intelligent space adventure and I enjoyed it.

Faults: The prose, including the dialog, was initially a little formal. It either got better or I adapted because I no longer noticed after a short while. Occasional minor problems suspending my disbelief but only because I have a wide scientific background.

Merits: Easy, fun, and fast reading. Good solid SciFi. Interesting and complex story. Solid conclusion that I had to make sure I had enough time to finish - I did not want to stop in the middle. Strong and interesting female scientist protagonist.

Excellent world building and character development.

Basic plot: Scientists are researching Europa from a station built above and below the ice. This story explores life in the ocean under the ice.

A recommended book. (I have already marked the sequel for purchase on my book list.)

=====

33

Oct 14, 2021

The Haunting of Hill House

by Shirley Jackson

2021 Grade D

This memorable classic is rather obsolete and I had a hard time finishing it. I did have fun naming the chapters for what happened in them. It was easy to do because so little actually happens. It is basically a very simple story and I won't forget it soon.

Chapter 1 is almost entirely descriptive with page long paragraphs and ends with Eleanor's trip to the house. Probably the best long paragraphs I have ever read, but still tedious and introspective. It gets better in chapters 2 and 3 when people collect in the house. There are well done conversations and new material. That part was quite good. The few "manifestations" are in chapters 4, 5 and 6 (if they really happened). The book falls apart after that with massive introspection. The new character in chapter 7 was the worst and I started speed reading rather a lot. The final two chapters are just plain repetitive and tedious. Except for the negative changes in Eleanor, there is basically no other character development in anyone. They were all nasty and self centered at the start and the same at the end. The world building is hypothetical, did it happen or not. There is no evidence at the end.

Was Eleanor insane before she arrived or just deranged from her first 32 years of damaged life? Did the house drive her over the edge to insanity or did the other cruel characters do it? You will never know more than that Eleanor drove to the house at the beginning and drove to her death at the end. Because those are the only concrete things that happened in the whole novel.

Although I will not forget the story, I cannot recommend it except as an educational examination of a classic.

=====

32

Oct 5, 2021

Veil of Reality

(book 2 of Fractured Empire - The complete Cadicle series of 7)

by A.K. DuBoff

2021 Grade B

This is the actual first novel in the series. The protagonist is a family man who works as an agent for a semi-military psychic-powers organization. At least he thought it was semi-military until his teen son is kidnapped by an enemy in a hidden centuries long war. That's when the deceit is exposed. The son is the other main protagonist.

The book is not quite as entertaining as the prequel, mainly because it seemed a little padded, it is needlessly introspective, and the conclusion is a little too open ended for my tastes (but not bad for a serialized story). Or maybe I just read it too soon after the prequel. The introspection bits are short and italicized so were easy to skip over when I felt like it. I also speed read some of the interrogation and battles when they got too long. But don't let that put you off, I always do that - they are actually quite exciting in places and very well written.

Recommended with reservations.

=====

31

Sep 27, 2021
Architects of Destiny
(book 1 of Fractured Empire - The complete Cadicle series of 7)
by A.K. DuBoff

2021 Grade B+

True space opera or adventure - Kind of nice. This is actually a prequel that takes place about 20 years before the first regular novel. Reading it is, of course, optional but it is rather good. The prose is smooth flowing, easy to read, and fun. It is a classic story of the boy who leaves home and takes a job on a freighter plying the space routes. It kept reminding me of the early youth oriented Asimov and Heinlein novels.

It was thoroughly enjoyable and is recommended.

=====

30
Sep 22, 2021
Sixshooter
by Lyndi Alexander

2021 Grade C+/B-

I would consider this more a soft SciFi novel as opposed to a space adventure. It does take place on space ships and various planets but the story telling emphasis is mostly about character development, interaction, and introspection. The story structure is long stretches of characterization interrupted by a short action event with a little tension. The events don't really seem to have any connection to each other until the end of the book though. Eventually someone gets hurt of course and in the climax a whole lot of people get hurt and there is plenty of excitement.

It is another difficult book to grade. It is basically a grade B because it is quite well done and a fun read. But I never want to read it again which earns it a grade C. I am not the target audience though. My SciFi start was with Heinlein, Asimov, Clark, Norton, and others. Those may be heavily social but all have hard SciFi underpinnings and the characters just get on with solving the problems instead of talking about themselves.

The content is basically a dystopian crime novel in a SciFi setting. Every city is described as a dump, bars as dives, hotels as seedy, and governments as crooked. All of the protagonists were psychologically damaged in some way in the past and are basically crooks now. They have no choice, given the society, but I got tired of it and started having trouble suspending my disbelief that the society could even function. And, yes, I did start speed reading a bit (not easy in this case) when it got tedious and repetitive.

It is just not my kind of book/story but it is well done.

This kind of book always makes me wonder why it gets published when really fun stories from authors like David Pearce and Romana Drew have such difficulty, although Romana's book Marauders of Sazile is starting to get some sales.

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29
Sep 20, 2021
Treasure Witch
(book 2 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)
by Tess Lake

2021 Grade B+

I wondered if book 2 would be different and it is. It is much better! Not enough to make me not want to put it down but enough so I came back to read much more regularly. The prose is more traditional, less hardboiled, and still easy to read.

This time they are trying to solve a crime from the past while the protagonist sees ghosts from the past including scenery

that blocks the view of the present, which makes driving difficult. (BTW, most trees have cream colored interiors, not brown.)

There was quite a bit more magic in the story, still used in fun ways. And again the mystery is mostly solved through the interaction of the protagonist with her sisters, parents, aunt and other characters in her small "haunted" beach town. The only bit I did not like was the open ended short prophecy conclusion after the "ouch," about a page from the end.

Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

Quite Enjoyable.

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28

Sep 16, 2021 review by John Burt
Mission to Moulokin
by Alan Dean Foster

1979 grade B-
1994 grade B
2021 grade B

Series book 12

This is a journey novel. Travel from A to Z to achieve some goal with various impediments in the way. Foster has done several of these and this is not the best example. In this case it is the same crew and ship as in the first book, Icerigger, so there is not a lot of character development. The little development that does take place is in the villains, and they are pretty standard stereotypes. There is a lot of world building though, enough for a couple of books.

So, the story was not fully engrossing. I actually fell asleep while reading several times. I did speed read in a few places but mostly in the villains' scenes which I marked so they can be skipped or sped through in case I read it again, unlikely as that may be.

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27

Sep 2, 2021 review by John Burt
Unlucky For Some
by Anthony O'Connor

2021 grade Z

It actually feels like there is an interesting story here but it was not written well enough for me to read. There are technical errors like the "hexagonal sphere." (A bunch of hexagons makes flat sheet unless there are some pentagons included.) There are also grammatical errors that any good proof reader would catch. It needs to be run through scribofile.com and grammarly. It feels like it was written by someone young and inexperienced - we were all there once. My advice would be to fix it and republish which is the advice I gave for the first book I was ever asked to alpha-read.

Anyway, I had to abandon it.

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26

Aug 31, 2021 review by John Burt
Death Around The Bend
(Lady Hardcastle book 3)
by T E Kinsey

2021 grade B+

Kinsey is kind of a pleasure to read. His prose flows so smoothly and easily that I never got the urge to speed read. I do recommend readers pay special attention to the various names of the characters. There are a lot of characters in the main location, and many have three names. I tend to ignore names and rely on the author to take care of it. Kinsey does a very good job, but I did occasionally have to think about who a nickname belonged to.

The story takes place in the early 1900s amongst the gentry and servants of rural England. The first 25-30% of this story is in the protagonists' home town and is basically just banter level conversation between characters, up, down, and sideways. Nothing really happens during this phase which ends when the protagonists travel to the site of the coming mystery. In fact, I had forgotten all the details by the end of the mystery portion. How the author manages to make this interesting, I don't know. But it was Never boring.

All the clues except the actual ID of the villain are presented during the mystery for the reader to see. I saw them and figured out just enough for it to be tantalizing. But, the clues are smothered in the character interactions so I never put it all together (not that I wanted to). This part did tend to help put me to sleep at night, but it was very well structured and still interesting.

The final section of the book is back at home and is so well done I easily recalled the details from the start. The minor mysteries started there are concluded very enjoyably, especially since I used to love building and riding "gravity carts" down hills.

Recommended for fans of this kind of story. I do plan to buy more by Kinsey.

=====

25

Aug 17, 2021

Constance

by Mathew FitzSimmons

2021 Grade C+

This book was difficult for me to rate so I had to fall back on my standby procedure. I don't want to read it again which means grade C. The story is actually very interesting (B+ at least) with interesting and very visualized characters. There was never any doubt that I would finish it. But I did not care for the prose style (long paragraphs, one after another) and ended up using massive speed reading. I also was slightly unsatisfied with the end, OK but not great (when does she die or did I miss something in the speed reading).

Technically the story is near future sociological SciFi. But actually it is a thriller mystery. Who is the murderer, will the protagonist survive, will anyone survive.... At least the character is comfortable and enjoying life at the end.

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24

Aug 8, 2021

Butter Witch

(book 1 of Torrent Witches Cozy Mysteries Complete Box Set of 10)

by Tess Lake

2021 Grade B-/C+

An odd, interesting fantasy/mystery but not a particularly engrossing read. Still, good enough to try book 2. The prose style reminds me a bit of old hardboiled mysteries. It's easy to read, fast moving, and not overly descriptive while still setting the scene very well. The magic in the story is different from most I have read and not used a lot. There is also not a lot of active investigation. These are not bad things.

It is more about the interaction of the protagonist with her sisters, parents and aunt in her strange seven member three generation family of female witches. The crime solving comes about as she also interacts with the other characters in her

small "haunted" beach town with lots of interesting characters. I am wondering if book one was intended to be mainly character development (which is good) and book two will be different. I will find out eventually. Obtained through an Amazon Prime Reading promotion.

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23

Jul 18, 2021 review by John Burt

Killer's Choice

by Dee Stewart

2021 Grade Z

Abandoned at 7% because I did not like the characters, story, or prose. Fortunately it was free on a promotion. I got what I paid for. Not my kind of book I guess.

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22

Jul 17, 2021 review by John Burt

Flinx In Flux

by Alan Dean Foster

2021 grade B+ sort of.

Book 5 in this SciFi series of 6 although Flinx is a minor character in book 6. I liked it better this time at the start and wondered why.

The first half is pretty much grade A. After the predictable battle the story sadly slows down. First, the two protagonists spend about a half dozen days wandering around a dark cave system trying to find a way out, fumbling around and into monsters, and sharing emotional secrets. After they get out, the story was even more predictable. And at the end it becomes just plain abstract. I still liked it better but that was partly because I pretty much automatically start speed reading when I get bored.

Never the less, it is a good and recommended book.

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Free SciFi e-book, and a good one too. Review below. Email the author from her website. Look for the blue on brown Special Offer message.

<https://www.romanadrew.com/?fbclid=IwAR1doOFh5rjkIAAYruFybDD0oEgqh-cO7kA2y-rQZr6ZMcM8SYU0Xvw19-Y>

Marauders of Sazile

by Romana Drew

2021 grade A

Wow - I have not read a book this fast and good in a long time. It was hard to put down even though I read the first draft as it was published on the author's website and Facebook page <<https://www.facebook.com/romana.drew>>. When I got to the conclusion, I did not stop until it was over. It is pure SciFi, with fantastic world building and great emotional character development.

The story opens on one young woman selected by aliens from applicants on earth to travel with them in space. She ends up aboard various space ships and on several planets trying to stop a war. It ranges from sadness to anger to laughter and from everyday life, to life threatening battles. It is told in first person as she records events in her journal. Most of the time it reads much better than a journal though. The sentences are fairly short and easy to read. The strong emotional content reminds me of Anne McCaffrey, the hard SciFi reminds me a bit of early Robert Heinlein, and the variety of aliens reminds me of Alan Dean Foster.

Very Recommended

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21

Jun 28, 2021 review by John Burt

Choose Me

by Tess Gerritsen and Gary Braver

2021 grade C+ sort of.

Good authors. I started with that because the presentation had problems for me. But they are just my personal dislikes and do not reflect on the writers.

The first problem is it is mostly written in present tense. I'm not fond of that but usually adapt pretty quickly and did indeed adapt in this story. It is very well done given the proviso below.

The second problem is basically the flashbacks. Chapter one is "After" and is detectives investigating an apparent suicide of a young woman. I very much liked the detective characters and they got better as the story progressed. The next five chapters are "Before" and are a flashback to three months before. Since I already knew the woman was dead and did not like the character anyway, why would I want to read about her. The next character introduced was not much more likable. I read two "Before" chapters and then checked the contents. The back and forth continues to the end which is 13 chapters of "After."

At that point it was abandon the book or just read the "Afters" which is what I did. There were 2 or 3 minor continuity errors but the story makes a very good procedural mystery with an exciting and odd end just reading the "Afters." Grade A- in fact.

(Notes - I did speed read over some long descriptive paragraphs but not many. Free promotional Amazon Kindle book.)

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20

Jun 12, 2021 review by John Burt

A Witch and A Hard Place (Witch Next Door book 7)

by Judith Berens

2021 grade C

Book 7 of 8 in this fantasy series. Because I skipped books 3, 4, 5, and 6, there were some content discrepancies. I suspect 6 should not be skipped. But in some ways the discrepancies made it more interesting since I had to figure out what happened. I still found it a bit tedious and speed read quite a bit.

Initially the content followed the same formula, but sort of diverged when they found the prison and mom. That part was still tedious with all the character posturing and torture (sped through lots of that!). Mom was rescued and they all ended up in some weird alternate universe in a soft cliff hanger.

The conclusion (book 8) next but not right away.

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19

June 05, 2021 review by John Burt

The Kacy Chronicles (boxed Kindle set)

by A.L. Knorr

2021 grade B-

Book 4 of 4 = Transcendent

Roughly the first half of this book was a bit tedious, and I sped through it by reading the start of the long paragraphs and skipping to the next paragraph. Part of the tedium was in the portions concerning only the villains. The rest were overly detailed descriptions of rooms, clothing, and one long fight scene. But there are parts that are needed so they cannot just be skipped overall.

The climax is two "battles" back to back and I read them both in one sitting. The major physical battle was very well handled and was read completely. It is followed by the final dirty politics battle which is courtroom style. Courtroom arguments are not something I enjoy, and I speed read the prosecution. The defense was the magical equivalent of CCTV - an interesting if not new concept. But it felt like a bit of a cheat because there was no other evidence and without it the villains would have won.

The wrap up after that is fairly long because the story is complex, but it is Grade A and only involved minor speed reading. Overall, a good story.

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The Kacy Chronicles overall review
2021 Grade B

This is an enjoyable chronicle of a complex fantasy story. It is a bit tedious or overwritten in places and even predictable. But it is otherwise interesting and very well done. I did not find any of the fantasy aspects new to me, but the use of them with incredible characters was excellent. Considering SciFi is my preferred genre, this was an enjoyable story and I might read it again some day.

It is a Recommended book.

Update - I bought the whole set in print for my Grandson. He liked book one and wanted the rest.

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18
May 30, 2021 review by John Burt
The Escape Orbit
by James White

1984 grade B-
2021 grade B

This is one of two books I have read that start the same way. I wonder if an editor suggested the start to various authors. The start has a batch of POWs in a long running space war dropped off on a habitable world and being left to survive. In the book I do not know the name or author of, the people are alone and must learn to survive. (If anyone knows the book, please tell me.)

In this story, there is already a large population of former POWs, a few maintaining military ways and most turned civilian. The new batch contains a very high ranking officer who uses both groups to plan and execute an escape, incidentally saving them all in the process.

It is not a great novel, and I did speed through some long paragraph descriptive bits, but it is good enough to read more than once.

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17
May 25, 2021 review by John Burt
The Kacy Chronicles (boxed Kindle set)
by A.L. Knorr

2021 grade B-

Book 3 of 4 = Combatant

As you might guess from the title, this book has the battles, and the protagonist becomes a warrior. It also starts the dirty politics and the "deals with the devil." Although it is very well written I don't care for politics or deals, and I find battles to be the boring action equivalent of a bus ride. The book starts with the dad's rescue, pretty tense. Unfortunately the story immediately moves into a battle with no break for comic relief or even down time. Since it was the same type of battle portrayed in the previous books, I skimmed through it. The later battles were more of the same and I massively speed read through those skipping large portions. The details between the fights were good, despite the politics and deals. I'll wait a while before reading book 4.

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16

May 25, 2021 review by John Burt
The Kacy Chronicles (boxed Kindle set)
by A.L. Knorr

2021 grade B

Book 2 of 4 = Ascendant

Book 2 is a good strong sequel. There is adequate expansion of the world building and the character development. As with other books from the publisher, a missing mom is one of the themes. She is found in this one, but that might not be a good thing. And the set up for more problems is the protagonist's dad is now in danger. Again the end is a soft cliff hanger. I just kept on reading into book 3.

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15

May 14, 2021 review by John Burt
King David's Spaceship aka Spaceship For The King
by Jerry Pournelle

1982 grade B+

2021 grade A-

This is actually a grade A novel. It is just the setting (a primitive planet and a feudal steam era planet), and the warfare content in the middle that brings it down to B level. The story starts and ends on the steam era planet whose people hitch a round trip ride with the Earth space empire to the primitive planet. There they fight a war to protect an ancient library which has knowledge they need. The problem is wars of that era were very messy, with thousands dead. It is extremely well written and not graphic, and it has excellent characters, character development, and story telling. I loved the sailing sequences. It is worth reading at least once, more if you like this kind of content and story.

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14

May 4, 2021 review by John Burt
The Kacy Chronicles (boxed Kindle set)
by A.L. Knorr

2021 grade B+

Book 1 of 4 = Descendant

Another 99 cent Kindle package deal. This fantasy series is written and published with the same group of people used in

The Witch Next Door series, which is how I found it. Descendant was quite enjoyable with diverse characters driving the story. The characters were intelligent and stayed in character most of the time except for some illogical actions and bickering in the first quarter. The universe basically already exists in fantasy so all the author has to do is add their own twist. They are good twists and I enjoyed the book but one still feels a little cheated when the alternate universe turns out to be regular magical harpies, dragons, elves, etc. The end is a soft cliff hanger, in case that bothers you, but the rest of the stories are in the collection. I will see how book 2 goes in a while.

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13

Apr 28, 2021 review by John Burt
The World Menders
by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

1992 grade B
2021 grade B+ (3 reads total)

Cultural Survey book 2

This is the sequel to The Still, Small Voice of Trumpets. The rule bound and moribund Interplanetary Relations Bureau learned its lesson from the Trumpets incident and is now adding a Cultural Survey agent to all teams. In this case a new graduate has to figure out why the rulers of the world treat the workers so badly and why the workers will not revolt. Again the violence is just short of graphic and it is still a pretty adult read.

The story is not as well done as the first novel and it took me quite a while to finish it. I think there is a bit more detail than the first book making it less exciting. In any case, it definitely is worth reading. I did guess some but not all of the ending clues long before the end was revealed in the book. It was fun to find out I was right.

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12

Apr 22, 2021 review by John Burt
The Still, Small Voice of Trumpets
by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

1991, 2021 grade A+ (3 reads total)

Cultural Survey book 1

Fast reading 60s era adult social SciFi. It would probably be rated R because of violence but it is appropriate to the story. "Close your eyes" and it is not graphic. I finished the first third in about 75min and the whole book in about 4 hours. The Trumpets title telegraphs the solution to the problem at hand. I don't know if that is a good or bad thing. But, although they are critical to the story, they are also incidental.

The protagonist is a cultural survey officer who is sort of a fish out of water sent to a planet to help convert the dictatorship to a democracy. The organization he is working for has no "culture" at all, and he does not understand the native people. But he likes their arts! He has a lot to learn and a difficult problem to solve. On the surface level the book is written from, it is simple, but it is actually quite complex.

Very Recommended. I need to read this more often.

(The cover on my copy has a space station(?) of all things. It has nothing to do with the story!)

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11

Apr 20, 2021 review by John Burt
The Rolling Stones

by Robert A Heinlein

1976, 1992, 2011, 2021 grade B+

Series book 2

Chronology: I read this book again shortly after reading Moon Is A Harsh Mistress to confirm or refute what I had read of the relation between the two. In both books it is the Stone family, Hazel is in both books, and they live at Luna colony on the Moon. However, Hazel (assuming it is the same character - the personality is the same) is a youngster in Mistress and is a grandmother in Rolling. This book also mentions they are from the Luna Free State which only exists after the revolution in Mistress. I estimate this book is roughly 80 years after the revolution.

Style: This is a 50s era book when SciFi was mostly still selling adventures to teens. But Heinlein was trying to make SciFi more adult, resulting in a sort of blend. The two protagonists are in their late teens. However, they do not monopolize the story and it is reasonably adult. Other characters range from a little kid to parents, grandparents, and quite old codgers living in space - all enjoyable.

Story: It is basically a family oriented hard SciFi space adventure. I enjoyed it just as much as before but it lacks the perfection of Moon is a Harsh Mistress. There is no sex, or graphic violence, although there is danger at times.

Recommended.

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10

Apr 14, 2021 review by John Burt
Witch Way To Go (Witch Next Door book 2)
by Judith Berens

2021 grade C-

There are 8 books in this fantasy series. I bought the Kindle omnibus version of all eight for 99 cents. Can't really lose at that price. Book one was grade B+ even if not very memorable. The author did an excellent job reminding me of what happened in book one though. Basically the series is a search for the witch's missing mom. At the end of book one they found a clue to go to Mexico next.

This book is basically two people on an RV road trip from Canada to Mexico with a few major and minor incidents along the way. The first major incident was another witch conclave at a lake. I found that incredibly dull and started speed reading massively. The last major incident was at the conclusion and I didn't even like it.

A tip often given to authors is, "No one is interested in the bus ride." The sad thing is the total contribution to the long story arc is a single clue to go to Guatemala next. The protagonists drove off...

I intend to skip to books 7 and 8 where mom is found and the villains are thwarted. I wonder what countries they will be in.

=====

9

Apr 11, 2021 review by John Burt
The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress (1966-68)
by Robert A. Heinlein

1967, 1976, 1991, 2011, 2021 grade A+

An earlier novel "The Rolling Stones" takes place about 80 years later and uses some of the same characters. But both are free standing and it is totally unnecessary to read them in any particular order.

In my opinion this is not only Heinlein's best novel but is my favorite novel period. So I am biased. The story is about

humans shipped to the moon who are stuck there because of the physiological changes low gravity causes. They work under the the iron fist of an earth governing body, and have the inevitable and necessary revolution. Yes it is patterned a bit around the English colonies of the mid 1700s, especially the USA and Australia.

The first half of the book is the best character driven world building I can think of. The culture developed by the group of ex-convicts shipped to the moon and their later children is amazing. It does include many of the author's strange ways of life in case that bothers you. Very, very little is explicit. The prose is written in their abbreviated English but is easy to get the hang of and read despite the missing words. The discussions of what it would take to have a revolution are detailed and interesting. I never got bored in this section. It was possible to stop reading but stopping places had to be carefully picked.

The next third is mostly the difficult journey to earth of two moon representatives to obtain recognition as an independent country. This section is a little tedious and I admit to skimming thru small sections of it. But this was my fifth time reading it.

Recognition was refused so the last sixth is the war. I read this non-stop in one 2.5 hour section. A warning though, not all the protagonists survive.

Recommended!!

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8
Apr 4, 2021 review by John Burt
A Quiet Life In The Country
(Lady Hardcastle book 1)
by T E Kinsey

2021 grade B/B+

One odd thing about this book is it is not told from Lady Hardcastle's point of view. It is told from her servant's POV except the servant (Armstrong) is so much more than a servant. Anyway Kinsey is one of the best writers I have read for telling a story via very interesting character driven dialog and narrative. And all the characters are so great and clearly envisioned. Just be sure to pay attention to who is who right from the beginning. I tended to forget, especially the rich people, because the book is a little slow at the start despite the early murder.

The scene is post war period rural UK. The "quiet life" turns out to be quiet and genteel but abnormal with two murders and a jewel theft to solve. Hardcastle, Armstrong, and a police detective do the solving by interviews and scene exploration in a reasonably procedural manner. In fact the book would make a good primer for anyone wanting to write this kind of mystery. Even with that I did not solve any of them ahead of time - which I like.

Recommended for fans of this kind of story.

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7
Mar 28, 2021 review by John Burt
The Tar-Aiym Krang
by Alan Dean Foster

1975 grade ?
1988 grade B+
2003 grade A-
2018 grade A
2021 grade A

Series book F2 (My series numbers are based on Flinx's age. He is late 16 in this book.)

Purchased new in 1975, third printing. Written in 1972, this is Foster's first full novel. The prequel For Love Of Mother Not

was written ten years later. Krang is a better story, but Mother is better written. Foster's writing skill went from very good to excellent in that time.

There is a lot of world building in this book and the first dozen or so pages are pretty much solid description. It is not boring, as many are, but it is a little tedious. The entertainment picks up fast when the protagonists, Flinx and his Alaspinian minidragon Pip, meet the remainder of the protagonists and the space faring adventure starts - the search for the Krang, weapon or musical instrument(?).

The last time I read the book I marked chapter 5 and a later sub-chapter to skip which I did. Other flashbacks and antagonists POVs are short and interesting.

This is a highly Recommended book.

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6

Mar 19, 2021 review by John Burt
For Love Of Mother Not
by Alan Dean Foster

1988 grade B+
2003 grade A
2021 grade B+

Series book F1 (My series numbers are based on Flinx's age. He is about 8 & 16 in this book.)

I have six novels in the series. This book is actually a prequel to Foster's first full novel "The Tar-Aiym Krang" which was also the first in the Flinx and Pip series. Flinx is human. Pip is his "snake," a poison-acid spitting Alaspinian minidragon. I like to read them in fictional chronological order which I determined from Flinx's age. This is my fourth reading of this novel.

The story is basically a sort of origin story. It is told mostly from Flinx's and his friends point of view. Those are all highly varied, new content, grade A material. The other occasional POV is from the antagonists. Those parts tend to lack fresh content and end up rather dull and repetitive. I ended up speed reading the antagonists.

The world building and character development are excellent. The rich believable environment is fully described in fast easy reading prose. Characters are easy to see and feel without any waste of words. Foster is one of the Deans of SciFi that I turn to when I want something really good to read.

This is a highly Recommended book.

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5

Mar 10, 2021 review by John Burt
A Match Made In Spell
by Regina Welling & Erin Lynn

2021 grade Z

For some reason this magic based fantasy never held my interest. I tried it several times over several days. I think it is because the protagonists were too self deprecating, the rest of the characters were too mean (a few could be just normal), the content repeated the sad past over and over, and the paragraphs were pretty much all the same slightly too long length (1/5 of a printed page.) Oh well, I gave up 15% of the way through.

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4

Mar 6, 2021 review by John Burt
Marauders of Sazile (coming soon)
by Romana Drew

2021 grade A

Wow - I have not read a book this fast and good in a long time. It was hard to put down even though I read the first draft as it was published on the author's website and Facebook page <<https://www.facebook.com/romana.drew>>. When I got to the conclusion, I did not stop until it was over. It is pure SciFi, with fantastic world building and great emotional character development.

The story opens on one young woman selected by aliens from applicants on earth to travel with them in space. She ends up aboard various space ships and on several planets trying to stop a war. It ranges from sadness to anger to laughter and from everyday life, to life threatening battles. It is told in first person as she records events in her journal. Most of the time it reads much better than a journal though. The sentences are fairly short and easy to read. The strong emotional content it reminds me of Anne McCaffrey, the hard SciFi reminds me a bit of early Robert Heinlein, and the variety of aliens reminds me of Alan Dean Foster.

I know the author and was given a final draft copy to proof. I will let you know when it is published.

Very Recommended

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3
Mermaid Fins, Winds & Rolling Pins
by Erin Johnson

2021 grade B-

This fantasy cozy mystery is the third book in the series. Sadly it did not work as well as the first two. The protagonists were pretty fully developed in books one and two, so only the antagonists and bystanders were really developed in this book. I did not like any of them. The undersea mermaid world building was OK but did not fully work for me. I certainly did not care for the royal court or the dance club. A lot of the world I seem to have read about or seen before. So with the lack of world or characters I liked, it came down to writing skill. Fortunately, Erin Johnson's skill is very high and I finished with little difficulty.

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2
The Deadly Mystery of the Missing Diamonds (A Dizzy Heights Mystery #1)
by T.E. Kinsey

2021 Grade B+

I "bought" this period mystery from Amazon Kindle when it was available for free and was pleasantly surprised. It is rather enjoyable. The writing style reminds me a bit of Heinlein's middle years, only better. It never bogged down, like Heinlein's, making it easy to keep reading.

It takes place in the mid 1920s. But that is just the place and time the characters live. There was no preaching about the inequalities of the era.

The actual story progresses slowly and is basically secondary. But the characters are excellent, interesting, and have great interactions. It is never confusing about who is who. Most of the story is told in very enjoyable dialog. Some areas have rather long paragraphs but I never felt the need to speed read. The only time I sped up or even skipped an area was the letters between some of the chapters. They were a little dull. And I wish Blanch had not died. (BTW, I figured out how she died before the character's did. It seemed rather obvious.)

One of the great things about a free book is the reader may like the material and pay for others. I might not read another Dizzy Heights but I am definitely going to buy one of the earlier Lady Hardcastle books.

Recommended.

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1

The Pursuit of the Pankera: A Parallel Novel About Parallel Universes
by Robert A. Heinlein,
David Weber (Introduction)

2021 Grade B+

Another of Heinlein's oddities, this novel is actually quite good but rather wordy. It was easy to put down, which is not a good sign. Each chapter is told from a different character's first person POV. I tended to forget who was "I." But it was well written first person and reminded the reader regularly who was who.

The story is in five parts. Each part is separated by some kind of dimensional travel and exploration.

Part one, earth in the future, starts with a literal bang in a way that only Heinlein can write. I do find the wealthy characters with their survivalist mansion in the mountains a bit odd but it is fun and enjoyable. The story continues until the two new families are forced to leave because of the Pankera invasion, again with a bang. It is grade A.

Parts two, three, and four visit fictional worlds created by earlier authors. At this point the material is much too long winded and feels like the didactic lascivious Heinlein of his middle era. The stories do proceed properly from a start to end and are enjoyable but there is just too much material that does not move the story along. These are grade B.

The fifth part is on an alternate and safe "earth." Here the new families "grow up" until they start the war on the Pankera. The war is not actually written but is set up until the prescient lead character knows they will win. It stops there. This part is much more cohesive and is grade B+

Pursuit of Pankera was an unpublished novel. Speculation is that copyright approval for the other authors universes or characters prevented publication. The first third of the book (part one) is apparently exactly the same as the later novel Number of the Beast. Pursuit... is now available for a reasonable price in the Kindle version.

The book does include the Lazarus Long universe but as an off camera stint where they are all rejuvenated.

There are many, many other reviews of the book if you want details.

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(* The squirrel image is from the internet and was not credited. I do not own it and do not know photographer. No profit is being made from this website.)