



Active Book Reviews. Started February 2021. SciFiOne.net

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 Thrax race with the human race and the prejudices they had to overcome.

It is told mostly from the Thrax 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 Thrax 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.)

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 grammerly. 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.

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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 on 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 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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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 is 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 it's 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.

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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 is 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.