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Lois McMaster Bujold

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The familiar old SF "planet of women" chestnut is reversed in the planet of Athos — an all-male planet made possible by the invention of the uterine replicator. Ethan, drawn out of his beloved Athos by a quest, finds himself an alien in more mainstream human society, and cannot help but find women disturbing aliens as well, especially the ultra-competent, ultra-beautiful Elli.

Ethan of Athos is Lois McMaster Bujold's third novel. It departs from the concerns of the Vorkosigan family to explore the ramifications of advanced biotechnology, turning many a cliché on its head along the way.

Ethan of Athos Details

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From Reader Review Ethan of Athos for online ebook

Maria Dimitrova says

Buddy read with Choko and Evgeny.

At first look this book is a lot different from the rest of the Vorkosigan Saga because it misses a Vorkosigan. Neither Miles nor any of his extended family shows up in this volume. But that doesn't make it any less entertaining! And if you look closely you will see that EoA follows the general theme of the series - a modern day ideology taken to the extremes.

One of the most interesting and useful inventions in this universe is the uterine replicator. This wonderful piece of technology has changed the way humanity views procreation. It's made possible for couples of all varieties to have biological children, it's safer for the mother and child and permits genetic clean up thus eliminating some of the most common genetic disorders. And in this case it has given a bunch of extreme misogynists a chance to create their perfect world free of women. As my friend Choko pointed out in her review this was most likely done by men who have very poor control over themselves but would never admit it so they blame the women. Back when I first read this book, I thought that this must be a paradise for gay men. Fast forward a few years to the present, when I have actually met gay people and they are no longer an abstract construct based on what the media shows and I know that they would be horrified. You see, this society isn't natural. Not because there are a lot of homosexual couples but because there's no chance for anything else. It doesn't matter if you are gay or not, if you want to have any sexual relationship it has to be with another man. They don't even know what a woman looks like. But in their eyes a woman is the epitome of all things evil. To them the idea that woman equals the Devil is so ingrained that at a certain moment in the beginning of the book (view spoiler) The Athosans aren't inherently evil, in fact they're pretty decent people who love their world and their sons. They're just so brainwashed that anything that is outside of their worldview is incomprehensible. That kind of total close mindedness is terrifying. As a general rule a human being is capable of understanding another's point of view even if they don't agree with it. The Athosans have managed to suppress that ability to the degree that not even their leaders are capable of it any more. If they weren't so well isolated by sheer distance this would have led to disaster after disaster.

But suppressed doesn't mean eliminated, as we see after the MC Ethan is thrust into the galactics society when he has to go and purchase ovarian cultures for his homeworld. The cultural shock is like a sledgehammer to his head but despite everything he manages in this crazy (by his standards) society. It's the resilience of human nature that lets him survive in this world. Disguised as an adventure (Ms. Bujold is great at this!) we see how that suppressed ability resurface, how he slowly but inexorably starts to see that the world isn't black and white and that his religion has gotten a lot of things wrong. It's a wonderful journey and in the end we see an Ethan who is so changed that he is almost unrecognisable from the one who left Athos in the beginning.

This story has two connections with Miles' world apart from being set in the same universe. One is obvious - Elli Quinn, the mercenary we met in *The Warrior's Apprentice* - and Terrence Cee. The latter is a less obvious connection that ties in with the novel *Cetaganda*. It's actually subtle enough that I missed it the first time I read the series. In my defence at the time I didn't read the books in the chronological order.

Terrence Cee is an interesting and conflicting character. I sympathize and pity him but at the same time can't help but loath him a little for what he tried to do. I understand why he did it but it still strikes me as wrong and immoral. And very, very dangerous with consequences no one can foresee.

This novel is sort of introduction to one of the main characters for the next few books. Sure we've met Elli

before but we didn't have the chance to get to know her. EoA establishes a few things about her. 1) She's recovered from the plasma torch injuries and has been given an extremely beautiful face that makes men drool, 2) she's really smart and devious and 3) she has a major crush on Miles and one of the worst cases of hero worship :D She's shown as capable and funny to be around character and I can't help but admire her. In other words she is the perfect counterpart for Admiral Neismith ;) So for those of you who are tempted to skip this book because Miles isn't around - don't! You'll be missing on some major awesomeness and added depth to the Vorkosiverse.

Lisa says

If you had told me two days ago that I would enjoy reading a book that departed from the main characters of the series and instead had a misogynist male protagonist from a misogynistic planet that follows a worldwide explicitly misogyny-based religion, and that furthermore, I would find said protagonist charming, sweet, well-intentioned and moreover, ETHICAL, I would have laughed in your face.

And I would have been wrong.

I failed to take into account Lois McMaster Bujold. Who is maybe a sorceress of some kind. The evidence suggests it. Feminine wiles!

So yeah, beyond all expectation this book is amazing and hilarious and very fast-paced, and above all, human.

Kaje Harper says

I read this when it first came out in 1986 (and several times since). Fantasy and SF were, at the time, one of the few places you could find gay main characters who were content, unapologetic, and sometimes in the story for reasons other than being gay. This book deals with Ethan, a physician raised on a planet originally settled by some misogynistic gay men, who, in a future where babies could be selected for sex and gestated in uterine replicators, were spared the necessity of having women around at all. Over generations, the planet developed its own culture where gay couples, or threesomes, or other family arrangements, and their sons were the norm and women were fabled and slightly threatening creatures in the galaxy outside.

But, for all their medical advances, donated human female ovaries were the other half of the baby-production system, and when they began to become senescent, it was necessary for someone to get more. In a galaxy where anything can be obtained for a price, women who sell an ovary are not unknown, and an order was placed. But when it is found to have been sabotaged, someone has to go brave the offplanet world to investigate. And Ethan is nominated by his superiors.

On his arrival in an unfamiliar, mainly het society on a space station, Ethan, who is a sweet, slightly naive, but smart guy, falls into unexpected intrigue. He meets Elli Quinn, the gorgeous and hyper-competent mercenary from Bujold's Vorkosigan series, (which is my all-time favorite character-driven SF - love, love those books.) She rearranges his perceptions of women, while adding her own skills to the mix. The resulting adventure is a bit campy, funny, with a heart of sweetness that is Ethan himself, and an unexpected M/M romance element.

Evgeny says

A buddy read with Choko and Maria.

A group of guys from Miles Vorkosigan universe decided it was a good idea to create a man-only planet. The technology at the moment was good enough for such project and thus Athos was born. The biggest and the most obvious problem was procreation. The locals had to get some fresh female eggs from time to time, but it was not a problem and the men lived in practically complete isolation without seeing a single woman all their lives and thinking it was the way it should be.

However a huge interplanetary crisis was coming and the governing committee of the planet "volunteered" a guy named Ethan to go outside for help. The poor guy had bad luck all around: the very first person he met outside of his planet happened to be a dreaded *woman*. As soon as his shock passed Ethan ended up right in the middle of intergalactic conspiracy. Needless to say his life became very cheap as a result.

I need to get the following off my chest right away: I think this is the weakest book of the series so far; let me count the reasons. I consider Miles, Cordelia, and Ivan to be the best characters of the series - in that order. Well, none of them are here. On a relative note I did not feel any of the characters presented had any depth.

The main villain looked outright wimpy and non-threatening compared to some people Miles encountered. The complete inability of local security forces to keep him isolated became a bad joke by the end of the book. This in my opinion was his only strength.

The novel tried hard to show Ethan's culture shock; this shock can carry the plot only so far. Once again by the end this became old.

On the positive side I learned that a lot of apparently delicious dishes (some of them sounded like outright delicacy) can be cooked from newts. This made me glad I was not living in that world.

The plot is fast-moving and one familiar face appear (actually disregard this: no familiar faces appear; read *The Warrior's Apprentice* to learn the reason for the paradox). Lois McMaster Bujold is a skillful writer to make even her minor efforts worth reading; 3 stars.

Vicky N. says

Ethan of Athos is a non-Vorkosigan book that is severely lacking with the absence of Miles Naismith, but tried to mimic his spirit with the audacious Ellie Quinn.

So the idea behind this book is that a group of people took an uterine replicator, a contraption simulates an uterus, to create an all men planet and make them believe women are evil and that they have entrapped men from all over the universe so they must never leave the planet to not contaminate themselves with women.

I really liked Athos and the idea behind it, it was really interesting to see how they fended for themselves without a feminine influence. I wasn't entirely sold in Ethan as a main character. He was too passive most of the book, there were very few and far between moments where he shined.

Elli, on the other hand, is a great character, especially when you realize she is only pretending to be this bold, adventurous mercenary because she keeps picturing Admiral Naismith and what he would do.

I also loved how it all turned out, I was definitely not expecting Terrence Cee.

It was entertaining. More thriller aspect, but still really good.

But despite its great story, something was missing. And we all know who that is.

Rachel Hartman says

It's actually been years since I read this, but I was reminded of it today by one of Sean's status updates for Angelfall, the one where he laments that the MC and the angel are going to start romancing each other. I sympathized (though I haven't read Angelfall), and that got me wondering whether the romancing is inevitable or necessary to make a good book.

Skip ahead to the answer: it's not. Here's proof.

(Bear in mind that the following is from memory, and forgive me if I get details wrong. I think I'm remembering correctly, however, based on the reviews I've looked at.)(Also: I suspect there are spoilers, even though most of the book is kind of a blur to me. The important stuff is not.)

Ethan is from Athos, a planet populated entirely by men, and he has never seen women before. He has a male partner, I recall, whom he loves, and there is some artificial mechanism for reproduction. The book also has a plot, which I don't remember at all except to say it was serviceable and it involves Ethan having to join forces with a beautiful woman.

One of the reasons I don't recall the plot is that I spent the entire book waiting for the other shoe to drop, as it were. Waiting for this woman to turn Ethan "straight", or at least tempt him to experiment with it, even if he rejects it later. He's only culturally gay, after all. Surely the possibility is there.

Doesn't happen.

And it feels... great. I can't even tell you. They get through all the adventures and misadventures (was there smuggling involved? Something like that?), and then Ethan goes home to his partner, and you just want to give a very loud *HA!* because it is so unexpected and so rare and Bujold has played your expectations like a violin.

This is why she is the (Mc)Master, friends, and don't you forget it. Do you like your SF with a healthy dollop of intellect and social commentary? Sure you do. This is the breakfast of champions.

So yeah, Sean, I'd also kind of like to see the angel NOT fall in love with someone, just once.

Clouds says

For fans of the Vorkosigan Saga, this represents an interesting break from the norm. There are a couple of books in the series focused on Miles' mother, Cordelia (*Shards of Honour & Barrayar*), the bulk (10+?) are focused on Miles Vorkosigan himself, (although they often feature many other POVs) - and there's one set way earlier in the universe's timeline that doesn't feature any members of the Vorkosigan family at all.

And then there's this one...

Ethan of Athos is set during Miles' Admiral Naismith era, but does not feature him. It features Elli Quin, one of Naismith's top sidekicks, but even she is only a supporting character - this story is about the eponymous Ethan, a character who does not crop up in any other story in the series, as far as I can recall - so it definitely breaks the mould.

EoA has the lowest average Goodreads ratings for any book in the series, which is why it has remained unread by me for so long... looks like I'll have to read some other reviews now, to see what issues other readers took with it, because I really enjoyed it - a very solid 4 star!

Miles and Cordelia are both incredibly competent, 'natural' heroes. They square up to challenges and overcome them. Ethan on the other hand is a reluctant hero, an innocent sent out into the big bad universe on a medical mission of mercy to save his planet. He gets sucked into the tangled world of espionage and lurches from one disaster to another. Sure, Quin is there to save his ass and drag him over the line - but for a Doc from the sticks, Ethan does his best to fight back!

I'm guessing a lot of readers took exception to Ethan's home planet - Athos - the all male world, where fathers grow their sons in tanks. Personally, I thought it was well done - the idea that the planet will always be an economic backwater because it's fighting the uphill cost of 100% artificial reproduction is a nice spin, and as always Bujold handles them personal relationships with a gentle and deft touch (for a sci-fi writer, she's exceptionally good at 'likeable' characters).

As it stands outside of the main Saga, this is very much a 'bonus' book - but I thought it was a cracking read and the pages flew by. Without Miles it lacks that element of insane/gleeful forward momentum that makes the best Vorkosigan books go *whoosh!* but *Ethan of Athos* comfortably stands it's own.

I originally finished this book and began the review on Christmas Eve, and had to cut it off unfinished because I had Santa business to attend to! I've only just circled back to finish it...

After this I read: Behemoth

Bradley says

It reads as a backwater boy gets thrown into intergalactic espionage, but I particularly liked the setup for a planet of nothing but men eventually becoming the galaxy's largest repository of something that would spoil your reading of the book if you learned about it before-hand.

As sci-fi as social commentary, it wasn't very deep, but it did have significance for the eighties.

Overall, the novel was intended and succeeded at being a light adventure, but I'm slightly shallow in what I want from Ms. Bujold. I wanted more Miles and he was just referred to several times only. That's really quite okay, though, because our heroine was quite a handful.

mark monday says

"How do you do," Ethan began politely. "I represent the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization of the Planet Athos. If I may, I'd like to tell you about the pioneering opportunities for settlement still available there--"

The sudden dead silence of his audience was interrupted by a large worker in green coveralls.

"Athos? The Planet of the Fags? You on the level?"

was Bujold on the level when she wrote this? sad to say, this book is sort of a mess. although it does have the genial tone, fast pace, (semi-)amusing banter, bursts of action, and (attempted) emotional depth of other Vorkosigan Saga novels... it really doesn't work. it feels half-baked and, even worse, just rather silly and easily dismissed. ah well. can't win 'em all, Bujold.

so the planet Athos was founded by some fanatical religious dudes who thought women were the root of all evil. there are certainly plenty of equivalents in our world's history - and hey, right here in the modern world too! - and so that basic idea could have been an, ahem, fertile concept. but it charges right to the brink of HUH? WHAT? when we learn that millennia later, Athos has remained a planet of men only, men who fear women as evil's spawn and who procreate by importing ovaries and doing various reproductive science-y type things that I barely understood or cared about. all in all, Athos is a peaceful and pleasant planet full of what appears to be a bunch of sweet simpletons. but something goes wrong with the latest shipment of female parts and so the shy but apparently attractive Dr. Ethan Urquhart must brave the big scary galaxy full of women to track down a new shipment. while out and about, Ethan finds himself caught right in the middle of nefarious activities involving the lovely mercenary Ellie Quinn, space station administrators, humorless military types, a telepath on the run, and - egads! - some threatening flirtation from various women.

basic questions about sexuality remain unanswered or irritatingly ambiguous. on a planet of men, what happens to the heterosexuals? although I imagine a world of men only (ugh) may perhaps be appealing to some gay gents, I would think that basic sexuality would make this an unendurable prospect for the heteros stuck there. like a gay man forced to live in a lesbian sorority for the rest of his life. is Bujold saying sexuality is based on nurture, not nature? sorta sounds like it, because there is a whole planet of men who seem perfectly fine without the fairer sex. Athos is such a happy place... has the heterosexuality just been nurtured out of 9 out of 10 men? how in the world are they happy without any women whatsoever?

Athos is only the background, as most of the novel takes place on Kline Station. unfortunately, squarely in the foreground is Dr. Ethan. he is surely one of the most vapid, uninteresting, passive, whiny, basically useless "heroes" I've had to deal with in a sci-fi actioneer. hey, I just made that word up! "actioneer", I like the ring of that. anyway, I really missed this series' usual protagonist Miles. Ethan was an exceedingly poor substitute.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4* of five

The Publisher Says: The familiar old SF "planet of women" chestnut is reversed in the planet of Athos — an all-male planet made possible by the invention of the uterine replicator. Ethan, drawn out of his beloved

Athos by a quest, finds himself an alien in more mainstream human society, and cannot help but find women disturbing aliens as well, especially the ultra-competent, ultra-beautiful Elli.

Ethan of Athos is Lois McMaster Bujold's third novel. It departs from the concerns of the Vorkosigan family to explore the ramifications of advanced biotechnology, turning many a cliché on its head along the way.

My Review: Athos is a terraformed planet settled about 200 years before this book takes place by a rigidly religious sect of men who refused to have any females on their planet, as they'd only cause trouble and lead men astray. To replace and grow the population, they do the job of birth the hard way, using uterine replicators to grow and birth their sons. Only sons, of course, and all bred from the ovarian cultures brought by the Founders to Athos. Which are, unsurprisingly, wearing out after 200 years. After some bad experiences with Galactic mail order brides/cultures, the Population Council decides to send an Ambassador out among Them, the scary galactics, to get new ovarian cultures.

Ethan CJB-8 Urquhart, Ambassador-at-Large of Athos, is in a pickle. He's never been off his home world before, and here he is on Kline Station (a space station within a reasonable sub-light boost of several lucrative trading routes) trying to navigate a Universe where The Sink of Sin (that's girls to thee and me), in the person of Commander Elli Quinn, Kline Station native and Free Dendarii mercenary, appears to be trying to get him killed by Cetagandan crazies (Colonel Luyst Millisor and company) so the Cetagandans can retrieve something they want and Ethan has.

But he doesn't know what it is.

It's the process of finding out what it is that the Cetagandans want, the Dendarii need, and the Athosians have that powers this retelling of *North by Northwest* in space. Ethan must, for the first time in his thirty-plus years, cope with the presence of women in his personal world...an alien species to him...while learning about how the rough-and-tumble of the Galaxy's business is accomplished, deal with the end of his partnership with Janos back on Athos, find himself falling in love with the most alien possible alien man, and return to Athos with what sent him out into the Galaxy in the first place: More ovarian cultures for the Athosian Reproduction Centers. Then he can go home and return to his first love. Populating his beloved home world with new life and new possibilities.

How he accomplishes these things is, well, it's fraught with danger, it's quite surprisingly open-minded of Ethan, and it's just not what this famous mil-SF series is famous for.

I first read this in 1986. I was married, I had stepsons in the house, I was sure that my relationship with their mother was solid (oh boy was *I* ever wrong!), and yet the premise of a planet made up of men and only men had a lot of appeal.

I was led from here to the rest of the Vorkosigan Saga, including: Barrayar, Cetaganda, Komarr, Sergyar, Beta Colony, Jackson's Whole, Lois McMaster Bujold, Ethan Of Athos, Miles Vorkosigan, Ivan Vorpatril, Falling Free, Aral Vorkosigan, Simon Illyan, Vorbarra, Barrayaran Imperial Auditor, and was equally pleased with the next few books I read, all listed here.

I have never been more amused at a line than at "Ethan would cheerfully have decked any Athosian fundamentalist who insisted that {his new love}'s love for his 'wife' could have no honor in it." Bujold clearly wanted to say something stern about the prevailing attitude towards gay men and their relationships. Keep in mind it was 1986...mid-AIDS crisis...and there was a lot, a very great deal, an enormous amount of hatred and fear floating around. Even more so than there is today. It was even braver of Bujold to set this story in the SFnal community's playground, since there was an almost complete silence from that fandom on any subject remotely gay male in nature.

So this book, over the past 25 years, has symbolized the generosity of straight allies of the gay male community. I admire Bujold as much today as I did then for telling this story. I loved the images of Athosian society, as brief as they were, and fell to contemplating what it would take to make such a culture work, what would be the pitfalls of it, and so on. Nowadays, with the manipulation of the human genome that's headed our unprepared society's way, I think the book is even more relevant and should have an even wider audience.

But hey...it's in print and selling 25 years later! Not that many books can make that claim. And for me, that's a really nice thing. A book about a subject that makes a lot of people squirm has that kind of staying power.

There just might be hope for humankind after all.

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Caro M. says

The only thing I missed in this Vorkosigan saga installment was Miles himself. Everything else was quite awesome - adventure, intrigue, characters. And the "science" part was pretty cool too. I like Bujold's writing a lot, it always pulls me in and keeps me till I finish the book. It's rational, not overloaded with detail and often humorous and ironic.

It's a skippable book if you want to read saga only for Miles, but in general it's a good sci-fi story, so you can leave it aside for later.

Worst Cover Gallery

Not that much this time, but still...

- OK, I get the idea, but that looks more like a pee sample. Peeing wasn't involved in this book. Just saying. Not to discourage you or something.

Holly says

While I enjoyed the fact that this book did not take the easy way out in the end, the main issue I have with Bujold is that she never gives any sense of setting. The Miles Vorkosigan books, of which this is an offshoot, are funny and entertaining. Cordelia's Honor is the best of them. But this one was a lot of fun as well.

Ethan is an "obstetrician" on a planet occupied solely by men. They fled the outside world for reasons sort of obscure, and closed off their planet to women. They now replicate using ovarian cells but those cells are depleting. Ethan is sent out into the galaxy to bring back more.

Having never seen a woman in his life, and been taught that they are deviant, sexual creatures, he is naturally terrified of them. This leads to some great comedy when he meets up with a gorgeous female mercenary.

Spoiler

You'd think he would fall in love with her, but hey, he's gay. It was refreshing. He find her attractive in the

end, but it goes no further. That made me happy.

Tracy says

Not my favourite Vorkosigan book, but very fun nonetheless. I like Elli Quinn a lot, and Ethan Urqhart is a terrific character.

Joanka says

After an average volume that was Cetaganda, I fell for Bujold's writing and the world of Vorkosigans again. *Ethan of Athos* is a... strange little story. Strange in a way that it's both very simple and yet when you start to think about it all, it gives material for long discussions. It's both gay and so very heterosexual, it's adventurous and also you could probably skip most of the action parts and it will be still fine. And all that not because the novel is so complex, it's just... strange in this wonderful way that gives lots and lots of joy.

As far as I know this books is a standalone that happens in the world the readers know from other Vorkosigan novels. Ethan, a doctor from a reproduction centre, spent all his life on Athos, a planet inhabited only by men. He never saw a female in his life thanks to the planet's censorship but of course, after a failed shipment of ovarian cultures essential for the community survival, he is chosen to travel to distant planet to personally select and purchase new cultures. On an extremely ecological (rightfully so) station called Kline Station he quickly meets Elli Quinn, who you might remember from *The Warrior's Apprentice*. She is still a member of the Dendarii Mercenaries and has quite complicated feelings towards her Admiral Naismith (which made me both smile and move me, Miles, you precious idiot), a giver of her new face (or rather funds for it). Suddenly mild-mannered Ethan and a force of nature called Elli are thrown into an adventure of conspiracies, assassins, adventures, newts and the station's systems. And believe me, it's fun! But what I liked the most, were (of course) the characters. I liked all of them (the ones that were developed enough) and I liked slow-paced and subtle change of Ethan. It's not in the foreground but his choices in the end tell a lot. (view spoiler).

There is also a romance, a light but very sweet one, neatly written into the adventures. Something I looked for passionately a few years ago when I wanted to read a m/m romance but with some plot not focused on the romance as such. I adored Ethan's love interest from the start and cheered for their happy ending.

There were some things that made me a bit uneasy. The whole planet of Athos, although not shocking in most ways remains a place infiltrated by the authorities, censored, with people kept in the dark about many things. I may understand and respect such a place as a refuge but it's tough when it's presented in this dystopian way. And yet, it's beautiful and Ethan loves it as his home, so I can only hope it will change for the better and (view spoiler) the people will be given a choice in the years to come.

Finally, this book is so unassuming. Yet, I cried a lot in the end. Not because it's sad but it pushed just the right of my buttons. I hope one day we will know exactly what happened later.

Lindsay says

In the universe of Barrayar, the Vorkosigans and all the rest comes a story about a native of a reclusive

planet on a critical mission and experiencing massive culture shock while helping to deal with an espionage mystery.

Lois McMaster Bujold often features cultures and plots based around the social and political consequences of advances in technology. With this one we again come back to the uterine replicator technology and how that can be applied; in this case enabling Athos, a male-only planet where reproduction is achieved via ovarian tissue cultures and uterine replicators for gestation. The titular character is a doctor who has been dispatched on a mission to procure new ovarian tissue cultures after their last consignment of them appears to have been sabotaged or stolen.

This book is largely about Ethan's culture shock on experiencing a society where half of the people are the gender that he's been indoctrinated into thinking as evil and he personally thinks are unnatural. That's on top of the issues around a planet-based person coming into a permanent station-habitat. There's an espionage plot as well where we get to see Elli Quinn from the Dendarii Mercenaries playing a big part and it's all entertaining enough.

Unfortunately a lot of the book hasn't aged terribly well, particularly around the reactions of the normal society towards the obligate homosexuality of the Athosians. Other parts of the book also don't read terribly well to a 2010s audience, including the manifestation of the Athosian ultra-religious society as Ethan's gynophobia as well as even the relatively low-grade sexism we see at Kline Station. There's even a particularly on-the-nose piece about a man running off to Athos because of an overbearing mother.

As a book that wants to talk about social mores, it's very much a product of its time. In its defense though there's a beautiful bit about "women's work":

"Really? I don't see how that can be. Why, the labor costs alone of bringing a child to maturity are astronomical. There must be something wrong with your accounting."

Her eyes screwed up in an expression of sudden ironic insight. "Ah, but on other worlds the labor costs aren't added in. They're counted as free."

That at least, cuts to the heart of a social issue still completely relevant today.

Kathi says

Ethan of Athos by Lois McMaster Bujold is a book in the Miles Vorkosigan series that has neither Miles nor his alter-ego Naismith in it (except as an off-stage character).

Ethan is from an all-male planet who manages population replacement and growth with cell lines from imported ovarian tissue and local sperm donations from approved fathers. The cell lines are getting old and decaying and new stock is needed. But when the order is filled, the specimens sent are useless and, in some cases, are not even human tissue.

So we have a mystery (what happened to the ordered tissue?) and a problem (how do we get more tissue?), and Ethan is sent to take care of the problem and, along the way, meets females for the first time and solves the mystery. We meet Cetagandan military operatives, Elli Quinn (a name from an earlier Miles/Naismith adventure), and Terence Cee (a key to the mystery).

I liked this book a lot and thought it paired well with Cetaganda in the Miles, Mystery & Mayhem omnibus.

Both, at heart, are mysteries and have themes of genetic and sociological engineering.

I think Ethan's inner curiosity contributed mightily to how quickly he lost his naivete. Given that he was raised in such a closed society, he was amazingly open-minded. In acting as an operative for the Dendarii Free Mercenaries, I liked the way Elli Quinn consciously invoked "WWND?" (What Would Naismith Do?)

No Miles, but an excellent book!

Choko says

*** 4.35 ***

A buddy read with Evgeny and Maria, because we love Science Fiction!!!

I love this author, I love this Universe, and I love this world of extremes. Every time I approach the next volume of this series, I experience this trepidation as to what weirdo society are we going to be introduced to this time. The genius of the series lays in the ability of the author to present a system of life which seems extremely outlandish, until you get to the basic premise and you see how everything must have started in a very average world where an idea for "The Greater Good" takes root, be it ideological, religious or purely economic, and goes to the most extreme end of that idea, to where the final product has only a passing resemblance to the original. Often, the very thing it had tried to prevent is a likely side effect.

This is another perfect example. Imagine, a group of religious leaders of a strict church, who believe that fornication and sexual temptation are sins but are having a really hard time controlling themselves around women. The temptation, in this case any woman, becomes equated with the sin. The woman then is of the Devil, but unfortunately She is needed for procreation, so the poor righteous saints have to endure and suffer by engaging in sin over and over, against their will, but they have no choice... :-(((

Well, one day, the sinful scientists on Beta Colony come up with uterine replicators, a way in which, if you have ovum and sperm samples, and with genetics being advanced, by utilizing one of the replicators you can skip the woman all together. This must have been like the greatest gift from G-D to those long suffering dudes. So, armed with the needed biological materials, geneticists, a charter for terraforming a new planet, their religion, and the firm resolution to never suffer a demon woman ever again, the Founding Fathers established the first all male planet on Athos. 200 years into this social experiment, the society has settled down and Dr. Ethan U. is one of the leading geneticists on the planet, happily producing sons for qualified fathers and their Designated Co-Parent. However, all the ovum they had counted on since the establishment of the planet, is degenerating and not viable, so in order to keep up with the population replacement, if not growth, they have to order more from another planet. Since not many people agree with the peculiarities of Athos and the fact that women are not allowed to even be in the vicinity of this planet, they get a shuttle only once a year. The shipment of the priceless for the survival of the planet ovum is delivered, but is wrong!!! There has been a big mistake and the council for Population Growth decides to send poor Ethan to the planet of the shipment's origin, among the sinners and women *the HORROR*!!! He needs to straighten things out and return with more viable genetic material!!!

This is how Ethan found himself not only in a foreign place, full of people who think him a freak, in the middle of a major international conspiracy, people trying to kill him, but worst of all, he met a woman!!! And was kind of shocked that talking to her did not suck his life force and surrender him to the Devil. He just had to give it some time:-)

The woman is Ellie Quinn, the mercenary who Admiral Miles Naismith took to his grandmother on Beta Colony and left her with some money to be able to receive skin grafts for the horrible burns of her body and face after a mission gone bad... The last time we saw her, she was barely alive and in a horrible pain and depression. I was so happy to see her here back in shape, with successful grafts and a brand new face!!! And she was a force to be reckoned with! This is her first spy mission and she doesn't want to disappoint The Admiral, who gave her his blessings and told her she would love it! It is very endearing to see how much she admires Naismith and in his absence tried to think "What Would Naismith Do" in the absurd situations she and Ethan were put in over and over again...

As always in this series, there is a mystery, adventure, difficult choices, and nonstop action from beginning to end. Also as always, there is the core of ethical dilemmas which is the base of the series. We can see some of us making similar decisions for our lives, but we are also shown the double edged sword of our decisions... What can we as humans live with and justify in our minds in order to make it fit the idea of who we are???? Isn't that the infernal question of our reality today too?!?!?!?

I recommend this series to all who love Sci-fi adventure and fantasy. It is written in a dynamic manner without sacrificing quality and emotion. Give this series a chance! After all, what could you lose?

Now I wish you all Happy Reading and may you always find what you need in the pages of a Good book!!!

Rob says

Executive Summary: After a slow start, I thought it finished much stronger. 3.5 stars, rounded up.

Audiobook: Grover Gardner once again does a good job. I don't think he really does voices (I find myself drawing a blank as I write this), but I enjoy listening to him. The volume and inflection is good, which for me is often the most important thing anyways. I plan to continue this series on in audio.

Full Review

This is a pretty short book. It's only about 8 hours in audio. It started a bit rough for me. Ethan isn't a very likeable character, in particular because of his prejudices towards woman. Athos as a society is just so strange to me. My initial thought was this was an inspiration to those Men's Rights idiots, except they want women to be subservient to them, and not to have nothing to do with them at all.

I had to look up the year this book was published. A society where homosexuality in book from 1986 seems pretty progressive. Although the attitudes of other characters in the book towards that seems appropriate to that time, so maybe not all that progressive.

Once Ethan got off Athos and met up with Elli Quinn the book got going a bit more to me. However it took awhile to really get a feel for what was going on, and care all that much about poor Ethan and his quest for new Ovarian samples with which to sustain the population of his planet.

There is mention of Miles Vorkosigan, but sadly he doesn't make an appearance. Ethan is a poor substitute for me. He did grow on me, and grow (albeit very slightly) as a character in this book, but not enough for me to care too much about him or his planet.

Overall I did still enjoy this book, but not nearly as much as The Warrior's Apprentice. I'm hoping to continue on with Falling Free soon, although that looks like it's another book without Miles. That's what I get for insisting on reading them in publication order however.

Jamie Hansen says

Surprisingly entertaining. While I missed Miles and the main characters of previous books, I liked Ethan more than I expected to and especially appreciated getting to know and see Commander Elli Quinn in action. I look forward to her character returning as I am told she will. :)

Jon says

3.5 stars

Miles is completely absent from this Vorkosigan series installment. Elli Quinn returns, with a new face and a new mission. The story is told mostly from the point-of-view of Ethan. Again, the theme swirls around genetics and reproduction, but definitely with a twist. The flip side of the female controlled genetic finesse of Cetaganda proves to be Athos, an all male planet rapidly running out of viable ovary cultures at their Rep Centers. When the batch of new ovaries is sabotaged, Athos sends Ethos to personally select, purchase and escort the replacements.

Even though I missed Miles, Elli and Ethan managed to keep me hopping and flipping pages. Nearly all the action takes place on the Kline space station. Mystery, torture, murder, galactic genetic experiments, political intrigue bordering on genocide - just about everything you've come to expect from Bujold's imagination.

A fun, fast read and a nice addition to the Vorkosigan series.
