



## Children of Time

*Adrian Tchaikovsky*

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## **Children of Time** Adrian Tchaikovsky

A race for survival among the stars... Humanity's last survivors escaped earth's ruins to find a new home. But when they find it, can their desperation overcome its dangers?

### WHO WILL INHERIT THIS NEW EARTH?

The last remnants of the human race left a dying Earth, desperate to find a new home among the stars. Following in the footsteps of their ancestors, they discover the greatest treasure of the past age - a world terraformed and prepared for human life.

But all is not right in this new Eden. In the long years since the planet was abandoned, the work of its architects has borne disastrous fruit. The planet is not waiting for them, pristine and unoccupied. New masters have turned it from a refuge into mankind's worst nightmare.

Now two civilizations are on a collision course, both testing the boundaries of what they will do to survive. As the fate of humanity hangs in the balance, who are the true heirs of this new Earth?

## **Children of Time Details**

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Author : Adrian Tchaikovsky

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## From Reader Review Children of Time for online ebook

### Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

Holy guacamole! This book rocked!

I had a feeling I would like this book but hells bells, I had no idea how much I would love it.

You have Earth that is pretty much going to pot, then goes to pot because of some stuff. Then people wake up a million years later on their ships. Well, okay not a million but still.

So there is space!

There is a new planet that continued to make itself from the start of terra forming many years ago < -- I don't think I spelled that right but we all know what it means. They were working on making the planet livable.

AND . . .

we have freaking . . .

SPIDERS!

and I liked Portia, she was the main spider and they are like no other spiders. Dudes and dudettes, this book is like no other I have read. YOU might have, but I have not.

Loved it, looks nice on my shelf with one of his other books. I'm a happy camper.

Mel ♥

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### Choko says

\*\*\* 4.65 \*\*\*

"... *“You can never know. That is the problem with ignorance. You can never truly know the extent of what you are ignorant about.”* ...

I wanted to read this book only because it was recommended to me by a friend. I never expected to love it so much, despite never having read anything by the author. Boy am I glad I read it!

I was raised on Science Fiction and Fantasy. Every week my family would receive in the mail the newest Sci-Fi publication and we would all fight over who is going to read it first, although we all knew my dad would be first, then my mom, if she was interested, and then would be my turn. My favorite of those were the ones with deep and logical connection to the Science side of the fiction, not so much the ones with the

space battles and soap-operas in space kind of stories. I loved the real plausible what-ifs that came with books taking the known of Physics and Biology and building them up into strange and irregular ways, but still creating worlds and creatures whose existence and creation we could follow in a somewhat logical way, thinking that yeah, given just the right conditions, this could actually happen and what could we, us humans, do about it.

Well, "*Children of Time*" is just this kind of book! The author has done his research into the biology of Arachnids and insects, putting them in a newly terraformed world with virgin ecosystem created to support life deriving from our Earth, mix in a Nano-Virus as a variable which acts as an accelerator for neuro-development and intelligence, and a catalyst for critically important markers of useful growth and useless excess of abilities, thus crafting a positive growth of individuals in a communal culture with always expending intellect and talents. Final result - **Giant Intelligent Spiders!!!!**

*"... "The act of courtship is consummated as a public ritual, where the hopeful males – in their moment of prominence – perform in front of a peer group, or even the whole city, before the female chooses her partner and accepts his package of sperm. She may then kill and eat him, which is thought to be a great honour for the victim, although even Portia suspects that the males do not quite see it that way." ...*

Yep, not a planet for those who have an uncomfortable relationship with our eight-legged web-weaving friends. Also, not exactly what the scientist who created the Nano-Virus intended to begin with. Our human, very intelligent, and very self-centered Dr. Avrana Kern, created the virus in order to push monkeys to their most extreme intellectual growth through generations. Instead, when the virus was unleashed on the planet, the monkeys and most of the rest of the humans were sabotaged by an opponent to the project and all blew up. Dr. Avrana Kern is the only one left, in a small capsule in space, going in and out of freeze-stasis, waiting for her "creations" to contact her from the planet. During this time, life on Earth self-destructs, thousands of years later humans reemerge, and then once again only a small part of them remain, looking for another planet to settle on, frozen on an Arc ship called Gilgamesh. The spider planet looks like their only chance and the books goes through their battles to get to it and try to take it over.

*"... "She has improved the lives of her species in a dozen separate ways, for she has a mind that can see answers to problems others did not even realize were holding them back." ...*

The book timeline measures in thousands of years and it is fascinating to follow the growth of some and the degradation and regression of others. This was done from the points of view of several pivotal characters, of which Portia and all her progeny through the centuries was my favorite. I loved everything about her/them. I loved how important the Classicist Human Holsten and the head engineer of the ship Lain were to the sustaining of the Human population on the Gilgamesh. A person who can sit back and think about communication and how it shapes our relationships with others, be it species, tribes or Peoples. And how vital the knowledge and ability to take care and advance our infrastructure is, when those skills are being overlooked at times of famine as well as at times when our martial or more lofty flights of fancy seem to rule our daily lives. We are reminded of how easy it would be for us to fall into the one or the other category, letting our roots and foundations rot, while our heads are in the clouds...

*"... "If they were of any quality or caliber, then they would ascend by their own virtues. Not if there was no structure that they could possibly climb. Not if all the structure that exists was designed to disenfranchise them. Portia," ...*

This book is not just about evolution. It is about understanding our nature and trying to learn from our mistakes, not just following the innate instinct for destruction, cannibalism, and disseminating everything which is different from us, to the point of mortally wounding ourselves. In our superior Humans First and Only ideology, we slowly but surely erode our environment and eventually the environment will strike back,

one way or another. Let's hope we don't realize this too late...

"... *"Mankind brooks no competitors, She has explained to them – not even its own reflection. "* ...

Now I wish you all Happy Reading and may you always find what you Need in the pages of a good Book!!!

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## Emma says

I have really struggled with this book. Really the only science fiction I tend to like is character driven so I was up against it from the start!

I've always thought that insect and deep sea creatures have much potential as horror/ monster elements in a story. The look of them close up is just as awful as anything fictitious- it's only that, in the case of insects, they're small and in the case of deep- sea creatures, far down and away, that saves us. So I was interested to read about Portia and the development of society, culture, technology, the ideas of god or 'the messenger'. Fascinating to read about colonialism and the subsumption of other cultures and species and its parallels with human evolution.

But I got bored. And the human side of the story, where I would have predicted my deeper interest, had little pace for me. I can see this is a great book and deserves its high ratings, just not from me! I'm very interested to read this author's fantasy series still as I believe this may be more to my liking!

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## Apatt says

*"Children of Time: Winner of the 2016 Arthur C. Clarke Award"*. Most cumbersome book title ever (this is the full title of the edition I bought). Why did the publisher have to tag the award thing on the book's original title? Fortunately, on the bright side, this is my only complaint about this book!

This book takes David Brin's "uplift" concept and really runs with it. In Brin's popular Uplift series, humanity have used technology to boost the intellect of selected species of animals to sentience level. I can't quite remember the reason behind this, presumably to make them more useful and for other, more magnanimous, purposes. Indeed there is a direct tribute to Brin in *Children of Time*, in the form a little spaceship called Brin 2. However, the emphasis of the novel is not about the uplifting itself, but about the accidental sentient species that arise from the project and its subsequent interaction with humanity.

The original idea was to uplift monkeys to sentient levels through an infection of an engineered "nanovirus", and put them on a habitable planet, but someone sabotaged that project and all the monkeys are killed. However, the nanovirus is sent to the intended planet and infects several species of insects instead. Spiders turn out to be the chief beneficiaries of this project as the virus is most effective on them. This starts off one of the two main narrative threads which chronicles the rise of the spider race as the ruler of the planet. The other narrative thread concerns a group of humans fleeing from Earth which is destroyed by a final world war, on an "ark ship" called "Gilgamesh". This massive spaceship is carrying working crew and thousands of people in suspended animation, to be defrosted when a habitable planet is found. Unfortunately the only habitable they manage to find, after hundreds of years and generations of crew have come and gone, is the nice planet now ruled by the spiders.

Wonderful Polish edition cover

It has been a busy month so it took me almost three weeks to finish. Somehow it makes me appreciate the book even more as my constant companion to many places. The narrative is quite interesting from the first chapter and as characters, situations and world building are gradually laid down it becomes increasingly compelling, by the end of the book I was completely riveted. While the humans and spiders plotlines are given about equal time I was much more fascinated by the spiders, the culture, language and technology they develop after receiving their “increased cognitive capacity”. The spider protagonists are also very well developed, and quite admirable. I love sci-fi biotechnology, organic devices, homes and transportations. It is fascinating how the development spiders’ technology takes a different path from the humans, due to lack of metals and electricity. Their tech is based on hyper advanced biochemistry instead. I love how their society is ruled by the female, and the physically weaker and less intelligent males are generally disposable second class citizens. That is until a radical and messianic male spider comes along.

The human side of the story is less fascinating but it never drags down the narrative. Their state of affairs is quite pitiful compared to the spiders. They spend hundreds of years on board “the Gilgamesh”, key figures going in and out of suspended animation as needed. Generations are born on the spaceship and never set foot on a planet. The ark ship becomes a “generation ship” even though it was never designed to be used as one and the living conditions on board become rather cramped as the on board population expands. This being the case their need to settle on the spider’s planet is understandable. Unfortunately the humans believe in the cold logic of a concept called “the prisoner’s choice” which is based on mutual distrust because the cost of betrayal would mean complete annihilation. As the humans and the spiders head for collision that would result in genocide of one side or the other I found myself curiously rooting for the spiders; mainly because the spider characters are generally better developed and they do have the moral high ground of being the *invadees*, not the invaders. Thematically it is mainly a story of racial prejudice and a plea for tolerance, with both sides thinking that there is a necessity to completely wipe out the other side for the survival of the race.

Whatever the outcome *Children of Time* is one of the best space operas I have ever read, with a nice and clear writing style and a straightforward linear structure of the twin plotlines that make the book very accessible. The sci-fi tech is highly imaginative and the science behind it is clearly explained without resorting to infodumping; some very good characterization, thrilling plot developments and a very good ending makes this one of the greats for me. Highly recommended.

#### Notes:

- In spite of the title this book has nothing to do with time travelling.
- In some ways, parts of this book are like *Watership Down* for spiders, and that is high praise! It may also be *Charlotte's Web* for adults? I haven't read that one, but my spider-sense says yes. It also reminds me a little bit of a computer game called *Sim Ant*.
- Tchaikovsky's study of psychology and zoology stand him in good stead here (he is also a keen amateur entomologist). Interestingly his fantasy series *Shadows of the Apt* is also based on insects. TBR'd!

#### Quotes:

*“There had been those back on Earth who claimed the universe cared, and that the survival of humanity was important, destined, meant. They had mostly stayed behind, holding to their corroding faith that some great power would weigh in on their behalf if only things became so very bad.”*

*“The enemy they face is the child of a technology she cannot conceive of, advanced beyond the dreams of her own kind’s greatest scientists, using a technology of metal and fire and lighting, all fit tools for vengeful deities. At her disposal is fragile silk, biochemistry and symbiosis, and the valour of all those who will put their lives at her disposal.”*

*“Life is not perfect, individuals will always be flawed, but empathy – the sheer inability to see those around them as anything other than people too – conquers all, in the end.”*

*“That is the problem with ignorance. You can never truly know the extent of what you are ignorant about.”*

*“I consider CoT to be an outreach program for literate-minded arachnophobics :) There has been a pleasant number of readers who really don't like spiders but (a) have got through the book; and (b) have come out of it willing to give the little guys the benefit of the doubt. Of course now I need to stealth-write a book that has spiders as utterly horrible people-destroying bad guys just to utterly throw my readership...”*

From Adrian Tchaikovsky's Reddit AMA.

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## **Phrynne says**

What a beautiful book. Six hundred totally absorbing pages. One of the best Science Fiction books I have ever read. Not being particularly coherent here but let me say again it is very, very good.

It shows mankind at its worst - I would not have cared if the last human being in the universe had died at the end. I hate spiders but was converted to the sentient kind and I was cheering them on as they grew smarter and smarter.

I could not imagine how it was going to end but Adrian Tchaikovsky is some kind of genius and the last few pages were just brilliant. Naming the ship Voyager was a touch of magic.

Recommend reading for anyone not just sci fi enthusiasts. There is something in this book for everyone.

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## **Robyn says**

Five stars because this puppy had me rooting for arachnids. Five stars for carefully crafted characters, humans and otherwise alike. Five stars because of the incredible, millennia- spanning plot. Five stars because of that ENDING! Not what I expected and so satisfying.

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## **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/06/12/...>

Children of Time was my first novel by this author, and wow, what a way to start my initiation into the Adrian Tchaikovsky fan club! I have never read anything quite like this book before, and I have to say the praise it's gotten has been well deserved. I just loved this.

First of all we have this incredible story, which has everything in place for a space opera of the grandest proportions. Long ago, when Earth was on its last legs and humanity feared it could go no further, scientists were sent out beyond the solar system to find and terraform new planets to ensure the future of our species. One of them, the brilliant but megalomaniacal Dr. Avrana Kern was successful in locating such a world, but just as she was about to implement a nanotech virus to accelerate the development process, sabotage

occurred. Kern's monkeys that were intended for biological uplift were not deployed on the planet because they were all killed in the attack on her ship. Kern herself was forced to be transformed, reduced to an AI mind and a body preserved in stasis. However, her nanovirus, the one intended to speed up evolution in the monkeys, did in fact make it onto the planet, imbedding itself into—wait for it—a species of spiders.

Years and years go by. Earth is no more. Desperate humans take to the stars in generation ships like the *Gilgamesh* to find these terraformed planets their ancestors supposedly prepared for them, but instead of a welcoming home, they find Kern's World and the repercussions of her genetically engineered virus. For generations, the planet's inhabitants have been evolving as well, the uplifted spiders developing their own cultures, civilizations and knowledge. It is their world now, and they don't take kindly to the assumptions of these strange looking humans who think they can just take over and live on their planet.

As a huge life sciences geek, I loved the ideas behind books like *Children of Time* or what some other science fiction fans call "biopunk". The chapters aboard the *Gilgamesh* were compelling with their human drama and fight for survival, but in my opinion, it was the sections about the spiders which were the most fascinating. They were also what made this novel stand out from all the sci-fi I've read so far this year. Tchaikovsky details generations of evolution in the spiders' biology as well as their culture, following compelling characters like the many iterations of Portia as her species develops language, religion, warfare, and other facets of civilization which they pass down to their descendants via a form of genetic memory. As such, they eventually become something akin to spiders but not as we understand them, having been altered by the virus but also by factors specific to their unique physiology. The author deserves extra bonus points too because it takes a real talent to write genuine, relatable and sympathetic non-human characters, and even more when they are effectively overgrown, freaky arachnids. Don't think you can ever bring yourself to root for a giant spider? There's a really good chance this book will change your mind.

I was also impressed by the way Tchaikovsky managed to tell this monumental saga—which takes place over thousands of years—without once being sidetracked or losing the story's main thread. When it dawned on me what the author was trying to do, I didn't think it was going to work, but oh, it does. In alternating sections, he explores the changes happening on Kern's World as well as the various side plots unfolding on the *Gilgamesh*. Most of humanity's last remnants are frozen in time, traveling in the cargo bay of the ark ship, but we do get to meet and stay with several of the key players like Holsten Mason and Isa Lain who survive the centuries by going in and out of stasis. Culture is evolving in its own way too on the *Gilgamesh*, and every time Holsten wakes he is hit with another shock of how perspectives and attitudes on the ship have changed since the last time he emerged. It just goes to show, adaptation isn't something that's happening only on the surface of Kern's World, with both the spider and human storylines mirroring and complementing each other in the coolest way possible.

Basically, you have got to read this book. It's gotten such high ratings for a reason. *Children of Time* is one of the smartest, most remarkable and innovative science fiction novels I've read in years and now I can't wait to read more by Adrian Tchaikovsky.

Audiobook Comments: I loved Mel Hudson's narration. Having a female reader really highlighted the spider chapters, and Hudson's voice and accent exuded the perfect amount of acuity and class to bring characters like Portia to life. I don't think I would have enjoyed myself as much if I had read the novel in print, so needless to say, I highly recommend this audiobook.

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## Philip says

5ish stars.

An unqualified masterpiece. This is some of the smartest, most exciting, and most imaginative fiction I've read in a long time. It's grand, expansive, and both character-driven and plot-driven.

Uplifted spiders. So cool and creative. The evolution of the Portias and their clusters is endlessly compelling. The journey that the humans take over the millennia, if not as thrilling, is dramatic in its buildup to the inevitable convergence of the two groups.

It chronicles the rise and fall of the human population and explores its recurring, natural gravitation towards malignant ambition and self-destruction. While that aspect is disheartening, there's also hope, because the spiders, being non-human, might be able to circumvent those tragedies... It's about nature, pride, communication, fear, change, and determination at all costs. Highly recommended.

Posted in Mr. Philip's Library

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### **Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says**

This was such an interesting read!

If you're looking for a different take on the whole alien thing... try this book.

I never thought I would end up rooting for spiders... but I did!

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### **Mayim de Vries says**

**“We are just an advanced breed of monkeys on a minor planet of a very average star. But we can understand the Universe. That makes us something very special.”**

*Professor Stephen Hawking*

**”What have you done with my monkeys?”**

*Doctor Avrana Kern*

I do not sci-fi that much but when I do, I do it only with books that make me cheer for spiders.

Adrian Tchaikovsky is famous for infusing his books with themes and motives related to his interests. He studied zoology and psychology. He is also interested in natural history, with particular emphasis on the world of insects. These are the roots of the “Children of Time”, a thrilling story about the fall of one civilisation and the birth of another. Together with human civilisation standing on the verge of destruction, we embark upon a fantastic interstellar travel. A tantalising cosmic odyssey, which takes place over the span of millennia, filled with extraordinary adventures, heroes, and dramatic twists.

#### **1. THE IDEA**

*“We are the civilisation of transport, waiting to happen somewhere else.”*

Human civilisation has found itself on the verge of annihilation. The Earth is no longer habitable and so humanity's last quest is a search of a planet suitable for settlement. Hundreds of thousands of years pass. A spaceship with the last surviving people finds a place similar to Earth. It turns out that the living conditions

on the planet are a result of its terraforming many thousands of years ago. It is but a remnant of a wider experiment aimed at creating an intelligent species able to develop at an accelerated pace. The intention was to create a new, better man. However, not everything went as planned, and the “exalted” ones are not monkeys (or other vertebrates, indeed), but an unassuming species known as *portia labiata*. Yup, **here come the sentient spiders.** (Don't make my mistake and check the photos. They are absolutely awful!)

## 2. THE DESIGN

*“Why should we be made thus, to improve and improve, unless it is to aspire.”*

The narration gives us **two perspectives**. The first is the one presents the actions of the inhabitants of the last ship-ark with the human cargo, Gilgamesh (view spoiler), trying to find a new planet to settle on. The second one shows the evolution of the spiders, accelerated by a special nanovirus. Consequently, we have one chapter about the human journey through the universe, and another one about the life of spiders on the green planet. Reading the spider civilisation chapters is like watching a National Geographic or a BBC Earth documentary. And **I would never expect that the adventures of insects can be so enticing!**

To the contrary, **human protagonists are a considerable weakness of the book**. Holsten, a scholar “*at the wrong end of his career*” and a historian “*at the wrong end of history*”, Guyen, a power-obsessed commander, control-hungry and with an utter god-complex, Lain, the engineer turned leader by necessity (come the hour, come the woman), Karst, your regular security tough-guy, or rigid, narrowly-minded scientists - they are all unremarkable, lacking perspicuity, and difficult to bond with.

**Pitched against humans, the Portias, Biancas and Fabians, even the Violas of the spider-folk are clear winners.** Throughout the thousands of years, we trace the evolving story (and the civilisation) through the (many!) eyes of numerous spiders, for simplicity called by the same names. **Just as much as I was quite indifferent to the human figures (I treated them as tools meant to give the spiders time to evolve and at the same time, to push the action forward), I found myself positively cheering for the insects!**

## 3. COSMIC WONDERS AWAIT

*“Because she needed to reach out and know there was something she could reach out to.”*

The novel was showered with prizes, and rightly so. The rich style of the Mr Tchaikovsky is impressive. “Children of Time” seduces us with an unusual ingenuity of worldbuilding, an intriguing plot, convincing descriptions and an extraordinary ambiance.

Tchaikovsky's tale is a story about the demise of one civilisation and the birth of another. On this very simple, not to say simplistic, premise, the Author creates a brilliant cosmic epos, which contains many key elements that are the driving force of more than one classic science-fiction novel. We have the destruction of humanity, genetic experiments, interstellar journey, fighting for survival with alien forms of life, artificial intelligence, playing the god. Especially gender war in this book is delightful. (view spoiler)

It is a novel written with panache, and yet carefully attending to minor details, enriched by the colourful and multifaceted picture of struggles undertaken in the defence and preservation of life, and trials related to overcoming consecutive stages of biological and cultural evolution. It is also a critical vision of the distant inheritors of the Earth, irreversibly poisoning the environment, and thus approaching the point of eliminating their own species. Despite the threat of total extermination, people still cannot get rid of deadly social mechanisms and habits, nurturing the inspiration to remain masters of the whole universe against all odds.

## 4. THE ORPHANS OF TIME

*“You claim to be human. Go be human elsewhere.”*

It is evident that for Mr Tchaikovsky, **humans have lost the game**. In the novel, we can also see a **civilisation devolving, understanding less than before, losing memory and wisdom, too busy with survival to pass on the knowledge**. In the book, all the coveted achievements of civilisational development like genetic engineering or transcending the boundaries of artificial intelligence, resonate only in echoes of former splendour and mimicked copies. The old ambitions of conquest, large-scale attempts at creating terraformed planets, leave only negligible traces behind. **Considering how the humans are depicted in this novel, I think that “The Orphans of Time” would be a more apt title**. Additionally, **humanity is crippled by its own irredeemable nature**. We are poisoned by the propensity to violence which we, as a species, seem unable to transcend. Mr Tchaikovsky presents us simply as *“monsters: clumsy, bickering, short-sighted monsters.”*

This very pessimist Hobessian view, determinist to the extreme, whereby humans are not able to transcend certain obstacles is contrasted with the nascent spider civilisation free from such inhibitions. The green world with giant arthropods, with its nascent civilisation where biology and custom are at constant war, where tradition is set against the progress, the known past against the unknown future, and where the intellect bent to break the shackles of yesterday triumphs, reads like a veritable paradise.

This is something that the Author denies the humans. Where spiders are thriving on empathy and cooperation and altruistic sacrifice, humans cheat, abuse and destroy. But **the worst thing is that this catastrophic tone and constant trajectory of humankind towards destruction is not substantiated by anything**. Why would humanity be unable to retrace their developmental steps when the spiders basically zipped through evolution and progress?

**The last 20% killed the book for me**. Particularly during the final stages of arachnid development, I was forced to resort to ‘suspension of disbelief’ which is a technique I usually apply only for fairytales. **It is not that I didn’t like the ending, it is more that I didn’t get the answers as to why things worked out the way they did**. Explanations for the evolutionary check-mate that would anchor the ending in any kind of logic. The finale (and the epilogue) seemed terribly arbitrary and bent on proving a very controversial hypothesis. **This was the decisive factor regarding my rating**.

Indubitably, **“Children of Time” offers a reading adventure, which I savoured with appreciation and applause**. It provided me with excellent multi-level entertainment, and at the same time raised many important issues as a poignant warning, foretelling what the humanity may face if we continue to push towards the mutual destruction of each other and the whole environment. **However, Mr Tchaikovsky's humanity is one inherently unable to produce Mother Teresas, MahatmasGhandi, and Irenas Sendler. And this is not us**.

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## Carol. says

Sympathetic spiders? Inconceivable!

*–I do not think that word means what you think it means–*

Nope, in this case, it pretty much does. It's not that I have a spider-phobia--I like to think we have a truce regarding squishing and biting--it's that something about their structure and movement speaks to a primeval instinct to *run away*. Children of Time popped up in friend reviews, but I'll be honest--it wasn't until I

realized there were giant spiders and colony ships that I really became intrigued. I am usually interested in the moving island of space colonization, and the inclusion of what seemed to be genuine aliens piqued my curiosity. Could it be done? Could an author really give an alien feel and yet remain sympathetic to creatures that inspire such fear?

Yes and yes.

Aside from that general set-up, I went into *Children* blind. Tchaikovsky structures the premise and then alternates the narrative between the two species. Once settled into the story-telling rhythm, he adds another wrinkle. I appreciate the way he told the story, easing the reader in and then building on the concepts. The human narrative tends to be more dialogue oriented, the spider-narrative more internal. It makes for an interesting pace change that might have dragged had the entire book been one style or the other.

**"She feels fear, a building anxiety that makes her stamp her feet and twitch her palps. Her people are more suited to offence than defence, but they have been unable to retain the initiative in this conflict. She will have to improvise. There is no plan for what comes next. She may die, and her eyes look into that abyss and feed her with a terror of extinction, of un-being, that is perhaps the legacy of all life."**

Characterization proved rather intriguing, particularly at first. I thought the feel of primitive spider-thinking rather believable, and appreciated the structuring of a very different world-view. I ended up believing the premise enough to enjoy the story and not feel hampered by arguing the science in my head. Also interestingly--particularly in a genre known for its sexism--the tendency of some female spiders to eat the males after mating is turned toward matriarchic ends. I was also intrigued by the spiders' interaction with other beings on the world, as well as how they are characterized.

**"She knows that individual ants themselves cannot be treated with, communicated with or even threatened. Her comprehension is coarse, of a necessity, but approximates to the truth. Each ant does not think. It has a complex set of responses based on a wide range of stimuli, many of which are themselves chemical messages produced by other ants in response to still more eventualities."**

Writing is solid. It is complex enough to convey cognitive concepts of world-view as well as philosophical underpinnings of what intelligence and interconnectivity is. I didn't overtly realize it as I read, but I think there were parallel discussions of what humanity means and aims for, a particularly worthwhile topic for our time.

**"The more he learned of them, the more he saw them not as spacefaring godlike exemplars, as his culture had originally cast them, but as monsters: clumsy, bickering, short-sighted monsters... In trying to be the ancients, they had sealed their own fate--neither to reach those heights, nor any others, doomed instead to a history of mediocrity and envy."**

I do think Tchaikovsky loses his way somewhat near the last third of the book. Still, it ended up being a book full of unexpected twists and turns. Most worked. A few did not, and I remain ambivalent about the ending. However, there were also moments when I thought, "this reminds me of Ursula LeGuin and one of her world-building, sci-fi masterpieces." A good story, intriguing world-building and a layered exploration of humanity and civilization. Overall, I'd definitely recommend it to someone who is in the mood for classic-feeling science fiction with modern sensibilities.

Four and a half webs, rounding up because it deserves recognition for Big Ideas, not because it's screaming to be included in my personal library.

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## Dana Ilie says

Children of Time' is one of those books one devours obsessively and then mourns once it's finished. Yes, 'Children of Time' is that good.

The author acknowledges our implicit arachnophobia and then very cleverly turns it on its head; indeed, after a while you kind of forget that these characters are spiders at all, even when they get stuck in to very spiderish behaviour. Their cities, for example, are great forests festooned with web complexes and, latterly, organic machinery and vehicles. The many versions of the spider society are also resolutely female and this novel is one of the few I can think of that presents a detailed, believable and sympathetic matriarchy. That it is in not in any way a utopia, without seeming unrecognisable or awful either, is another credit to the unapologetic intelligence of this book.

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## Petrik says

**Smart and imaginative, highly recommended for everyone who loves Sci-Fi and not recommended for anyone with arachnophobia.**

Children of Time is Adrian Tchaikovsky's first Sci-Fi and also my first experience with his work. This is a highly praised book, it won Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Novel in 2016 and most likely, will be 5 stars read for anyone who has never read anything like it. Plus, for even more praise, the film rights to the book has also been sold to Lionsgate.

It's a great story. The plot revolved around the race for survival between races on attaining a single terraformed planet; The races being the last surviving humanity that fled their dying Earth, and the sentient spiders accidentally evolved by a mad scientist; these beings were born and live on the planet.

## Picture: Children of Time (Polish cover)

This standalone encompassed a lot of relatable topics to our society such as gender discrimination, greed, and on the bright side, empathy. It's unique and epic, with tale spanning between generations to generations. Unfortunately for me, I have read something very similar to this in a manga called Terra Formars and because of that, my experience on this was a bit ruined. The premise of this book with that particular manga is very similar, with the differences being the planet is Mars and the sentient creatures are cockroaches. It's not fair for me to compare the topic unrelated form of speculative fiction but I want you to first look at this gif so I can explain my reasoning. (Warning: gory scene ahead)

That, ladies and gentleman is a sentient evolved cockroach killing humans. This somehow affected me into thinking that this standalone will be action-packed because of the similar premise; it's not. Children of Time

plot direction is almost the total opposite. I expected more interaction between the two species but they happened only twice throughout the entire book, one very briefly too. I also felt the entire middle section from the alien's side felt a bit boring; it was a bit too long and felt like learning biology and history from a textbook because there's almost no dialogue on it. Finally, I don't think it was necessary to divide the prose for the two races POV's, the human side was written in past tense while the alien side was written in present tense; this made their stories felt disconnected to me.

I may sound a bit too negative here. This is because up until the 80% section of the book, I totally felt like this is a 3 stars book at best. However, I was wrong. The author has saved everything for the last 20% of the book and it was brilliant. No loose ends, the conclusion of this book was truly incredible and made all my struggle through the middle section of the book worth it.

Knowing that this is the author's first Sci-Fi, I foresee a very bright future ahead of him. I highly recommend this to every Sci-Fi fans but not to anyone with arachnophobia; because.. sentient spiders.

For anyone who loved this book and wants something more epic, I recommend reading *Remembrance of Earth's Past* by Cixin Liu. Trust me, the last book of that trilogy made everything this book looks like an ant regarding its scope.

You can find **this** and the rest of my Adult Epic/High Fantasy & Sci-Fi reviews at **BookNest**

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## Algernon says

**This is the future.**

**This is where mankind takes its next step.**

**This is where we become gods.**

Science has given mankind the tools to travel to distant stars, to terraform their planets and to play with the building blocks of life : genetics.

It sounds like a dream come true, an utopian future in which everything is possible.

In practice, the deployment of miraculous scientific discoveries from the laboratory to the real world is fraught with the same issues that have plagued past generations : greed, selfishness, religious intolerance, thirst for power, irresponsible behaviour. Instead of agents of progress, scientists turn into agents of destruction. Utopias become Distopias.

Adrian Tchaikovsky explores this deep divide between idealistic dreams and grim reality in two directions:

- artificially accelerated evolution of a population through a nanotechnology, synthetic 'smart' virus
- social degradation in a multi-generational arcology : a slower than lightspeed ship transporting the frozen survivors of a planetary holocaust.

It's been done before, but Tchaikovsky manages to be here both traditional and original. The story reminds me of the golden age SF in its mostly positive attitude towards science, in looking at the big picture rather than at the lives of the individuals, in tracking social movements through the lens of technological progress, in its plain, clear-cut storytelling and often unidimensional characters.

The originality of the project comes from the same passion of the author that made his fantasy epic special : Tchaikovsky is really keen on his arthropods. "Shadows of the Apt" is populated by a wide range of different

nations that share insect and human traits. "Children of Time" invites us to view the world through alien eyes that share a lot of common features with Earth's spiders. This almost obsession with the insect world is giving Tchaikovsky an edge over his fellow writers through the huge diversity of the regnum, a much richer source of inspiration than the usual human shaped aliens. I know that for me, as a photographer, it is always fascinating to turn a macro lens on even the most common specimens of these arthropods, and that a close up look at their multifaceted eyes or at the shapes of mandibles and antennas will make me think of aliens living unnoticed among us humans.

*They are among the most diverse groups of animals on the planet, including more than a million described species and representing more than half of all known living organisms.*

"Children of Time" managed to keep my interest and to make me turn the pages faster and faster especially in its alien half of the story, mostly by this originality in perspective. (view spoiler) . I was already a fan of the author before his move from fantasy to SF, but this new story reinforced his position among my favorites. It's not easy to keep a good balance between action and exposition and emotionally charged characterization, especially if you have no familiar frame of reference for your social and economic structures and you have to start anew with the main actors after each generational change. The novel covers a multi-millennial timespan yet, despite all the inherent problems of such a large frame, it works like clockwork, even in the final blending together of the two main streams : human and alien.

I am about to name drop one of the biggest names in SF : Isaac Asimov. In the "Foundation" series, Asimov also uses a multigenerational approach that allows him to study history through the engines of science and technology, explaining wars, gender roles, growth and decay in relation to the discoveries of positronic brains or mathematical formulas that explain Fate and Chance. Tchaikovsky has his nanotechnology virus that can change a whole society from hunters/gatherers to intelligent predators, through commerce and military conquest to a modern society of scientists and artists. This alien evolution is not without its own mishaps and wrong turns in the path to the future. It starts with the promise of a mad dreamer:

**We will seed the universe with all the wonders of the Earth.**

... a dreamer (view spoiler) who conveniently forgets that these wonders, monitored from outer space, manifest like global warming, oceans of plastic garbage, deforestation and desertification, global wars, famine and crippling poverty, indigent species hunted to extinction. Both the aliens on their terraformed planet and the humans in their multi-generational ark demonstrate that this dismal list is very close to the true heritage of humanity. Yet Tchaikovsky is also prone to remember that at the bottom of Pandora's Box there is a feeble thing called Hope. The future is not already written down, despite the claims of psychohistory and prophets of doom, and thus my last quotations from what turned out to be one of the best (SF) novels of 2015:

**Nothing. No promises. The universe promises us nothing.  
Things are the way we make them.**

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## **Bradley says**

There's something wildly giddy welling up within me, and I blame it entirely on this book.

There have been a couple of brilliant SF titles to come out this year and I would swear belong on the Hugo list, and this is yet one more. Kim Stanley Robinson's Aurora was one, as was Scott Hawkins's The Library

at Mount Char, but if I had to break down the individual merits of each, I might wind up saying that this one deserves it the most. For pure SF, it hits the heights of ideas, memorable characters, exploration, and message, although the message is definitely not one that is apparent until the end.

It has all the hallmarks of a good classic SF tale, and I was reminded every step of the way of John Brunner's *The Crucible of Time*, with the bringing up of an alien society from its primitive roots to space exploration, the wild quest of humanity trying to survive it's own stupidity in over ten thousand years of desperate Ark travel, and throw into the mix a great mad cyborg/AI god/scientist who's belief system gets sorely challenged.

If all that isn't enough to perk you up, then how about a society of biopunk spiders learning to tame themselves and their world with the propelling help of a nanovirus designed to uplift an entirely different species, but lacking those poor monkeys, had to make due with some jumping spiders from old Earth?

Oh yeah. Now we're talking. From page one we get a precious nod to David Brin for his wonderful *Uplift* series, but right as we begin to suspect that it's a rip-off, everything goes to hell. I call that an auspicious beginning.

And then we get slices of alien life complete with great self-contained stories, with nothing worthless to the grand over-tale being spun, including the war and eventual domestication of deadly intelligent army ants, the fight for the poor male spider's rights (who don't appreciate being eaten after mating), and the eventual discovery that the original scientist that had seeded the world with the nanovirus, who still lived as a cyborg, was not, in fact, a god.

And if that isn't enough, let's get to know the human side of the equation. They've had a rough time climbing back out of a dark age only to discover that the Earth is a complete shit hole and there's nothing left to be saved. They rose on the backs of the dead society that had brought humanity to this pass and went out to search for a new home. Unfortunately, everything has gone to shit except this one little paradise that's defended by a mad cyborg god who thinks that humans are shit. (And she's right.) She'll protect her precious project from anything that dares disturb it.

Great conflict ensues.

My god this was a great book. I had a bit of a learning curve in the first few dozen pages getting over the somewhat sparse writing, but there's a purpose to it. A hell of a lot has to happen to build such an enormous tale without stretching it out into a dozen equivalent and impoverished books. In this one novel, we get everything. It's brilliant.

I'll revisit this review at a later time and see if it still captures my imagination as much as the other Hugo Possibles, but my mind wants to put all my bets on this one. The flaws in *Aurora*, despite the brilliant setup, message, and end, are just enough to push it down a rung for me. *Library at Mount Char* was mostly dark fantasy with a damn huge nod at turning it into a real SF title, and I still think it's awesome and mythic, but if I had to choose between something that's obviously SF to the core and beyond and a great book that has more in common with *American Gods* and *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*, (both of which won Hugos in their years despite being fantasies), then I'd choose *Children of Time*.

Unfortunately, I'm going to have to sit on the fence. Having to choose between two novels that are very different in scope, writing, and characterizations is a hell of a thing. Both are fantastic at what they do. I cried during both. I'll just have to revisit my memories later to be certain.

Oh, there is one more thing I need to mention.

I hate the title.

It does absolutely NOTHING to enumerate how fucking awesome this epic SF is. Fans of any classic SF need to read this gem. It has a hell of a lot more flow to it, and just as much idea exploration as anything written by Alastair Reynolds. Go get it. Now.

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