



Orbital Resonance

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Melpomene Murray's concerns are those of any teenager: homework, friends, dates. But Melpomene lives on the *Flying Dutchman*, an asteroid colony located thousands of miles from an Earth almost destroyed by disease, war, and pollution. She and her spaceborn classmates are humanity's last hope, and Mel's just starting to realize how heavy a responsibility that is. Her parents and teachers have trained her from birth to lead mankind into the future.

What they never realized is that Melpomene might have plans of her own...

Orbital Resonance Details

Date : Published December 15th 1992 by Tor Books (first published December 1991)

ISBN : 9780812532388

Author : John Barnes

Format : Paperback 245 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Young Adult, Science Fiction Fantasy

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From Reader Review Orbital Resonance for online ebook

Cheryl says

In lieu of a review, I can copy in my comment on a thread about books like The City of Ember:

...

Here's a happy coincidence. I'm reading a book right now that is probably perfect.

Main character is YA and the book is fairly short and the plot and characters are accessible... but... 1. there is a sort of a mystery/ gradual revelation, and 2. there are mature words & scenes, and 3. there are complex themes to think about.

The young people are raised very differently than their parents, and so they're almost 'alien' in a way, and a lot of things we understand, including economy and technology, are different for them.

The apocalypse was a few decades ago from the current story, and recovery has hit a big bump, as we learn gradually.

Lots of What-If and World-Building but a good story beyond that, too. (Just beware the awkward beginning, do not DNF too early... it's all crafted intentionally.)

...

The ending didn't disappoint. 4.5 stars rounded up, because I'm going to be thinking about this for a while, and I want to reread it, and I might read the sequel(s).

Janet says

Although the main character is thirteen-year-old Melpomene Murrary, this is not a story for young people. Although she lives on an asteroid colony desperately needed to supply a dying Earth, this is not a story about space and space-faring. It is very much a story of social engineering in the mode of Ender's Game. It asks the same question, what would you do to a group of young people who must fulfill the desperate mission of Earth? Instead of competitive geniuses though, these engineers create a society where young people don't want to function outside of their highly cooperative groups. All of their schooling and grading is built on this group model. This makes tremendous sense in this environment except when you need a leader.

This is an amazingly creative novel and thought-provoking as well.

Susan says

I really enjoyed this, written as though by the teenage protagonist Melpomene who's required to compose something for people on earth to help them understand life on an asteroid. It becomes something of a diary. A new kid arrives from earth, and as she writes about the incidents that ensue and about things going on in her personal life, we discover issues of conflict in a society that's based on consensus, where being branded an "unco" (uncooperative?) is a serious problem.

I noticed in particular that the educational system employed a fascinating blend of competition and collaboration -- students always know their own exact rank, and strive to increase it; yet, they're routinely

grouped with others in a way that makes that rank partially dependent on their helping all the weaker students. An interesting adaptation to a culture in which everyone's life depends on everyone else's ability to do his/her job well.

One thing I found particularly interesting was the question of (view spoiler).

This is an excellent read for those who like their science fiction to raise moral questions as well as to entertain. I'll definitely read the others in the series. Apparently, I already read and enjoyed #4, but it was quite a while ago and I don't remember it. Better to do them all in order now, though I can't tell whether any of the books in the series is actually dependent on the others or shares any characters.

C says

Surprisingly enjoyable for a quick science fiction YA novel. The jargon gets really grating sometimes, but the mechanics of the setting and the grind of working through schoolwork, not to mention the 'engineering' are all both novel and make the plot more interesting to move through. Didn't like the games etc, smacked of *Ender's Game*, and wasn't a big fan of the seeming need to explain each class in detail - I get it, these kids are superhuman.

It had all the aspects of a book I don't get into, except *Orbital Resonance* pulled it out into something fresh, and kept me up late to get through the next chapter.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in October 1999.

The front cover of this edition bears an endorsement from Orson Scott Card comparing Barnes to Robert A. Heinlein. On the basis of earlier Barnes novels, the John Brunner-like *Mother of Storms* and the brutal *Kaleidoscope Century*, this may seem rather a strange comparison to make. Yet *Orbital Resonance* is distinctly reminiscent of the best of Heinlein's books for teenagers, a tradition to which Card's own *Ender's Game* perhaps also belongs. (*Orbital Resonance* has a low-gravity game which is quite similar to that battle room in *Ender's Game*.)

Set on a space station designed to aid the colonisation of Mars, the background to *Orbital Resonance* is a ruined Earth in only a few decades time. The satellite is the last bastion of the civilisation of mankind; there a group of gifted children are being conditioned to become the new elite of the human race. The novel takes the form of the journal of one of these children, Melpomene Murray, as they approach adulthood and a crisis in the form of a new arrival from Earth in their class.

Barnes also makes points about the way that the West lives today, by looking at how the relatively affluent children on the satellite see the lives of those remaining on Earth's surface, a place of continual famine and desperate want. Part of the school curriculum is a subject intended to enhance the children's understanding of and empathy for what is going on, yet they are virtually unaffected by the video footage, merely making such callous and stupid comments as "why don't they just grow more food?". They may be gifted, but they find it exceptionally difficult to understand any point of view different from the culture conditioned on them; another example is the complete incomprehension the narrator has as to why her word processor might possibly query the use of the word "clitoris" as "audience-inappropriate" (after all, girls on Earth must have

them too).

Like Heinlein, Barnes manages to write convincingly as a bright teenage girl. (As a man in his thirties, I may not be the best judge of this, but he at least convinced me.) The sentimentality of Heinlein is absent, and Melpomene's crushing discovery of the years of manipulation at the hands of her parents is strongly handled.

Julian says

It's hard to really say why, but I think this has been done by others and done better. It's the story of kids on a space station who are going to inherit, basically, the remains of fucked-up humanity. Oh wait, I think my problem is that I read *Beggars in Spain* and this is a bit too along the same lines but can't quite compare. Maybe it's unfair to judge based on that but I can't help it. It was still an interesting story and worth reading.

Gar says

Part of John Barnes' "Century Next Door/Meme Wars" un-series (as they're not sequels, simply related and connected). Definitely the most lighthearted and least apocalyptic of the three I've read (still tracking down the fourth), but also the least satisfying.

At this point in the world's timeline, Earth is pretty much a shambles, its ecology thrashing due to some extrapolated quasi-weapons technology and thus most heavy industry moved off-world. The *Flying Dutchman* is a "transfer ship" designed to stay in long orbit as a generation ship; the new generation of kids born on the ship are all basically molded and mentally conditioned and mildly-brain-stapled from early on-- but this isn't gone into in thoughtful depth, because it's from the kids' perspective. It's a mild coming-of-age tale overall, with a rather abrupt stopping rather than an ending.

Wealththeow says

My first thought, on starting this book, was that the main character had a fantastic name: Melpomene Murray. The same naming convention as for asteroids exists for her generation. This is only the first of many differences between generations. In Mel's parents' lifetime, Earth's crumbling infrastructure finally collapsed. mutAIDS, ecological disaster, and countless wars all erupted in the same decade, killing much of Earth's population and leaving the planet almost uninhabitable. Mel's parents and a few thousand others escaped to live on a commercial space colony, *The Flying Dutchman*. They've raised their children to live in space, but are surprised at just how strange their children are to them.

Mel is a logical, empathic teenager, and I really liked her. When an immigrant from Earth joins her class, she tries to help him integrate. She is dumbfounded by the social changes he brings about, and hurt by her friends' new behavior. Barnes has written a book that captures the awkward stage of coming of age both for humans and new societies. It's a very interesting novel, and if it weren't for the last few chapters (which dribble on to no purpose), I would have rated this far higher.

Leila P says

Very enjoyable; Barnes has really become one of my favourites, pos-def. He has imagined a new culture, and he has realized it's the children born in space who create it, not the earth-born parents. The plot itself wasn't anything huge, just one year in a girl's life.

Ashley says

The world building, language, and voice of this book were outstanding.

In some ways the main character reminded me of Scout from To Kill a Mockingbird mixed with Ender from Ender's Games.

The overall plot was a little lackluster I think - like the big climax wasn't all that climactic and the resolution was like WHAT? really? Huh. Okay. Weird.

Can't say I'd want to continue reading the series but I did enjoy reading this one for the most part.

Nate says

Fine. Perfectly good book. Just not to my taste.

Rose says

"Orbital Resonance" by John Barnes examines the life of its protagonist, 13-year old Melpomeme Murray, in a combination of a coming of age tale and sociological and political commentary about an alternate future involving a rapidly degenerating Earth. I didn't know what to expect for this, being my first Barnes novel overall, but I was pleasantly surprised and drawn into many of the moments within this work.

Melopomeme is a likable lead to follow. I'll fully admit that I liked and identified with her voice and natural poise for relating her experiences (even down to the special language she uses, like "Pos-def"). She's described in the way of a typical teenager - having school, friends, and other concerns, though she lives within an asteroid colony called "The Flying Dutchman". Given the terrible state of Earth with dwindling resources, an outbreak of mutAIDS, ongoing war and hostility among other factors, generations are being transferred to the asteroid colonies in order to save humanity as they know it. Melopmeme tells of her day to day trials and tribulations. Some of it is very interesting, especially the ongoing trials of Melpomeme helping a new recruit adjust to his life on the colony despite the social stigma that others assign to him (Randy). It operates very much like what the social clique system operates with teens in today's society, though having more weight since the environment weighs much more on delegating these kids have to work together as a central group. There are other things like the games that are vivid and interesting to watch unfold. Barnes has an intriguing blend of imagination as well as commentary about the weight of the issues he depicts.

However, I have to say there were many times when the work tends to dwindle too much, and it took me a while to get through those parts in order to hit the next point where it became intriguing again. It takes slice

of life, political/social commentary, and science fiction and wraps it all into a web of experiences for the heroine, though I think the last chapter could've amounted to more than what it did, to my chagrin. The book also shows its age in places since it was penned in 1991, so there may be aspects where the ideals seem outdated or odd with the mention of certain years.

Nonetheless, I enjoyed most of the ride that "Orbital Resonance" took me on, and appreciated some of the messages that it put forward. I know it's the first book in a related (but not necessarily connected) series, and I'm interested enough to pursue the other books to see where they go.

Overall score: 3/5

Tamahome says

Explanation of my desire to read (animated whiteboard review):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMkeZJ...>

Ack. Out of print and no ebook.

Ordered 'new' from Amazon for \$6, dammit.

Got it in the mail today!

page 47/245 - Flying through it so far. Very similar to those old Heinlein juveniles. Sometimes I get a little confused with the science and the slang, but a lot of it is like sf candy, told from a young but very smart girl's point of view. It takes place on an asteroid converted into a space ship orbiting the sun between earth and mars (I had to look up what aphelion and perihelion mean), so there's a lot of tricks with gravity. Nice and short and it's a standalone story, I think (EDIT: not really). Unheard of in publishing these days. Why doesn't Barnes write stuff like this now? I guess it didn't sell well. Maybe it's a little too challenging for kids, and yet it's a kid's point of view. There's some heavy stuff about the future of earth, alternating with kids having fun in school, so far. Pos-def!

page 101/245 - Now it's getting more serious, more like Ender's Game. There's some suprising sexual references, and lots of math references. I didn't realize Luke reviewed one of the books in this series on his podcast, The Sky So Big So Black <http://www.sfbpr.com/archives/98> . I like the succinct writing style, where you infer everyone's feelings from their actions and dialog, and not have it spelled out for you in long interior dialogs. Oh, this might be similar to Heinlein's Podkayne of Mars, which has a young female main character.

pg 215/245 - Almost done. Will easily finish in an hour. Kind of dragging my feet. I think I have ADD, and only like things new and shiny. There's a lot of crying.

pg 218/218 - Err, there is really only 218 pages. The rest is a preview of another book, a million doors or something. So, not bad. At least the narration is interesting. She's been assigned to write a novel for the world to see the asteroid culture, and commenting on it as she goes along.

Lee says

I really enjoyed this read. The beginning threw me off a bit-the story is told as though written by the main character. The main character is also quite young (12) although people reach adult status earlier in the novel.

It also uses made-up slang, which I usually find very annoying and overused in most books, but it wasn't annoying in this one. For one thing, there were only a couple of slang words, which were easy to pick up from the context and weren't used so much that they became irritating.

It's actually a very mature book considering most of the characters ages. The book also has kind of a psychology/sociology in space thing going on. The situation and relationship with Earth is very interesting and well developed, although it's not overstressed.

My only complaint is that this book ended too soon! Good thing for me there's a couple more books in the series (though as far as I understand, they're stand-alone but related)

Camilla says

A coming-of-age story told by a 13-year-old girl raised on a space station. The book deals with the socially-indoctrinated children born on the station, and their conflict with their Earth-born parents and the new boy in class.

I was a little surprised that I enjoyed this as much as I did -- since the story is told in the form of an autobiography, the writing is often awkward, which I thought would annoy me. Instead, it helps make the protagonist's character more real.

I'd recommend it for teenagers and people who don't mind some teenage trials and tribulations in their sci-fi.
