



The Disappeared

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His name: Miles Flint. His occupation: Retrieval Artist. His job: Hunt down the Disappeared--outlaws on the run, wanted for crimes against alien cultures. The catch: Flint isn't working on the side of the law.

In a universe where humans and aliens have formed a loose government called the Earth Alliance, treaties guarantee that humans are subject to alien laws when on alien soil. But alien laws often make no sense, and the punishments vary from loss of life to loss of a first-born child. Now three cases have collided: a stolen spaceyacht filled with dead bodies, two kidnapped human children, and a human woman on the run, trying to Disappear to avoid alien prosecution. Flint must enforce the law-giving the children to aliens, solving the murders, and arresting the woman for trying to save her own life. But how is a man supposed to enforce laws that are unjust? How can he sacrifice innocents to a system he's not sure he believes in? How can Miles Flint do the right thing in a universe where the right thing is very, very wrong? This Endeavor Award-winning novel is Flint's first adventure, the story that turns him from a police detective in the Armstrong Dome on the Moon into a Retrieval Artist. "Rusch has created an entertaining blend of mystery and sf, a solid police drama that asks hard questions about what justice between cultures, and even species, really is." -Booklist "It feels like a popular TV series crossed with a Spielberg film-engaging." -Locus "The Disappeared is a very readable, very thought-provoking novel that lives up to every expectation we have of Rusch and her considerable talents. Buy and enjoy." -Analog

The Disappeared Details

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Author : Kristine Kathryn Rusch

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From Reader Review The Disappeared for online ebook

Ed Dragon says

Story is based on the foundation that there is an alien race that controls human society, primarily the law. Not much is explored of how it came to be, rather, it is how the present is and things are happening. Fact alone, failed to impress me, but I can see how it can be interesting for others.

Snarktastic Sonja says

I enjoyed this book. I really did. It was a very intriguing world and a very intriguing story. It is *not quite* dystopian, more true sci-fi - I mean there ARE aliens. The characters are very well drawn.

I am, however, unlikely to continue the series. It just hits too close to home for me. The government - that is supposed to be protecting its citizens - is way too busy protecting its own behind to care about its citizens. Yep. This is why I won't continue.

If that doesn't bother you and you would like a good sci fi series, I highly recommend this one. I wish I could continue. It depresses me too much.

Emily says

This is the prequel to Rusch's 2000 story, "The Retrieval Artist." As that was and is one of my favorite novellas of all time, I was eagerly anticipating this book, and not disappointed in the least.

Miles Flint is a first-year detective on the Moon Sector Police, with his tough experienced partner, Noelle DeRicci. Both are smart and somewhat on the fringe of the agency, and thus tend to pick up the cases others don't really want. As the book opens they are given a case in the Port, a mysterious vessel with three victims of a gruesome Disty vengeance killing inside. Almost immediately, more aliens and a beautiful woman on the run arrive to complicate matters.

Because in this future, humanity has made trading contracts with other species that allow them to use their own justice on humans who violate their laws. Once an appeal has been denied by the multicultural courts, the aggrieved party is allowed to take matters into their own hands however their laws see fit. Those humans can be pressed into slavery, messily executed along with everyone involved, have their children taken, or any other punishment, with impunity. Though few like it, for the most part the politicians and corporations have convinced people that it's necessary for progress. Meanwhile, quasi-legal Disappearance services have sprung up to shield and give new lives to people who are willing to pay.

As the cops try to prevent a diplomatic disaster, it slowly becomes obvious that all of this is related to a disappearance service selling out its clients, though the reader knew early on. Both work hard to keep such a stressful situation from spiraling out of control, even when they could step back; Flint proves his humanity in the end, and tries to help as many as he can. He doesn't entirely succeed, and not as well as he'd like, but it's more than anyone hoped for.

I can't say enough for this story. All of the characters are very real, the stress and worry etched into every page, hope rare but held onto tightly. Everyone has their own dark pasts, everyone their own mistakes that haunt them though they push it down. Seeing people with many different interests competing or working together or both. The story unfolds masterfully, weaving in and out of cultural and interpersonal relations, rules and regulations, philosophical conundrums, histories, desperate attempts to keep order, and it's always apparent that everyone wants to do the right thing, though only Flint is so willing to fight hard for what he believes in, then DeRicci, inspired by him and past caring about her future.

The reader is given a lot extra that the cops don't have, and in many ways this brings us to sympathize with the guilty and less likable protagonists. Even the woman in the first chapter, horrified to find her vessel abandoned to the Disty, and next seen brutally eviscerated... when later we find out it was all for teaching a Disty English. The prose is kept tight, clipping forward from the first page, taking only the short breathers that the heroes and the fugitives get. It's an effort just to set it down, no matter where you are. Even the exposition is fluidly intermixed with the story, so nothing feels rushed. The technology is neither overexplained nor silly, more of a setting for the characters than anything.

I recommend this to all. I cannot wait for the next installment, be it in short form or novel.

Cathy says

It started off very entertaining with just the right amount of mystery. I liked the police procedural aspect with the two cops. The alternating POVs kept it speeding along. It did seem kind of weird that all of the aliens had the same or very similar laws about how people had to pay for what for their crimes. Except the Wygnin made the criminals' children pay by kidnapping them and trying to turn them Wygnin. Which worked if they were young enough and they could be happy members of Wygnin society, as horrifying as it was to the humans, but if they were older it destroyed their personalities and was crippling. That's hard to even read about. But that's the price of doing interstellar business!

The alternating POVs kept the pace moving along very quickly and all of the viewpoints were interesting and kept my curiosity piqued. I wasn't sure if all of the characters were likable or not, but that isn't always a requirement, and trying to find out was part of the curiosity aspect of watching it unfold. It was good to see that a book that was published fourteen years ago (I read this in February 2016) didn't feel outdated. The author didn't try to include many technological wonders that would date it, it was mostly classic sci-fi Moon colony and inner planet settlement motifs, with her aliens providing the primary originality and fulcrum around which the various POV stories rotated. I really enjoyed the police procedural aspect of it too, but I always like a sci-fi mystery, it's an interesting way to illustrate a society. Well, I like a mystery anyway, but prefer fantasy and sci-fi, so combining mystery with one of my favorite genres is usually a big win-win for me. But I thought the author was good at spooling out the details, of each of the Disappeared's cases about how they got in trouble with the respective aliens, about the police investigating the cases as they discovered them on the Moon, about the police partners and who they were and what their personal histories were. There were an awful lot of details once I thought about it, but it didn't feel that way at all, it felt like one of those easy, effortless mysteries that just seemed logical in the way it built and unfolded. The kind that must actually be really hard to plan and write. Especially when it's the first book in a series so it's also laying the groundwork for what the author wants to do longer term as well. Most of the way along in the book I thought it didn't suffer for being a first book, it didn't do the awkward introduction thing or anything, there were no infodumps.

But the Retrieval Artist wasn't even mentioned until around page three hundred and barely even then, so don't expect the book to be about that. And by around then I realized that it was very much the first book in a

series, that pretty much everything that happened up to page three hundred was actually just an introduction to the series. The pace is weird once I saw the whole thing, it went along fine until that point, then it was a mad dash to the end. I had a hard time believing Miles' actions at that point, within two hours he made major decisions and acted on them, no pause or hesitation, completely inconsistently with the serious and dedicated cop character who'd been established in the rest of the book. The guy who we see at the end of the book doesn't seem like he could be the same guy at the beginning of the book, after just a few short days. The character wasn't introduced in a way that worked for me in the beginning to get to that end, or the middle didn't move him from that beginning to that end, or something just didn't work for me with his character to make it believable. But it isn't actually that big of a deal, despite the rushed ending and some other issues with things that were shallower that they should have been. It's still a very fun book and a good beginning of a series and I'm very intrigued to see where Rusch took the series next.

Micah Sisk says

Having just read *The Retrieval Artist*, the novella that began this series, and having previously read two of Rusch's standalone Retrieval Artist novels, I've decided to start going through this series in order of publication.

The Disappeared steps back in time and follows the events that led Miles Flint into becoming a Retrieval Artist: a private investigator dedicated to finding those who have "disappeared," humans (usually) who have changed their identities and gone into hiding because of convictions for crimes against alien races. That is to say, it follows Flint's short lived police detective career, and examines the legal and cultural differences between human society and several alien species. And more specifically, it deals with the moral, ethical, and personal dilemmas caused by interspecies trade/legal agreements.

So needless to say, the story revolves around moral conflict. It's tragic and emotionally charged. And yet it's actually written in very simple, straightforward terms. It feels a lot more like a primer to the universe that's explored in later books than it does a work that satisfies on its own terms. It's a decent, quick, and easy read...But it was not wholly satisfying either. Rusch's later works in this series (or at least the ones I've read) were more complex and more interesting. Probably because they were proper mysteries. In *The Disappeared* there really isn't any mystery...Other than how the main character will work his way through the moral/ethical ambiguities of his predicament: his job is to uphold laws which he finds abhorrent and unjust.

Rusch brings *The Disappeared* to a satisfying conclusion, but for me the book didn't seem to have as much depth and complexity as it needed. It seemed like a long novella rather than a full-fledged novel.

Worth a read? Sure. But probably not her best effort in this series.

Virginia says

I do not want to live in the world Rusch has created in this series. It is too hard for me to read about aliens taking human babies/children as compensation/punishment/justice and humans allowing this to happen. Enough with the babies already! My heart just can't take it. In fact, I had to skip to the end to make sure I found out what happened before I would willingly continue reading.

Good story and descriptions but I think I will pass on the rest of the series.

Robyn says

The story of how Miles Flint becomes a 'Retrieval Artist.' I'd say more but I think half the fun of this book is the slow reveal of the world, governed by an intercultural law that allows aliens to enact punishments on humans for transgressions of their laws. Loved the world-building, the characters, and the many shades of grey (and I don't just mean the Moon dust) in the plot.

Sarah says

Soooo... I totally feel bad about not loving this book. It looked so promising. My issues were the multiple POV and the multiple storylines. It drove me crazy and it jarred the book enough that I just couldn't get into it. The aliens were really cool, along with their totally bizarre laws. I mean, we'll take your first born child away from you because you built on land that we sold you? How screwed up is that? The aliens that were brought into the story were very unique and I can see where there's room for a vast number of books simply by inventing new aliens. It just didn't work for me. Also, the term Retrieval Artist was apparently occasionally inverted, which was also quite confusing. Disappointing.

Maggie K says

A fast paced space mystery that lays the groundwork for a series.

Flint has just made detective on the moon, a long-time dream. But if this week is an example of the kind of cases he is going to get, he already regrets the goal. 3 cases seem to overlap in that they involve turning humans over to alien races for punishment. Enforcing laws that do not seem moral makes Flint dig deep, hoping for a loophole. Instead he finds all sorts of graft. People who have paid good money to 'disappear' from their alien warrants are suddenly being found, and Flint really wants to keep that from happening.

This had a few glitches, but has an interesting premise and shows a tremendous amount of potential. I look forward to reading the next in the series.

Taylor says

Interesting idea but the execution was not so great.

The basic premise is quite interesting. In the future, humanity has reached the stars and discovered other intelligent races. Part of the price of doing business with these other races is that humans must abide and be accountable under the laws of the race who controlled where the crime occurred. So, CEO of an interstellar corporation commits sacrilege on an alien world? The penalty is death of their first-born, under the laws of the owners of that planet. This gives rise to a niche industry where perpetrators of these crimes can be "disappeared"; basically companies will, for a fee, provide a client with the background, new name, papers, etc. for a different life, so alien justice cannot be carried out. So, this is, roughly, the premise.

The story centers on two Lunar (actually Armstrong City, a dome on the moon) detectives who are faced with multiple crimes surrounding aliens and the Disappeared. While I found the idea behind the story interesting, I really had difficulty following why anybody did anything in this book. The motivations of the Disappeared people were pretty evident (I don't want to die/perform multiple years hard labor/have my first born taken away) but I never really felt I understood the motivations behind them getting in trouble in the first place. The detectives were worse for me. I never got why they did what they did. All the characters felt two-dimensional and any "depth" felt disjointed and ancillary to the way they acted. The only beings in the book I felt I had a handle on their motivations and actions were the aliens.

tl;dr: This just did not work for me. The legal aspects were really good ideas but the characterizations felt really forced.

Ben Goodridge says

Hard science fiction meets hard-boiled crime drama.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

He was amazed that something so beautiful could be so dangerous.

This book was just a total pleasure to read.

The premise here is quite simple: in order to co-exist with the Alien cultures in the galaxy, and for commercial and political gain, humanity has to adhere to the laws and regulations laid down by the different Alien civilizations. Inter species crimes are judged by a multi "cultural" tribunal, and if guilt against a human is determined, a warrant is issued. This whole setup is **bad** news for humans, since the various Alien punishments are **extremely** harsh. There's also no such thing as mitigating circumstances, which means that guilt can be assigned even to those who are blissfully ignorant.

The *Disappeared* of the title are "sentenced" humans who are quite literally secreted away by Disappearing Agencies. This, of course, is illegal, and human law enforcement agencies are required to follow the law to the letter, which often means handing over humans for alien punishment, even if there is a chance that these humans are innocent.

So. It is obvious that humans have gotten the short and ugly end of the stick in this arrangement. Don't believe me? Read this book!

[He] felt his heart lurch. He took a deep breath and reminded himself that this was his job.

The Disappeared is a study in grey moral areas, and will twist the way you perceive what is just and fair to a ridiculous extent. I have never read anything quite like this: it's a very different kind of police procedural and also an interstellar legal thriller dealing with some pretty complicated legal and ethical issues.

"The Rev usually don't lie, so we can rely on what they tell us."

"They also have a nasty way of taking matters into their own hands if they don't get what they want."

The novel takes a good hard look at the impact of differences between cultures. Obviously it's been extrapolated to the extreme, but it got me thinking. The prose dispenses with unnecessary exposition, leaving the story clear and concise. This adds to the general feel of the novel. It reads **very** quickly and I recommend it to anybody who wants to read a Science Fiction novel that is just totally different from the many other ones out there. *The Disappeared* is the first in the Retrieval Artist series.

"That creates a problem that could become some kind of weird interstellar incident. You can blame me for anything that goes wrong, but please, please stop this from getting worse." "

Added to Favourites

Chris says

Does anyone remember that episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where the young Mr. Crusher faces a horrible punishment for breaking a fence? The idea behind that episode forms part of the background for this seasons.

The Disappeared is sci-fi *C.S.I.* with a twist. Inter-galactic treaties have led to a simple rule. You commit a crime on a planet, you face that planet's punishment, even if it means handing over your baby because you stepped on something. It's this premise that makes the book scary and leads the reader to identify with the hero, Miles Flint, a cop who has problems with the inter-galactic law.

The characters are engaging and well fleshed out. It was a very good start to the series.

Mathew Walls says

Interesting concept, but approached all wrong. I like the idea of a story about fugitives on the run from interstellar law, with the problems of members of one species being convicted under the laws of another, but for some reason the author decided to make the protagonists of this book law-enforcement officers who do everything in their power to not enforce the law, which is incredibly irritating.

Also, the featured fugitives are all really dumb. There're the ones who've been sentenced to have their first-born children taken away, who had no children at the time of sentencing, who decided to abandon their lives and go into hiding rather than just choosing to either not have children, or deliberately having a child to give up. This one is really only a major issue because of the convicted doing incredibly dumb things.

Then there's the lawyer who decided to represent an alien under his planet's own legal system and tried to subvert it, and then acts like it's not her fault when she's found to have committed a crime. Plus, she was only sentenced to five years labour, but instead decides to go into hiding and abandon her entire life. Seems like the wrong choice to me.

Another big problem is the organisations that exist to hide these fugitives. Obviously this is illegal, so you'd assume these businesses would be operating below the radar, but the cops seem to have no trouble locating their offices or getting their financial records, so how they're still operating is a mystery.

But what annoyed me most was the attitudes of the detectives toward people who handed fugitives over to

the law or gave away their locations. Apparently these people, law-abiding people helping law-enforcement to locate criminals, are scum. Because no matter what the human has done, you should never hand them over to alien legal systems. Even when they've been charged, convicted, appealed to the interstellar inter-species courts, lost the appeal, been sentenced and fled justice. 'Cause aliens are just automatically evil I guess.

Also, the term "space cop" is used repeatedly and in earnest.

Justine says

3.5 stars.
