



# The Jupiter Theft

*Donald Moffitt*

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## **The Jupiter Theft** Donald Moffitt

Runaway World. Within hours after the Lunar observatory picked up a strange new X-ray source in Cygnus, the disastrous picture was clear. An immense object was hurtling toward the Solar System at nearly the speed of light...and its intense radiation would surely wipe Earth free of all life within six months.

There was nothing anyone could do.

Then, incredibly, the rogue that had appeared out of nowhere suddenly changed its trajectory and stopped in the area of Jupiter.

And that was flatly impossible!

## **The Jupiter Theft Details**

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Author : Donald Moffitt

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# From Reader Review *The Jupiter Theft* for online ebook

**Lilyn G. | Sci-Fi & Scary says**

*The Jupiter Theft* is the second book I've read by Donald Moffitt. The first, *Children of the Comet*, I read shortly after his death a few years ago. It was unplanned that I picked up this book, but midway through I realized I had inadvertently given myself a chance to see how the author's writing had progressed over almost forty years. This is his first science fiction novel.

I hadn't heard of Donald Moffitt before stumbling upon *Children of Men*. And I hadn't heard of *The Jupiter Theft* until I was gathering information on books based on the lesser-loved planetary bodies in science fiction. Both were fortuitous discoveries, because as I've discovered, I am rather in awe of his imagination.

*The Jupiter Theft* did not – I believe – get nearly the attention it deserved. It has such an outrageous plot that it seems like it should have garnered a lot more attention than it apparently did. I mean, how many times have you read about aliens stopping in to thieve a planet from our solar system?! In terms of engaging writing with a scientific basis that isn't too hard to buy into, Moffitt rivals Arthur C. Clarke in my mind. This was a fun book that, whilst having its issues, definitely managed to keep me interested in reading it from start to finish.

One of the things that I liked the most was that the aliens didn't even really seem that interested in Earth. They were stopping by our solar system for a specific reason, yes, but checking out (and potentially invading and enslaving) the Earthlings wasn't exactly top of the list. I mean yeah, they'll take a curious poke about, but wouldn't you? Other than that, though, what's a little planet-stealing/gaz-guzzling amongst neighbors?

The only thing I really had a problem with in the book was one of the character's abilities to pick up an alien language in a seemingly very short amount of time. It drove me a bit bonkers, but it did move the story along, so I just tried to shrug it off.

On a fun note, take a look again at the cover of *The Jupiter Theft*. It looks absolutely ridiculous, doesn't it? But the truth is, the artist illustrated one of the scenes from the book pretty faithfully. The Cygnans were so strange, but then again, they all were. All the aliens in the book were well-imagined. From the scents-y humanoids to the Jovian hunter, they were all interesting to imagine.

The pace is perfect. The dialogue can be a little awkward at times, but for the most part it's good. The science can occasionally make you want to go cross-eyed, but if you just re-read the passage once or twice, you'll get what he's saying. Overall, *The Jupiter Theft* is an imaginative science fiction adventure set in a future that's only slightly off from our current one. I think if you're a fan of the more optimistic sci-fi of older decades, you need to give *The Jupiter Theft* a read.

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**Dean Burnett says**

[MULTIPLE SPOILERS DISCUSSED, PROCEED WITH CAUTION]

Ok so this is, overall, a good fun sci-fi romp which introduces some genuinely interesting alien life and major-scale science, and it's cool that, even though the plot revolves around the destruction of our solar

system's biggest planet, the overall vibe is still upbeat and optimistic.

The book does fall down a bit for me though. Part of it is entirely personal because it was maybe the third book in a row I'd read where Jupiter gets destroyed. Not sure if this is a surprisingly common sci-fi plot element or just an extremely unlikely coincidence, but it was a bit grating. It's obviously going to be hard for a book to keep you completely onside when you're in the frankly-ludicrous mindset of feeling sorry for gas giant, but there we have it

But the main issue that really got to me is one that means I struggle with a lot of sci-fi, classic or modern. A great deal of it seems, to me, to lead with the cool science idea, then add the human characters later, almost as an afterthought, or even as a necessary evil to 'justify' the science stuff the author really wants to talk about.

This often results in characters that come across as shallow or poorly developed, or saying and doing things that no actual human would ever say/do. Because the author isn't too concerned with them, they're just means to an end. This causes serious derailment of suspension of disbelief, especially since the characters are basically what drives every story. It really takes me out of the book when it happens.

And it happens in TJT quite a lot. The most glaring one is as follows. Towards the end, the large group of astronauts that had been sent to Jupiter to investigate, have been captured and are being held captive in the alien zoo, where they keep samples of creatures that inhabited the planets and systems they visited/destroyed. Our main protagonists aren't captured, they're trying to save the day so to speak, but they find the captive humans.

The captive astronauts have decided to travel with the aliens, so they can explore the galaxy, which is nice of them. But they've all been left naked and unprovisioned because the aliens, who aren't evil exactly, don't realise what humans need. A primitive way of speaking to the aliens has been worked out, and the nominal head of the captured group asks the protagonists to find and tell the aliens they're happy to go with them, but need supplies.

The line is something like "Tell them we need food, water, clothing, birth control..."

And that took me right out of it. Birth control?!?! A group of \*qualified astronauts\* are captured on an alien spacecraft, naked, reduced to the status of zoo exhibits, know for sure they won't see Earth ever again, have maybe one chance to get a message to their quasi-captors, and their priority is to make sure they can have casual sex without worrying?

This would be ridiculous enough by itself, but a major plot point of the story is one where weird parasitic growths on the aliens are revealed to be the males of the species, mindless symbiotes who provide essential substances as well as fertility as and when needed.

Basically, these aliens have \*no concept of sex\*, casual or otherwise. Exactly how the heroes are supposed to use their very limited alien vocabulary knowledge to explain what birth control is and why it's needed, is anyone's guess.

The idea that experienced astronauts would do this just threw a total spanner in the works for me. Others may not feel the same, and that's fine, but this is my review and I felt it needed saying.

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## **David says**

Maybe 3.5 stars. Lots of science ficiton elements. Unique central premise. Not so much for character-oriented readers.

Spoilers below

The central concept is an alien society which is using gas giant planets as fuel for interstellar travel. They stop at our solar system to "refill their gas tank" by preparing their process to enlist Jupiter as their fuel for the next leg of their journey. As the aliens approach the solar system, their deceleration from near-light-speed creates an x-ray source noticed by human astronomers. A human space mission intended to study Jupiter goes to investigate. From there, a considerable part of the story is about most of the human crew being treated like zoo animals, how crew factions fight over what to do, and the crew's concerns if the exit of Jupiter from the solar system will harm Earth. Plausibility is stretched by one crew member being treated differently - who just happens to have perfect pitch and is capable of re-programming a conveniently available moog organ to be able to communicate with two aliens...

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## **Trevor McGuire says**

This is a fun little book full of lots of hard science (or some real solid attempts at it), traditional SF characters, some backstabbing, a hero and a liberal dose of Red Scare.

The story centers around a human expedition to Jupiter that ends up being rerouted because of surprise visitors from outside our solar system. First Contact ensues and the reader is taken on a journey through their massive interstellar craft, given a detailed exposition of their anatomy, science and language, and then finally shown what their goal is. Throw in some man versus man subplots and you have yourself a fun read.

Oddly enough, the thing I liked most about this book was that the women weren't all 10's, as is common in SF. Annoyingly, though, the women tended to be the only characters whose physical characteristics were described at all (other than the square jaw of a man, for example), but the fact they weren't stereotypically beautiful was a nice change.

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## **Ric says**

One of the books I read in the 80s. It somehow made an impression because I still remember even after I've forgotten other, more popular titles.

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## **Eric Simmons says**

It was an interesting read. It's an interesting take on the basic alien invasion story with the twist being that the aliens aren't at all interested in Earth. Their technology is far more advanced than ours, they find us a bit interesting but then brush us aside and take what they want. They aren't out to destroy us, in fact they really don't give us much thought at all.

Ironically the biggest threat to the human race, even after the invading aliens make their appearance is other humans.

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### **Charles Harrison says**

Rating this book was harder than I expected. It was hard to weigh up overall: On one hand the dystopian future is rich and interesting on the other this gets completely ignored in the surprise optimistic ending. On one hand the physics is simply beautiful and makes amazing use of relativity on the other this gets really bogged down and over explained. On one hand the alien biology is detailed and original on the other a pair of deus ex machina aliens turn up when needed to speed up the plot. On one hand the characters each get their own backgrounds and motivations on the other they are all utterly forgettable and hard to keep track of. See what I mean? There is a lot to like for hard sci fi fans it just seems to set high standards and then fall short of them. Strangely there is such a richness of ideas it is a shame they were not explained over several stories rather than all crammed into one.

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### **Alan Clark says**

Fast-paced, scientifically literate, hard SF. Much better than the average rating would suggest, imo, with plenty of interesting aliens, facts and ideas.

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### **Steven says**

I read this book because it uses the idea of a language that requires absolute pitch. The aliens were somewhat interesting, their technology and history somewhat more so, but the stultifying presence of stupid governments throughout most of the book was almost overwhelming.

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### **Bill says**

Fun science-fiction novel that pulled me in with elements of space opera (risky missions! narrow escapes! freaky aliens!), hard-science sci-fi (plausible artificial gravity limitations! freaky alien biology!) and political maneuvering... in space! Published in the 70's, Moffitt's vision of the future now has odd elements of alternate history as well, for someone reading it in 2016.

I'm always happy when a novel presents an alien race that is, well, genuinely alien, and the ones in this book fit that bill. Their biology, society, technology, and means of communication make their cryptic attitude towards humans plausible yet still disturbing.

The book does suffer a little from one of my sci-fi peeves -- characters explaining things to each other. But here it makes a certain amount of sense, as the humans try to deduce the nature and intentions of the aliens with incomplete information.

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## **Anilecia says**

Very much a hard sci-fi from the 70s, it includes a great deal of information on space travel and the physics of life in space.

The story starts slow, with that peculiarly-70s style of detached writing and is much more "tell" than "show". I almost gave up on it until the Cygnans show up, which is when the narrative becomes interesting.

If you like sci-fi it's worth the read, just don't give up on it.

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## **Michael says**

This is a very solid and well-written hard s-f novel from the seventies, which has largely been ignored since, perhaps in part due to the lousy title. The title might cause you to think it was a space opera heist story of some kind, rather than scientifically rigorous sci fi. Moffitt is not a trained scientist, however he managed to make predictions which, by and large, do not seem dated almost forty years later. That's not to say that he predicted i-phones or goodreads, but within the range of technologies he imagined for the mid-twenty-first century, there are few which seem dated now, and many which appear quite prescient, including tablet computers and robot listening devices (drones). His aliens also come across as genuinely original, not as carbon-copies of human beings with a few odd characteristics, and he has given considerable thought to the linguistics of communicating with a species with entirely different vocal arrangements.

I don't usually spend a lot of time worrying about "spoilers" in my reviews – I figure if you're reading a book review, you want to know what the book is about. In this case, however, I'm inclined to leave out a lot of the details, because I won't be able to describe them as interestingly as Moffitt does, and you'll get more out of seeing his scientific explanations than my re-telling of them. The cover of the book gives a little bit away, however: "The enormous alien convoy was a world unto itself – what could it possibly want from a lifeless planet?" That, plus the title, sets you up at least for the first part of this book.

The book begins very similarly to *The Black Cloud*, so much so that I suspect it of being a deliberate homage. A few astronomers detect something coming towards our system, and quickly recognize that it is extremely dangerous, possibly capable of destroying all life, on its current trajectory and speed. However, it soon baffles everyone by changing speed and making course corrections. This is the point where Moffitt starts to go his own direction. The object comes from roughly the same part of the sky as Cygnus, and so is dubbed "Cygnan," and as the blurb suggests it is actually a group of alien ships with a very unique (and still plausible) propulsion system. The convoy parks itself around Jupiter and a human mission is sent to investigate.

Moffitt is very good at "story engineering," as well as giving precise technical descriptions, a combination that is relatively rare (given a choice, I'd rather have good science than good stories, but I appreciate the combination when it occurs). The plot contains many suspenseful cliffhangers and nail-biters, and the timing of them is perfectly attuned to keep the reader hanging on and wondering how he will resolve this or that issue. Where he seems a bit weaker, at least in this first book, is characterization. Many of the human characters are largely one- or two-dimensional and interchangeable with one another. He had two young women characters named "Maggie" and "Maybury," and I found it almost impossible to distinguish them

right up to the end. At the least, the women in this book were professionals and technicians, not just love/sex-interests for the males, and they actually did things to further the plot. The main character is a solid hero, but not terribly interesting. The technology and alien characters are where a lot of color comes in. One other minor nit-picky point is that I didn't think his geo-political predictions held up as well as his technological and scientific ones.

The final point I'd make is that as much as I enjoyed it, the ending more or less decided that I couldn't give it that fifth star. It's a satisfactory ending, but it leaves a few threads untied and it also fails ultimately to justify the entire book as a discussion of the human condition. It's very hard to express why without going into "spoilers," but the book loses its sense of purpose in the final pages and just seems to end because Moffitt was out of ideas. Despite this, it was a genuinely enjoyable read, and something sci fi fans should take the time to rediscover.

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### **Shayla Morgansen says**

The blurb likened this book to the work of a favourite of mine, Arthur C Clarke, and in style, it definitely came close. Honest, hard science formed the solid foundation of this 1977 sci-fi and made for a convincing, interesting series of events. The main character, Jameson, was likeable and his defining ability of perfect pitch was introduced gently enough that I didn't roll my eyes when it became pertinent to the success of the mission.

Unfortunately, this fantastic foundation is not enough to create an actual story, and while Moffitt develops an awesome story universe, he then does very little within it. Characters spend months building a spaceship (its specifications, functions and components all painstakingly explained, all very interesting) and then spend months learning about an extra-solar alien species (again, very interesting and carefully thought out, from anatomical differences to social motivations) but not much else \*happens\* in that time. The ending is reasonably satisfying but the journey isn't entirely, so the book lost a star from me at this point.

The other star I took from my rating of *The Jupiter Theft* came away due to the peppering of sexism that moved me from good-natured eye-rolling to frowning by about halfway through the book. The opening scene is spaced across the POVs of two male characters, who both note the female character's attractiveness and make mention of her breasts in their internal monologue. This while a dangerous new x-ray source is being discovered in the sky and is taking up everyone's attention, supposedly. Descriptions of female characters throughout the book never fail to comment on breast size, and it was about the point when a female character was encouraged to share herself around among the male crew on the spaceship that I took a break from reading. I realise that this book is as old as the first *Star Wars* and I appreciate that works are reflective of the views of their times, but it's still disappointing that in the same year that Lucas gave us modestly-dressed, independent and capable Princess Leia, Moffitt was describing how Maybury's breasts behaved in the moon's low gravity.

So, three stars.

If you enjoy good hard science fiction world-building and can overlook some olden days commentary, I expect you would thoroughly enjoy this book.

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### **Kevin says**

I admit it. This book is guilty of having clunky characterization, and it's not a great soul-rending exploration of the human psyche. But it deserves classic status within the genre. Here is a premise as incredible as the



best of Clarke or Niven, and an alien species both strange compelling. I need nothing more

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