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Cat, the halfbreed telepath hero of *Catspaw* and *Psion*, joins a research team on Refuge, homeworld of his mother's people, the Hydrans. Immediately, he finds trouble when he helps a Hydran woman escape human pursuers.

The decimated Hydran population of Refuge is confined to a bleak "homeland," by a huge corporate state, Tau Biotech. Tau also controls Refuge's one unique natural resource, "Dreamfall." The tangible residue of cast-off thoughts from beautiful, enigmatic "cloud whales," dreamfall forms vast reefs, sacred to the Hydrans, but mere exploitable data to Tau.

Caught between Tau and desperate Hydrans who fight to reclaim their world, Cat must somehow forge the ruins of the past into a means to defeat Tau's brutality to save his people--and himself.

Dreamfall Details

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From Reader Review Dreamfall for online ebook

Anne Barwell says

This is the last book in the author's Cat series, and I really hope there is another one in the works considering the way it ended. While it's realistic and I can see Tau having their last ditch revenge on Cat for what he's done, it's just...I wasn't happy. He's definitely not happy.

I love this series, it has everything I like in it, psi powers, angst, whumping, a good storyline and characters and it's realistic in that it's not pat happy endings or solutions. I also love the way the Hydrans parallel TP in a lot of ways with their abilities, not being able to kill, and in this story, the love between Miya and Cat which forms a telepathic bond between them. It's definitely a series I'd recommend and one I'd added to my wish list for my own copies.

Sam says

Oh Joan D. Vinge. Why did you revive a series I enjoyed years after? I loved Catspaw and thought the ending satisfied Cat's tale quite well. Enter Dreamfall, which is just a mess of a novel. I'm giving it a 2 because I think Vinge's writing is still solid, I just truthfully think that there was no reason for us to go back and see how Cat's doing when his story felt complete prior. I wanted to enjoy this one, but I was just so frustrated with what the story was doing and how it moved, and that essentially killed what little enjoyment I had.

Julie Decker says

Cat has landed on a planet with a large indigenous population of Hydrans, and since he himself is half Hydran, he decides he wants to go see the Hydran town. Unfortunately, just like with full-blood humans, Cat finds himself feeling unwelcome--partially because he is telepathic like Hydrans are, but has brain damage that forces him to keep his mind closed. Just when he feels there's really no place that will accept him, Cat meets a strange Hydran woman on the run from law enforcement, and he finds her so compelling that he helps her escape without question. One complication, though: she's stolen a child. With that, Cat follows his connection to the woman--Miya--only to find that her kidnapping of the child is considered a terrorist action, and Miya's sister Naoh is indeed a freedom fighting leader who wants humans to get off their planet. When he learns why Miya thinks the child is better off in her care and why the humans' presence has been poisoning the Hydrans for so long, he can't help but sympathize, but still, he is half human too--which not only gives him a connection to the other half of his heritage, but makes him well aware of what horror they are capable of.

Cat not fitting in with humans was central to the previous two books--*Psion* and *Catspaw*--but his connection to the Hydrans wasn't explored really until now. I loved seeing him learn about his other people, explore a real romantic connection, acknowledge the depth of his wounds, and set about healing them. And of course, I love how right and wrong are not black and white in this book--how nobody's really the good guy and nobody stands for "the truth" (including the protagonist). It was also nice to see some Hydrans who were

diverse--not painted as a spooky race of aliens that all have one mind--and I liked the themes of healing that permeated this novel after following Cat through so much pain. Vinge is a phenomenal character writer. Readers who like multilayered, three-dimensional characters with an intimate connection to the narration should read this.

Miriam says

Vinge is one of my favourite scfi authors. Not only because she is an excellent writer but because she reveals a compassionate soul. Probably it is in this book where she shows this in a beautiful and, at the same time, a crude narrative. The core of the world is one of horrific and icy oppression and the counterpart, the fight for human values: dignity, fair dealing, justice, etc. It is the second time I read it, but at that time, almost ten years ago, I didn't notice how powerful the message was. I should say that the world she describes is not very much different to the world we are living today, with almost untouchable worldwide secret services, powerful private corporations doing as it pleases their greed, extreme inequality, colonialism in its worst form (does exist a good form?).

Viridian5 says

The first time I read *Dreamfall*, I did it not long after reading *Psion* and *Catspaw*. *Dreamfall* wasn't the sequel to *Catspaw* I'd wanted, which affected my rating of the book.

Twenty years later, far less fresh with the material, I tackled it again and probably more objectively for itself as a single book. It's not bad and I finished it pretty quickly out of wanting to see how things turned out, but for this book--and this series--the reader needs to be able to deal with the protagonist constantly being tormented physically, emotionally, and mentally, sometimes to the point of becoming ridiculous and nearly funny (to me at least), sometimes in ways that some readers might find triggery (view spoiler) This book is especially thick with torment; even by the standards of the other books in the series I found it a bit extreme.

I think I picked up the worldbuilding and cultures better this time than on my first read.

Caitlin says

A good book with a bummer ending. Not surprising, I suppose, since the theme of this novel is the near impossibility of surviving as an outsider in a world governed by the corporate state.

Cat's a sweet character who somehow manages to be a bridge between peoples, but also manages to find himself alone & disregarded.

This is a book filled with longing - for community, for change, for love, for companionship, for a way to be whole. Vinge writes interesting characters & the plot here is nicely character driven, although she doesn't really do anything with the cloud whales and their dreamfall - odd to set up such a cool premise & then just sort of leave it there.

This is the third book of a trilogy and I think I like the second one, *Catspaw*, best. The characters, landscape, & ideas are more diverse - alien, but not alien all at once.

Kurt Lieber says

If you go into this series expecting a happy ending, you're gonna have a bad time. In fact, if you go into this series expecting anything other than soul-crushing depression and abject, chronic melancholy, you're gonna have a bad time.

It's almost as if the author measures the literary quality of her works by the amount of misery and pain she can inflict on the protagonist. To her credit, just when you think the main character has hit bottom, she pulls the false bottom out from under you so you can continue watching him tumble inexorably downwards.

I don't expect all novels to be happy-go-lucky fairy tales, but nor do I go into a book expecting to need therapy when I'm done with it. There was almost nothing redeeming about this book unless you're a shareholder in pharmaceutical companies that specialize in anti-depressants.

Yeah, so....not a huge fan of this book or the series.

Jonathan says

Given my love of Psion, this review is riddled with disappointment and someone else might give it another star out of some kind of misguided pity.

Shambling adolescent sulker stumbles through grindingly plodding narrative. In the debut novel "Psion", the behaviour matched the age, but now it drags. Despite this, two random women throw themselves at our hero and two more sexually assault him (much less exciting than it sounds, no really). Psion has a wonderful spirit of magic and mystery, of a tense combative foe in a cruel uncaring world. Dreamfall has dreams crushed underfoot by mechanical processors.

In a wonderfully backhanded review on the back cover of my edition a reviewer says "The cloud-reef backdrop is spectacular". True and desperate all at the same time...

Angela says

Well, it was great to hear the end of the story for Cat. And although it did not end entirely happily for Cat, I felt like Vinge left enough unsaid to assume he'd figure out a way to enjoy a happy ending eventually.

My biggest criticism is regarding Cat's tattoo. It was mentioned several times in book two, and in this third book it was brought up every few chapters. I am somewhat irritated it was not used as a plot point. I mean, the tattoo was not even part of Cat's character--he cannot remember when or where he got it. It was a dead end character trait, that was referenced too many times to be ignored. Because it kept coming up, I assumed it was important; and I am most annoyed it was not.

Not my favourite installment of Cat's journey, but I do not regret finding out the next chapter of his life.

Marie says

I feel like I'm coming out of dreamfall myself—a long waking dream that started when I began reading the Cat series. Book lovers know what I'm talking about: your non-reading time feels like a haze, because you're not aware of the here and now. You're still inside the novel.

While Psion was more of a coming-of-age/adventure and Catspaw more political intrigue, Dreamfall felt like a film noir, with Cat uncovering a mystery that leads him to the ghetto streets of Freaktown and eventually the corrupt and cold-blooded men that keep up the status quo. It's not as hard-bitten in style as something like *The Big Sleep*, though. Cat's longing for connection and forgiveness soften the tone, although he has some dark musings about human nature. Cat's thoughts added such texture to the story. He would often think with the delicacy of poetry, but switch to say something incredibly hard-as-nails out loud. Those reversals were so delightfully surprising.

There was an overall feeling of isolation in this book. The isolation of your own biology, of a community kept at arm's length. The isolation we impose upon ourselves. Of how another being, whether human or alien, is ultimately unknowable. That sense of being blocked in wasn't obvious, but kept the events tied together nicely.

Dreamfall is the third—and sadly, last—book in this series, and it feels more like an *Empire Strikes Back* than a *Return of the Jedi*; that soft minor chord before the music swells to a magnificent crescendo. (view spoiler)It's ripe for a triumphant final installment in the series. I'll just have to hope that Joan Vinge recovers her health and finds the right spark that will set her hand to writing it.

Still, this book works well as a stand-alone, although readers will have a greater emotional connection if they read the series from the beginning. I hope those who pick it up have their own dreamfall.

Roger says

The book seemed like just a reason for the author to pile more abuse on Cat.

Brooke Banks says

Recommendation: If you insist on completing the trilogy. Otherwise, *Catspaw* (#2) is the must-read while *Psion* (#1) is solid.

Rating: 2-2 ½ stars I read it, enjoyed parts of it but it has problematic tropes and nonsensical premises I can't accept with a unsatisfying ending.

Pros

Get up close and personal with Hydreans...

Cons

...Who are a classic example of Magical Native Americans, with Noble tokens

Insta-love

Sucktastic ending

It's basically Psion redux with insta-love only it's open ending isn't the beginning of a trilogy, it's the dissatisfying result of one. It's not all bad but I love Cat, he's what I read for, found pleasure in when others didn't. His ending SUCKS. It pisses me off. Sure, I can imagine how things will go after the last sentence but I don't want headcannon, I want closure.

Maybe it's more fitting with the theme and it take another book to make it right but still. Vinge made me care, connect with him and I'm left to drift among the stars asking questions without answers...Okay, so it definitely fits with the tone and message of the Cat books but that doesn't change my discontentment.

I'll gladly take and read more of Cat's life and to leave it hanging so precariously is disappointing. Before Hydreaens were described vaguely with little information on daily life and culture but in Dreamfall we get up close and personal, which initially convinced me to read it. However, it's obvious they're Magical Noble Native Americans, which is hardly acceptable. Toss in how people keep bringing up how their civilization was declining when Humans popped up and how their welfare is tied to the land and it becomes enraging.

Reading this made me realize what felt off about Psion's villain. For someone proclaimed as so radical and dangerous, he hadn't actually planned on harming anyone. He was just willing to fight back, cut off their valuable supply. Yet the good guys are being used and trying to convince humans that they're valuable tools. Why is it always "Be a monster or be a useful tool"? The fight for the rights of people to be recognized is still being fought on the terms of the oppressors, which is something I'm not down with.

Not only that but the big drama of the book is this conflict between two sisters: one a radical terrorist willing to harm and the other subjugating herself to prove how harmless and useful Hydreaen's powers could be to their oppressors. In Psion there was much the same but instead both men on each side of Cat were irritating fucks who learned their lesson. Instead, the same dichotomy shows up wearing my patience and one woman is clearly the favored option. Cat praises her and is punished for how he bucks the status quo.

The feedback loop thing still gets me though. Before it had little enough impact in Catspaw to overlook while in Psion I took Cat's damage as PTSD to rationalize it. However, in Dreamfall there's a deadly altercation between a Human and a Hydreaen.

It means you can't defend yourself, which I have a huge problem with. It's talked about how it evolved that way to help them manage and control their powers, but that sounds stupid unless the Hydreaens themselves made it so because evolution isn't guided or linear, you adapt to the environment and that feedback loop seems like the quick way to an evolutionary dead end. And the scene where "everyone's fears about Hydreaens and Humans fight were realized" is stupid because they wound up dead, like everyone knew they would. Where's the threat to Humans, exactly? Even if there were a Hydra for every Human (there's not), they'd all be dead. They'd have to outnumber them vastly to be able and willing to sacrifice one person for every human and survive to tell the tell. Sounds like "Yellow Peril" and its ilk bullshit.

Dave says

Poor, poor Cat. He's like the universe's personal chew-toy.

Also, I'm pretty sure "Namaste" is not an alien expression. I suppose it could just be symbolic?

I keep waiting for Cat to grow a pair and start taking some agency in his life instead of just reacting (often in the worst possible way) to the shit that constantly comes his way.

I mean, he has the potential to be a major player, but he's always too scared to live up to it unless someone's got his balls in a vice- which they usually do- and even then he never goes far enough.

I guess he's afraid to turn into another Quicksilver, but hey, Rubiy's ideas weren't ALL wrong.

Denise says

Tangible residue of cast-off thoughts from beautiful, enigmatic cloud whales - I don't see how anybody could read that phrase and not want to go on and read the book about it. Of course it's not as good as you imagined - how could it be?

Swankivy says

Dreamfall is the third book in the Cat series (so read *Psion* and *Catspaw*), and the least enjoyable in my opinion, which makes it about six times better than all books anyway. *Dreamfall* is the story of Cat's exploration of his heritage. While traveling to a distant planet with his university to study the "cloud whales," Cat goes to the "Homeland" (where the indigenous Hydran population lives, much like Native Americans were pushed off of their land to reservations) and ends up in a mess. His telepathic talent still doesn't work except maybe once in a while, so he finds he isn't really welcome over in the Hydran town because keeping his mind closed is offensive to them.

As he is feeling hopeless about not fitting in with either the humans or the Hydrans, a woman smacks into him, running away from security, and drops a child's databand into his hand as she runs away. He helps her escape and ends up taken into custody himself. He is interrogated and briefly tortured, but since he knows nothing he is unable to help them catch the Hydran woman, who apparently kidnapped a human child.

It comes out that the child is Joby, a baby with neurological damage that makes him unable to control himself at all, and so his family had hired a Hydran companion for him to make him able to move and react the way he wanted to in an attempt to rehabilitate him. The woman, Miya, took off with their son for reasons unclear. Cat feels a connection to the woman, though, and ends up meeting her again very soon, when she explains herself to him. She takes him to the Hydran town and tries to help him get to know the people, though her sister, Naoh, takes an immediate aversion to him.

Miya and Cat become lovers, and Cat learns the Hydran language and attempts to act as a go-between for the humans and the Hydrans. But trouble is brewing (of course). The humans see the Hydrans as terrorists holding the child hostage, and the Hydrans--specifically a freedom-fighting radical group of them--see the

humans as invaders. They are led by Naoh in a fight against the humans, and Cat is swept up in it, yet again, trying to find his feet. Cat thinks Naoh is wrong and very sick, and tries to stop the Hydrans from attacking the humans, but Naoh is too persuasive and ends up getting hundreds of people to riot. And the humans retaliate with a kind of gas that makes Hydrans unable to use their psionic abilities, rendering them helpless and confused. Cat, Miya, and Joby retreat to a quiet place to heal.

There are tons of details I've missed here, of course--Cat's attempts to expose Corporate Security's treatment of their bonded workers; Cat's friendship and relationship with Kissindre Perrymeade, his classmate who is somewhat entranced by him; his relationship with an old woman known as an *oyasin* who teaches him much about life and himself. But of course it all comes together in an ending that definitely isn't "happy" but just seems right. Cat is much more mature now and his exploration of the Hydran part of himself is fascinating; he always felt very human because of being raised thinking he was only human, and so it's great to see his acceptance of both halves.
