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Philip K. Dick Award-winning author of *Ship of Fools* and the Carlucci trilogy.

After he crash-landed on an untamed planet, young Cale Alexandros was a slave for most of his life. But when freed, he would discover a secret that some people want to learn-and a revelation that some will do anything to control.

The Rosetta Codex Details

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From Reader Review The Rosetta Codex for online ebook

C.M. Muller says

The first part of this book was absolutely wonderful, the middle section left me feeling a bit disappointed, the end redeemed the whole to a slight degree. Overall, the concept and writing was brilliant, but I found myself losing interest in the story about halfway through. I think a lot of this had to do with the various jumps in time, in which we follow the young protagonist into adulthood. That said, I am a huge Richard Paul Russo fan. If this is your first foray into his fiction, I suggest you hold off on this one in lieu of either "Ship of Fools" or "Destroying Angel".

Elana says

It's one of those books that are good novels without being good SF. The story is the bildungsroman of Cale who is determined to bring an alien race back to life through the Codex of the title. The book is beautifully, even hauntingly, written: details of life on alien worlds stand out with an almost hallucinatory vividness; Cale's tribulations are well-described; the plot and focalization are impeccably handled. But...what is the point? Who are those aliens? Why is Cale so determined? Is there fate at work? Something important is on the verge of being said but we never find out what it is.

Bandit says

This is the second book I've read by the author and, though it definitely isn't as good as Ship of Fools, I found myself enjoying it quite a lot. I'm fairly new to scifi, I know world building is suppose to be a huge element and there was some of that in the book, but I think Russo's main strength is in his writing and his characters. The main protagonist, Cale, was a very compelling reluctant yet steadfast sort of hero on a mission I'm not sure I even agree with, but was interested in reading about. That's pretty much all of the story, it follows Cale (considerably more likeable than his homonym vegetable namesake) from the time he lands on a distant planet as a child to him ushering in a new age of alien/human contact as a young man. This book was definitely more of a journey than a destination sort of read, it didn't have enough drama or conflict or suspense and at times came across as somewhat episodic, but I liked it and was entertained thoroughly. I think it wasn't exciting enough to wow, but sometimes slow and steady does ok too. Maybe I was just in the right mood.

Mojofiction says

Science Fiction is similar to fantasy; it usually requires some kind of world-building. But where fantasy world-building is often filled with intrigue and mystery, I've found some science fiction to be overly expository, which can be dull or lead to really long books.

In The Rosetta Codex, author Richard Paul Russo skews in-depth world-building in favor of immediate action. That's probably a wise choice, because the story focuses entirely on one character. With one focus,

the author can play his cards a little closer to the vest and give us a limited view of the universe through only that character's eyes. It lets your imagination fill in some of the blanks, which can be fun. There are some pitfalls though, when creating that balancing act between world-building and storytelling.

THE STORY

Marooned in the harsh wastelands of a hostile planet at the age of five, Cale Alexandros lives as a slave, with no idea of his life before and no prospects of a life now. His only real memory is a cryptic final word from his father instructing him to never tell anyone the family name. Fed up with slave life, Cale tries to escape, only to discover that the rest of the world is just as terrible. But then a solitary trader finds him and shows him the way out to a great city called Morningstar. Cale takes the journey alone. Along the way he happens upon the remains of a long-gone alien civilization. But he won't realize the significance of his discovery until he reaches Morningstar. By then, he's seeing his world in a different light. Who was the mysterious trader? And what is so important about the dead alien culture?

THE REVIEW

The Rosetta Codex is a fast-paced novel, but the author is up to the task with effective prose that doesn't meander or overly-complicate matters with sub-plots that go nowhere (as world-building in sci-fi sometimes leads to). Cale's journey is dangerous and suspenseful. Much of the time is stuck in his head as he experiences the world around him, but it's handled well and builds the character.

Unfortunately, Cale's journey to Morningstar is only the first act of the book, and even his arrival and stay at Morningstar are only stopovers to a longer journey, and a more complicated plot. I say unfortunately, because once Cale arrives at Morningstar, the author opens the story up to more characters and events. That's fine, but the events take place over the course of several years and lead to further events that stretch out over even more years. It's all very compressed in the narrative. Within that time characters quickly come and go. It's hard to feel anything for them or really gauge their impact on Cale.

The same is true for the universe the author has constructed. There are other planets and other species, but they are given short shrift and never feel realized, and any interest that pops up is snuffed out by the hurry-up offense run to keep the plot going (sorry, football reference). By the end, I had a hard time feeling anything at the resolution for both Cale and the plot. It just didn't seem to matter. It didn't feel important enough. Cale's character arc seemed to fall short.

I said world-building is a balance with storytelling in science fiction, and I think the balance is lost here. There are a lot of great ideas and interesting characters. They needed an extra book (I can't believe I'm saying that) to flesh them out. They need fleshing out because the reader needs to better understand their importance to Cale, their motives for their actions, what stakes they are playing for. It's all a little muddled and leads to a generic conclusion.

That's not to say The Rosetta Codex isn't an interesting book. It just covers too much ground in too short of a time. The author is a good writer with a fully-stocked imagination. The characters he does develop are three-dimensional and worth reading about. The trip through the alien portal at the end is fascinating (I won't say any more about that development). It's everything science fiction should be.

He just has too many ideas for one novel.

Kyle Johnson says

I picked this book up while bored out of my skull one evening, interrupting my reading of "The Dragon's Nine Sons". The name was similar to something my dad had mentioned to me just a few days before, though it turns out that was a different book.

For a random snag off the Choice Reads shelf, I was pleasantly surprised by all but the very end of the book. The premise and plot remained interesting throughout, but once I had finished the book, it just felt flat. There weren't many high points in the book, and (as one reviewer pointed out) the main character shows very little emotion throughout the entire book. One of the reasons I enjoyed this book (despite its problems) was that it filled that need I had after reading "The Dreaming Void" of reading something sci-fi/fantasy that was outside the norm. Like the Edeard story-line in "The Dreaming Void", "The Rosetta Codex" is a nice blend of sci-fi and fantasy at the same time.

Would I recommend reading the book? Yes, in part because it was a quick read. Do I think everyone I recommend it to is going to enjoy it? No, probably not.

At this point, my hope is that there is a sequel in the making. I'm not sure what the premise of such a book would be, but the blandness of the end seems kind of like the end of a chapter, more than the end of an entire story.

Shawn says

A few points to summarize this book:

1. The book has an interesting blend of technology and mysticism.
2. Through the main character the reader is introduced to several mysteries and enigmas. However, the presentation of the mysteries was much more appealing than the actual resolution.
3. The flow of time and space is somewhat choppy throughout the book. I found myself backtracking a few paragraphs from time-to-time to understand just what was happening. To the author's credit, he does not bog the story down with long rabbit trails.
4. I don't appreciate profanity. There are several servings of it that are not essential to the story, in my humble opinion.
5. I think the ending needed some explanation as to why an alien race that was physically and intellectually superior needed someone to find a book and use it to activate the revivification process that would bring them back from extinction.
6. There are a few interesting characters and relationships developed throughout the book, although I still don't get why the ruthless Blackburn would have compassion on Cale.

The fantasy worlds and the constant sense of mystery kept me engaged. This was okay for some fun reading. Now back to books with gravitas.

Ivan Mkrtchyan says

Sadly, this book is a lot weaker than brilliant 'Ship of Fools'. It starts with some decent plot-hooks... And

none of them rests resolved.

And yes: too few "gray colors", and the slightest doubt whether the main character is doing right is immediately dissipated by author talking through supporting cast. I guessed what's the ending going to be somewhere through 2/3 of the novel, and still hoped for plot twist. It didn't happen, and that disappointed me most.

Micah Sisk says

Mmm...yeah, it was alright. Not as good as his *Ship of Fools* or his Carlucci trilogy, but reasonable.

As someone pointed out, this is what's called a Bildungsroman, a story that focuses on the protagonist's development through his life...a "coming of age" story and all that. It suffers a bit in that the author seemed more interested in the main character's early development rather than his later "life's work" adventure. Which is a bit sad because the *idea* of what the main character was later to accomplish is pretty cool. Only I don't think we are given enough justification or explanation of it. And other than time itself, there are too few obstacles placed in the protagonist's way during his march toward the story's conclusion. We get too much "this much time passed, he did this, he went here, he did that, badda-bing, DONE" and not enough of "plans laid, plans wrecked, low-point, resurgence, triumphant resolution through difficult circumstances."

Still, it's worth a read if you're in the mood for some good ideas and light entertainment.

Sarah says

This book sounded very promising but unfortunately, for me at least, it dragged quite a bit until I was about 3/4 of the way in when it suddenly sprung into action but then it ended very abruptly which was very disappointing as I really wanted to know more about what happened.

Sarah says

The Rosetta Codex is the story of Cale Alexandros, a boy of wealthy background who at the age of 5 becomes captured and enslaved on a world far from his own. He lives this life until, as a teenager, he flees his captors, sending him on a series of events that bring him to uncover an indecipherable book several years later. This book contains secrets that could change the world forever, and some see that as a threat... a threat that needs to be taken care of by whatever means necessary.

This isn't the strongest story I've ever read, nor is it exactly compelling. Though I give the author his due credit for making the time line realistic - months and even years pass between notable events, rather than happening one right after another - the story lags at times and doesn't really worry about keeping the interest of the reader. While I wouldn't say the story is trite, it doesn't bring much new to the plate, and seems like your typical sci-fi story. Overall, an average book.

Ashley says

This idea was pretty cool, but as with many sci-fi books the concept didn't completely come to fruition. Cale crash landed on a planet as a child. His destiny is apparently to find a Codex that would not only help translate ancient alien manuscripts, but would prove to be the key to the aliens return. This book was overly violent. Descriptions of violence that weren't important to the story. The main problem I found though was I really didn't care about Cale. He wasn't an empathetic character. His nursemaid and lifelong supporter is an attempt to show his humanity, but it doesn't. Also the conclusion just made me feel like the whole journey was pointless. The aliens are back. Great. The end? Just kind of disjointed.

Jason says

Slow going at first, but it builds to a fairly satisfying climax. Clean, well crafted prose made this more enjoyable than much run-of-the-mill SF genre stuff. My wife really liked Russo's Carlucci novels, and so I plan to give them a chance, based on this stand-alone novel.

Jeff says

I really enjoyed this book, by the author of Ship of Fools. The story follows the life of a boy named Cale Alexandros, whose father is killed when the ship they are on is attacked. Cale was 5 when this happened. His father sent him and his guardian, Sidonie, down to the planet they were going to in a shuttle, but it crashes. Cale is taken by a bunch of rogues and is shuffled from place to place and group to group throughout this story. It held my attention very well, and was difficult to put down.

Roddy Williams says

'Cale Alexandros was five years old when his family's starship was attacked en route to Morningstar, the lone outpost of civilization on a savage planet. Cale crash-landed in the wilds, and was picked from the wreckage by brutish nomads.

For years, he was forced to endure life as a slave, until a kind trader finally freed him. But Cale never forgot what he had seen in the desert wastes... or the temple that held a book with pages made of a strange metal, and the writings he could not identify.

When he finally reaches Morningstar, Cale realises the importance of his discovery. For the book is a key to understanding an alien language. But it also holds a secret that some people want to learn – and a revelation that some will do anything to control...'

Blurb from the 2007 Ace paperback edition

A freighter making a clandestine trip to the planet Conrad's World is attacked. The Captain asks a young woman, Sidonie, to take his five year old son, Cale Alexandros, to safety in the city of Morningstar. She and the boy escape the ship but crashland well before the city in the badlands before the Divide, a vast chasm

which separates the apparently civilised city Morningstar from this area, populated by exiles, criminals and political dissidents.

Cale is dragged from the wreckage by a nomadic and savage community who treat him as a slave.

A mysterious and seemingly amoral traveller, Blackburn, offers to take Cale away with him to Morningstar, but Cale, perhaps sensing Blackburn's nature, refuses.

Cale later escapes to another community but is beaten up after being discovered in a compromising position with a young girl and is forced to move on, during which journey he discovers a ruined temple filled with alien hieroglyphs, and a book which contains text not only in the alien characters, but translated into a number of human languages – The Rosetta Codex.

He buries the book with the body of a fellow-traveller and eventually crosses the Divide and reaches Morningstar.

Cale bumps into Blackburn with unlikely regularity, although their meetings don't come to much. He then takes up with a xenoarchaeological cult called The Resurrectionists, and is then tracked down by his old guardian, Sidonie, whom he thought dead.

Sidonie tells him he is heir to an interplanetary corporation. After recovering The Rosetta Codex, he returns to his home world where he plans to follow the instructions in the Codex; to travel to a designated star and awaken the Emissary so that the Jaaprana may live again. He is, however, dogged by Blackburn and the cyborg Sarakheen, Justinian, who need the Codex to translate the alien technology manuals they have amassed.

It would be unfair to call Russo merely a pessimist, although on first reading his work he gives a very bleak, if realistic, assessment of the human condition. Here, we are in a human civilisation in decline. At one point, when trying to persuade Cale of the Sarakheen's need for the Codex(their goal is to create true cyborgs, devoid of human weaknesses) they take him to a remote warehouse where the elite of this new world are watching gladiator-style fight-to-the-death combats. Blackburn's point is that Man, though technologically blessed and having spread to the stars, cannot throw off the dark and savage animal needs that dwell within him, something that the Sarakheen would be able to do with the Codex.

There is, however, goodness in Humanity, which is evinced by Cale himself and the friends he makes.

Several people help Cale and ask for little or nothing in return.

Russo's style generally evokes a curiosity within the reader since although we move through a variety of locations and social settings we do not get a real view of the wider galactic society although it is clear from the text that interstellar human civilisation is in decline. Manufacture of interstellar ships has virtually ceased and although many colonial cities are built on the ruins of the Jaaprana cities there is very little interest in archaeological research.

Cale is given a choice at the climax of the novel and, although the choice is taken out of his hands it is no doubt a question that every reader would ask themselves. What would I have done?

The concept of Fate and Destiny is also a strong theme in this book. Cale meets Alazar on the bad side of the Divide, and is witness to one of his brother's Harlock's visions which appears to relate to the destiny of all three of them in retrospect.

Back on his home world, Cale, apparently coincidentally, meets the brothers again, as well as Blackburn, whose true calling and origins are never determined.

Also, Cale meets with his father's horoscoper, who appears to have set or predicted Cale's destiny from the time before he was stranded on Conrad's world.

This the very concept of free will is brought into question, and is possibly the reason that the decision was taken out of Cale's hands at the denouement.

Johnny Bennett says

The Rosetta Codex is a bit of Indiana Jones set in space. And over the course of several years in the characters life. Russo does a good job of propelling the pace forward but sometimes is a bit sloppy and choppy with months and years being dismissed at the turn of a page. No touchstones of *Cale*; no vignettes that ground the reader into this maturing character. The way the backstory and mysticism weave throughout this story create some exciting knots that come undone gracefully before the reader.

Profanity riddled with mysticism and aliens, the rape in the prologue is the most disturbing part by far. Once through that unpleasant, but not explicit or detailed scene (think one page not several), the rest is typical dystopian fiction. The cruelty and struggle of those outside the utopia and decadence and debauchery of those inside.
