



The Webs of Varok

Cary Neeper

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Silver medalist, YA fiction — *Nautilus Book Awards*

Finalist, science fiction— *ForeWord's Book of the Year Awards*

In an alternate 21st century Solar System: Tandra Grey has left Earth for the ancient sustainable culture of Varok, with its promise of stability for her young daughter. But a genius with a hidden talent sets her eye on Varok's wealth—and Tandra's soul mates. Tandra, the elll Conn, and the varok Orram must untangle a web of deceit to restore balance for Varok and their fragile new family.

“. . . engaging, multi-layered, provocative, and above all relevant to the times. . .” —*Frank Kaminski, book reviewer for Energy Bulletin and Resilience.org*

“. . . a page-turning struggle between the eternal themes of personal accumulation vs. the common good.”
—*Kathy Campbell, past president, League of Women Voters New Mexico*

“. . . so many alien-imaginative twists, intrigues, and betrayals that the spellbound reader won't even realize s/he's being educated!” —*Professor William Rees, originator of the Ecological Footprint concept*

The second novel in Cary Neeper's *Archives of Varok* series, *The Webs of Varok* follows the new, offworld adventures of the characters from Neeper's 1975 novel *A Place Beyond Man*, re-released in 2011. With three more titles coming in 2013-14, the five-volume *Archives of Varok* travels with Tandra's family on quests from Earth to the Oort Cloud with several stops in-between.

Cary Neeper lives in the US Southwest with her husband and a friendly menagerie of dogs, fish and fowl. An avid proponent of sustainability and steady-state economics since the 1970s, she studied zoology, chemistry and religion at Pomona College and medical microbiology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Cary paints landscapes in acrylics, including the cover art for *The Webs of Varok*.

The Webs of Varok Details

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Author : Cary Neeper

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From Reader Review The Webs of Varok for online ebook

Sam says

This is the second book in "The Archives of Varok" and I'm not sure if it would have helped reading the first book before embarking on the second one. That being being said, although I got confused a time or two it did hold my interest and if this is your genre then I recommend you give this a read. I won this from LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

Denzil Pugh says

The best science-fiction/fantasy novels are ones that lie outside the stereotypes of either genre. I abhor reading fantasy just for fantasies' sake. Why escape to another world when you return to the same world as the same person? I like to have meaning in my books, something with meat on it, that I can rip away and take with me. Certainly, there will be a few times when Anne McCaffrey's books will call to me, something light, but usually, I want something more along the lines of Orson Scott Card, where larger moral issues are addressed. In fact, when I read and review books, especially of the sci-fi variety, my question always is, "How would OSC write this?" If I find the answer is, "Just like this," then I know I've found a good book. And such is The Webs of Varok by Cary Neeper.

What surprised me was that this wasn't the first book in this series, but the second. Neeper wrote a book about Alien first contact in 1975, called A Place Beyond Man (which was redone in 2011 as The View Beyond Earth). However, it's not completely necessary to read the other book to understand what's going on. The prologue does an ample job of getting everything set. Further, the forward tells us that what Neeper is trying to do is to create a society with a self-sustaining environment, incorporating population control, a regulatory business trade, and a Utopian system of government based on the idea that citizens are content to live their lives within the confines of regulations in order to prevent the previous cataclysms where ecological and economical systems spiraled out of control. In fact, the book is more about this idea than anything else, leading one to believe that the plot means nothing and that it's going to be the author preaching at us the whole time. This is very far from being true.

The characters, Tandra, the human, Conn, the Elll, and Orram, the Varok, are all very well constructed, done with dialogue, much as OSC would do. In fact, Neeper does an amazing job creating all of the sentient beings on Jupiter's hidden moon. Ellls are aquatic beings who survive on land using clothing that remains wet. They are sensuous beings, outgoing and social. The Varoks, for whom the moon is named, were the main sentient beings until whatever cataclysm befell upon them (a biological war, as it turns out), ripping apart their sense of touch. They have relied upon their development of mental communication, reading each other's minds. In fact, this is the main crux of the novel, that Varoks cannot lie to each other. This keeps the world in check, for no one is able to do anything illegal without being caught. This is the same outcome of Clarke & Baxter's technology of wormhole usage in The Light of Other Days. Thus the world can operate completely differently than Earth. The downside of this is that Neeper (as the characters in the book) would recommend using the same regulations of Varok here on Earth, in present day society. This, of course, is impossible, because human nature will not acquiesce to total regulation by a government. It was tried before, called Communism, and it didn't work, for precisely that reason.

I remember walking through the park here in Conyers, and trying to come up with a society that could live in

harmony with the beauty that I was seeing around me. And having read Ayn Rand and being against governmental control of the individual, I tried to overcome the weaknesses of Rand's world and our own. The only way I could do it was with population control and economic controls that would forbid companies from making forced obsolescence a part of the economic system (see my blog on the forever light bulb coming from Clifford D. Simak's book Ring Around the Sun. In fact, when I stopped thinking about it that day, I had come up with a society very similar to Neeper's Varok, but with the large problem of making people honest with themselves and others. Only a biological or technological breakthrough would accomplish this.

I give The Webs of Varok 4/5 stars on the systems of Goodreads and others because of a couple of plot issues that happen late in the book that threw me off. It might be that something distracted me at the sentence where Orram's disappearance happened, or something. It's not always the book's fault, but I can't reconcile it. I do recommend the book, even to conservatives who would find reading a book written with liberal ideas repulsive. You'll like it. You'll even agree with most of the ideas in the book. They are ideals that conservatives and liberals must strive for (and the goals are usually the same, just arrived at in two totally different ways). I have the first book (75) version, and will get the '11 version, too, and see what differences there are. It looks like the '75 book deals with the differences between the three species, especially those of social and sensual nature. I hope that these books are done as well as this book. I look forward to reading them.

Carolina says

Originally posted at: [A Girl That Likes Books](#)

I got this book through the Early Reviewers program of LybraryThing, and here is my review.

What's the book about?

This is the second installment of the Archives of Varok, by the same author. It's settled in an alternate 21st century where the Earth has gone in overdrive with environmental and economical excess and we have found that one of Jupiter's moons, Varok, is inhabited by species physically different from us but with a lot to teach us on how we should take care of our planet and each Other. Tandra Grey a human, has decided to leave Earth with her new family, composed by a Varok named Orram and an Elll named Conn as well as an adopted daughter. When arriving to Varok, their new home, they realize that something is off with the planet and will have to figure out what it is in order not only to save it but also to save their new family.

What was different of this book?

I've never read a book with such a strong and blunt environmental message. That said...I have a problem with a book that keeps using "germs" as a term to refer to any type of pathogen. Is it the scientist in me? Maybe. But "germs" to me is the same as say "a thingy" instead of calling something by its proper name. Just saying.

What about the main character?

To be completely honest, I'm not 100% sure who was the main character, both Tandra and Conn have big parts, but so does Orram and Mahntik. I think they were all very complex characters, well constructed. However, none of them gave me any feeling of empathy or connection. Tandra is the first-person narrator of

portions of *The Webs of Varok*, like her voyage to Varok with her other family members. Other parts, like when we read about Mahntik conspiring with Gitahl, are in the third-person, and that for me made it even harder to "adopt" a character.

The 10% moment

It took me an awful lot of time to read this book and that also applies to getting to the 10%. I wasn't caught in the story I'm afraid. I don't know if it was due to me not reading the first book, but every review I saw said that it was ok if you didn't. There was something missing for me to fall for the characters.

Final thoughts

The message is very nice, very well delivered. An interesting dissertation if you may on how bad monopolies can be, how abusing the environment can have catastrophic consequences for everyone. The book is beautifully written with enough details for you to picture the varokian environment. The intrigue...well, it was sort off there but there was no climax for me, and the conclusion was weak, in my opinion. I was expecting more development on Mahntik's abilities as well as the struggle of Tara to adapting to a new home. I can see the potential in this book, but it was just not for me.

I am hesitant as to consider this book as Science Fiction since I didn't really see any science part developed. Sure there is the threat of the (ugh) new strains of germs being released as a bioweapon...but I wished there was more about this strains, what do they do, how were they developed. Not a comprehensive text book description, but something more. I almost feel tempted to put it under Fantasy more than SciFi if one might need to choose a genre.

Because of all these reasons I gave this a 2/5, it was a good book, but not a good book for me.

C.M. Truxler says

The Webs of Varok Keeps Readers Tied to Pages

This, the second installment of *The Archives of Varok*, Cary Neeper's new book, *The Webs of Varok*, is a Science Fiction jaunt into intricately detailed worlds and beings, which includes a sampling of Varokian linguistics supplied by the author. The novel, subsequently written to entertain young adults with the Sci-Fi genre, manages to cross over age categories easily and entertain a varied mass of readers. Journeys through embellished discussions have never been so appealing.

The focuses of this first-person work is not singular, or even a couple; the focus of the novel is a family unlike any other, yet will be distinctly familiar to some. Tandra, Orram, Conn, and Shawne make up the unique family, though Tandra seems to be the main narrator. They are a family not of blood, but bonds just as deep and meaningful, perhaps more so in many ways. Each character stands clear and vibrant within the readers mind. Each are live breathing creations of the Neeper's imagination.

The plot is well thought out and expansive, yet no detail is missed. Readers are treated to sketches, at the beginning of the work, of both Varok and Leahnyahorkah (*The Haven of All That Fly*). The sketches add a fitting touch to the validity of Neeper's creations and implant the surrounding landscape deeper within the reader's mind. If the work has a weak point at all, it is the aching feeling of coming into the tale too far in

and missing something. The feeling is highly prevalent at the beginning of the work, but eases more the further into the story a reader travels. Nagging feeling or not, the journey Neeper has created is one any Sci-Fi enthusiast should not miss.

Erin M. says

Tandra Grey, a human woman, flees a troubled Earth with her daughter and her adopted family of two aliens of different species, looking for peace as well as answers for Earth's problems. They return to the aliens' home planet of Varok--a moon of Jupiter--where they hope to live a peaceful life in a society that has prospered in a "Steady-State" economy for centuries. They arrive on Varok, however, only to discover that one greedy woman, named Mahntik, has found a means by which to deceive all those around her and thereby a way to selfishly enact her short-sighted economic ambitions. The peaceful status quo begins to unravel all over the planet. As Mahntik exploits the fear and greed of those around her, the naturally-trustful varoks (who are mind-readers) struggle to find any evidence of her wrong-doing, for Mahntik has an unheard of ability to block her mind from being fully read. Meanwhile, Tandra's family seems to be falling apart, and she wrestles with the idea of going back to Earth or not. Perhaps she and her alien family members are too different, and the answers she hoped to find on Varok aren't there after all.

This idea of a Steady State, which is basically a philosophy of sustainable economic growth and environmental usage, is one of the strongest themes of the book and is essential to the plot. Knowing this, I was on high-alert for any signs of didacticism, for I am rarely in the mood to be preached at, and almost never while I'm reading for pleasure. I am interested in environmental issues, and in learning about solutions for our beleaguered planet, but as a reader the most important thing to me in a novel is story. As I read, I was frankly impressed by Neeper's ability to walk that razor-fine edge between story and Steady State treatise. Every time I started to feel my eyes glaze over a little bit, Neeper would pull me back in with story and with character. Some might disagree with me on this. Some might feel that the agenda was too strong, too present--that it occupied too much of the thoughts and dialogs of the various characters. As for me, I feel like I learned something, and I had a good time doing it.

I always admire writers of science fiction because they have to more or less adhere to the rules of actual science, and therefore have a ton of research to do. They cannot explain away wonky physics with simple magic. (Not that there is anything wrong with magic. I am an avid fan of fantasy. Lower your pitchforks, everyone.) It must have taken Ms. Neeper an enormous and exhausting amount of research to create a believable world within our own solar system, and at a distance from the sun that would seem, even to the most unscientific of minds, antithetical to light and life. But she did it. She turned a non-existent moon of Jupiter into something that actually felt like a real place, complete with strange light and dark cycles, lightning storms, ammonia seas, etc. My understanding of astrophysics is less than small, and where someone like Neil deGrasse Tyson might be able to point out holes in the science, I did not find it hard to suspend my disbelief, nor do I think would most readers.

What set this book apart for me, however--what took it from Really Good to Great--is personified in the amphibious character named Conn. As a character, he kept the story from the dangerous buzz-killing precipice of taking itself too seriously. His voice was the strongest, his story the most compelling to me. Maybe I loved Conn so much because, in him, I recognized the wonderful, unfathomable possibility of being able to relate in a meaningful way to other beings out there in the vast Universe. I mean... come on. Surely we can't be alone. As one character in the movie Contact says, "It would be an awful waste of space."

Conclusion

I approach almost every book I read with a healthy level of skepticism, and this book was no exception. The cover was strange and the subject matter seemed unapproachable, almost as if it were an abstruse manifesto thinly disguised as a novel. I decided to give it a shot anyway, and discovered that my first impression could not have been more wrong. A great book is one that can surprise me into learning something, or remind me of some truth I instinctually know, while still entertaining me. The Webs of Varok did both.

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Kathy says

Neeper's work shows an astounding level of imagination. This book gives you detailed world building, unique cultural systems and a believable yet alien characters. A fascinating read.
