



Cuckoo's Egg

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They named him Thorn. They told him he was of their people, although he was so different. He was ugly in their eyes, strange, sleek-skinned instead of furred, clawless, different. Yet he was of their power class: judge-warriors, the elite, the fighters, the defenders.

Thorn knew that his difference was somehow very important - but not important enough to prevent murderous conspiracies against him, against his protector, against his castle, and perhaps against the peace of the world. But when the crunch came, when Thorn finally learned what his true role in life was to be, that on him might hang the future of two worlds, then he had to stand alone to justify his very existence.

Cuckoo's Egg Details

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Author : C.J. Cherryh

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From Reader Review Cuckoo's Egg for online ebook

Bobp0303 says

I have been reading and rereading this book since sometime in the 80s, I think. My first reading notation says that I'd read it at least twelve times before 2007. The author uses elements of Zen that remind me of Alan W. Watts' "The Way of Zen". I've used Cuckoo's Egg to instruct, soothe, minister -- in fact, it reminds me of my mother's quote from John Denham — 'Books should to one of these four ends conduce, For wisdom, piety, delight, or use.' Cuckoo's Egg does all four.

The only part of the book that's fantasy is given away on the cover itself: an alien has the care of a human baby. The unfolding of that care, the revealed profession of the alien, and ultimately how the situation came to be is truly marvelous. This is one of the vanishingly few books I would rank with Mary Doria Russell's "The Sparrow", although the two books have very little in common. The level of authorial thinking continues to impress me after all these years and readings.

Jacqueline says

One of my favorite books. I've begged Ms. Cherryh for a sequel. I love the way that the human boy is the alien. I loved the warrior culture. I would love to see the hero deal with the incoming humans.

Laura (Kyahgirl) says

I wasn't sure whether to give this a four or a five so I went with five.

Its funny, when you read the words of a really, solidly talented writer you just sense that you are on solid ground. There are no plot devices trying to herd you in a particular direction, no manufactured tensions. It feels real.

This book was unusual in that the story was told in the world of an alien intelligence but the reader, as a human, is the only other human along with the young man being raised in this alien world. It was an interesting perspective.

Cherryh drew me in from the very beginning. I can see why she is a hugo award winning novelist.

Trice says

Spoiler quotes ahead - I think this review is marked, but still figuring out this app do not entirely sure.

"You are my enemy"

"I killed you once"

"I raised you... It made me see what he could have been...if he had been my son"

"I am Haras....I am here...I am Haras...The world is the Earth... I am Haras... I am a man."

She overpowers with her endings and I am still lost in trying to pinpoint exactly in which ways, why's, wherefore I find so overpowering that last conversation between Dune and Thorn, and finally Thorn's words launched out in announcement into a strange universe - he is barely come to himself, barely come to understand his actual relationship, connection, to those he holds desperately closest to him, and he must launch his voice of just barely clawed to manhood into a universe and to a people whose existence he can only begin to conceptualize and try to find communication, understanding, and even a Hatani solution to first contact near 18 years past - the possibility that a violence-begun inter-species relationship can be turned to something different by 2 peoples thinking of other potentialities, other hopes, by 2 peoples with members marveling at the other's power, ability, by 2 peoples who can choose to accept and meet in a different way, now.

A smaller note at the moment and that is that I find it amazing how she can capture a stranger, an other, living in the midst of people so different in their essentials, and trying desperately to understand the truth of them.

Morgan says

Review Title: How do you communicate with a race that you never met or never seen before?

Story:

The world had faced a threat that it had never seen before and had never expected to come to pass. This threat was averted, but at a terrible cost to those who faced it. There was only one man that survived the encounter and the world said that it would give him whatever he asked of it. This man's name was Dunn and he did not ask for fame or for riches.

Instead he asked for something that came from the vanquished enemy that had threatened the people of his world. This came in the form of a young boy named Thorn. It was Dunn's intention to raise this boy in the ways of his people and prepare him for the day that he would go forward and lead Dunn's people forward into the future that awaited them in the stars.

Unfortunately Dunn underestimated how tricky humans can be....

This story kept me turning the pages. There is not a lot of violence or action found in this story until the end, but the interactions between the various characters are almost as good as any battle scene. The author keeps the dialogue tight and it's hard not to feel the tension as Dunn and Thorn test each other as he grows up. It's also very easy to understand how lost Thorn feels after a certain event unleashes the world on him. The only complaint I have is that I wanted to read more about these characters, but it appears this is a standalone book that was written in the beginning of the author's but toward the end of the timeline of the universe she created. So the following books never really touch on this story line again. It's a great read though, and makes you wonder what could have happened after the last page is turned. I would recommend this to

anyone that likes books that build their story around how the characters interact with each other versus how many explosions can be crammed into one book. Mac

Gates Watson says

This is one of my absolute favorite's of C J Cherryh! I love the story of a human baby being created by and raised as another species. Thorn only knows he doesn't look like his guardian or any others on the planet. He doesn't know why others are afraid of him or shun him. He only knows he will do anything to be accepted. When he finally learns not only how he came into being buy why he has to decide if he will accept his destiny.

This was the first book I read from this author and because of it I became a fan for life! I would highly recommend this or any others of her work.

Ben Aaronovitch says

Just reread this. I picked it up while I was shifting books around my living room, read the first couple of pages and then nothing would satisfy except to polish it off that afternoon.

It's almost a coppanion piece to The Palladin in that they both concentrate on the student/master relationship but in this one the the student is the involuntary subject whereas in The Paladin it is the master. The slow build up and, this being CJ Cherryh book, acceleration to breath taking speed still dragged me to the end of the book even though I already knew the twist.

Stevie Kincade says

One of these days CJ Cherryh and I are going to really *connect* on a story. I believe it. I have a dozen Cherryh books on my "to read" table. "Cuckoo's egg" is not that story though.

One of the daunting things about Cherryh is that her books are loooong and they make up parts of larger series. I can't stand reading things out of order even though it seems Cherryh's books work fine as "Stand alones". I really want to read "Foreigner" but if I like it as much as I think I will, I have 15+ more books to read. I want to read "Cyteen" but it looks to be double the size of "Downbelow Station" and that took me a month to read. While "Cuckoo's egg" is listed as "Age of Exploration #3" it is actually a book a lot of Cherryh fans recommend for newcomers to start with. It's not very long, it is accessible and requires no previous reading.

The non-spoiler premise of "Cuckoo's Egg" as we can see from the cover, is that of a human baby being raised by an alien. The Alien's name is Duun-Hatani, Hatani being his caste. Hatani are essentially the warrior-judges of their society. We don't know much about Duun initially but he is clearly an important figure in his society. He raises the human, named Thorn in accordance with what he believes to be a proper childhood, in total isolation from the world. For 16 years Thorn wonders "why am I different"? "Am I mistake"?

To call this novel a "slow burn" would be an understatement. For a good 2/3 of the novel not a whole lot

happens. We watch Thorn grow up and ask lots of questions and get very few answers. Things pick up about 3/4 of the way through and then rush at warp speed to a conclusion. The answers we receive are satisfying and well thought out. I just think the pacing of the book was too slow, then too fast, even though it isn't a long book.

The book raises a number of questions about the nature of our identities and how the way we are raised affects who we are. Given the character's personalities it was hard to get overwhelmingly invested in them. We essentially want Thorn's questions to be answered and we slowly become as frustrated as he does at the "tricks" employed to keep him in the dark.

A word of advice, **don't read the back cover of this book**. It spoils a plot element we only learn 3/4 of the way through.

Sandra says

Cherryh does write the most amazing books. About an alien boy raised by an elite warrior/judge alone on a planet far from earth, the story is intense, emotional, sad, and fascinating. No one does alien cultures like Cherryh.

Katharine says

This is one of my favourite books of all time! I bought a copy in hardcover to survive the number of times I have re-read this book. It stands up with Ursula Le Guin's Left Hand of Darkness (another one of the best). I have read and enjoyed so many of the author's books and her wonderful imaginative ideas and places but none grabbed me the way this one did.

Mer says

This is one of the few books I've reread at least 4 times. It's not very long and can be finished in a day with some carving out of time, it moves along, gives some mystery and I always seem to forget the ending so it's always a nice surprise when I get there.

I didn't realize this is part of a series, I'll have to check out the rest.

Lisa says

A simple story that stays with you - even years later

fromcouchtomoon says

Notable for its alien pov & "human as other" effect, but also of note is that it shares the same year and concept as Ender's Game. Must have been an '80s trend to write simple stories about kids trained to become war criminals.

Yune says

A human infant raised by another species in its strictest discipline. This is not, despite moments of tenderness, a particularly warm tale; it's an introduction to an alien society and a foreign standard of honor, or, from the bleakest angle, a story of the lengths one must go to in order to survive. As seems typical with Cherryh, the build-up is masterful and the pacing near the end hurried, but the entire arc is beautifully rendered.

Martina says

With the bits of information I gleaned from publishing and writer presentations, this book would not be published today because it starts well before the action begins and ends just as the action begins. I was hooked from the beginning though by the character Thorn's struggles and the immense obstacle he faces. He must figure out the world around him while he is isolated from it. As he understands more about himself, his commitment to the world around him, even though he is an alien increases, even as the world rejects him. I liked how the author examines humans through alien eyes.

A weakness in the story is that the technology is almost exactly the same as 1980's Earth with a few tweaks.
