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A Hugo Award-winning novel of destiny and revenge. On the sixteen colonized worlds, mankind had changed: men of War on the Dorsai worlds, men of Faith on the Friendly worlds. Jamethon Black, a Friendly, is a true soldier, and a true man of faith. Now he must face a deadly enemy--an enemy whose defeat will forever separate him from the only woman he has ever loved.

Soldier, Ask Not Details

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Author : Gordon R. Dickson

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From Reader Review Soldier, Ask Not for online ebook

Carol says

4 1/2 stars

I am still 2 books behind schedule and probably going to lose more ground in the next couple of months. So I pulled this one from our 60s scifi bookcase to reread. I knew it would go quickly and that I would be crying as I read the last chapter.

Yes, I enjoyed it. I liked the themes of faith and reason; duty and revenge; love and hate. And Tam changes immensely during the course of the book. That's what makes a book worthwhile.

Although this book is listed as #3 in the Childe cycle, that is based on internal chronology. This was the first book written in that universe. As another reviewer noted, "Soldier, Ask Not" was originally a short story. Dickson's editor and/or agent convinced him to expand it into a novel. And then Dickson went beyond that and wrote the other stories of the cycle. I haven't read all the others, but of the ones I have sampled, this is IMO the best. Some of the others are quite weak in characterization, and reading them feels to me like hard work, while Dickson fills in the imagined future history but without the passion of Soldier Ask Not. Others are pretty good, again IMO, because the development of the character is what is most important to me.

Kathi says

7/10

In this installment of Dickson's Childe Cycle, we learn about the Final Encyclopedia and the man seemingly destined to lead it, Tam Olyn. Turning his heart and unique powers toward "Destruct", Tam roams the galaxy and works his way up the ranks of Newsman's Guild, all the while manipulating people and events as he seeks a very personal revenge with interstellar consequences.

Fast-paced action with philosophical interludes, the book is both interesting and thought-provoking.

Jerry-Book says

The third book in the (supersoldier) Dorsai saga. However, it does not star one of the Dorsai. Instead, it stars a "normal" human (Tam) but one who has a psychological skill for manipulating events. The big issue in the book will be on the good side of history or the dark side. After his brother in law is executed by a soldier from the Friendlies Worlds, it does not look good for the good side. The Friendlies are mis-named since their only export is soldiers with religious fanaticism like today's Isis warriors. In this future the main export each world has is the skills of their people. Also, Tam is being recruited to head the Giant Encyclopedia due to his talents. This will be his good path if he chooses it and not the path of revenge against the Friendlies. One of the super soldiers, a Dorsai, does play a prominent role in the latter part of the book. The main character faces an interesting climax which also involves the Dorsai. Perhaps, a weakness in the book are many of the characters other than Tam are one dimensional especially the female characters. I think a strength of the book is the portrait of religious fanaticism. The black-clad Friendlies warriors seem quite similar to today's Isis warriors. For example, one of the warriors says, "Without my faith I am but common earth. But with my

faith, there is no power can stay me!”

Connor Ha says

excellent

Although Dorsai! Was by far my favorite book in the series, this book also was very good, told in the point of view of someone with less than pure motives. Great ending

Mitchell says

A harder read than I remembered. Basically a logic driven book written parallel to Dorsai!. But in this book, the main character Tam, is a brat. It's hard being in his head page after page. He does dumb things then blames the world. And again there is an ornamental woman, Lisa, to rescue and reward him. And yet the book pulls together right at the very end. This is a book about belief, but I'm not sure that it's right or true. It does try very hard. The whole splintering of man versus those that stay home kind of echoes the out-of-Africa spread of man. Given when it was written, I'm not sure it was intentional or what it would mean. But there are questions sitting there. 3.5 of 5.

prcardi says

Storyline: 2/5

Characters: 4/5

Writing Style: 4/5

World: 4/5

Dickson weaves ambience like few others. From the first pages you find yourself mesmerized by an eeriness that has nothing to do with horror. The ether from which this tale descends is heavy with enigma and foreboding. It promises a march through the human psyche, with all the concomitant darkness and ill-will potentially therein.

We again start with a character weighted with possibilities. We again are confronted with that elusive yet ever-so-powerful personal attribute: charisma. Dickson is going to try a slightly different approach to his great man theory of history this time. Along the way, he's going to tie together the events from the first two in the series, Dorsai! and Necromancer. It is here, in Soldier, Ask Not, that we get a functional galactic picture. The future Dickson has put together is astonishing for how different it is from both our reality and others' visions of a planet-colonizing future. Dickson envisions planetary colonization having occurred along ethnonationalist lines. The galactic economy is founded on the simple principle of comparative advantage and the presence of powerful labor unions. Dickson, however, never treats this worldbuilding as part of the show; all of this is the background, the context in which his psychological drama plays out. Character motivations, politics, options and obstructions all follow from this future he has envisioned. It is beautiful in its originality and ugly in its internecine repercussions.

I liked and enjoyed this more than I do most novels from the early years of science fiction. I'm really just not

a fan of the Golden Age stuff, and the first Childe novel was published just after, in 1960. Dickson has great aims, aims that far exceed what his contemporary and even next generation science fiction writers held. The main problem with the book - and what might just ruin it for others - is that it is restricted by the page count and the repeated decisions to skip over some of the more crucial scenes and details. What Dickson was aiming for was never going to be accomplished in 320 pages. To get to his ending he has to skip over years of activity of his main character, leaving a promise that interesting maturation and perfection did indeed occur in that time. We don't get to see it though, because Dickson didn't make room for it. This particular story cries out for some creativity with mediums within the text - some shifts of perspective or sources. Today, we would get excerpts of news articles or something similar to fill out and enrich the book. Compared to science fiction of the 1950s and earlier, the Childe Cycle is a real treasure and offers something unique. Compared to the science fiction of later years, however, this will be viewed by some critically as not following through on its promises, not developing the story or character fully, for not working through and making everything fit in the end. And those critics are right. Still, the ambience Dickson creates made this a remarkable read. I'm a fan.

Sue Bursztynski says

I read just about the entire Childe Cycle many years ago, but this was the first I read. I even have - somewhere among my messy bookshelves - the original magazine in which part of it was first published.

It's not standard military SF. The characters and their treatment of each other are more important than the fighting. The universe is fascinating, with the human race split up into specialised areas - warriors, mystics, scientists, etc. The main character's wish for revenge could have disastrous consequences for the entire human race.

I found it very powerful reading.

A classic of SF.

Joe Santoro says

This book is really deep, and in the good way, not the annoying hipster way. It's a great exploration of humanity in general, with some really interesting bits about the press.

Tam is a very interesting character, and the 14 worlds, with their Splintered evolution, is a great, unique setting. There's not much hard sci fi to be found (none, in fact), but that's totally not the point here. And if one of the characters is a lot like Hari Seldon, I consider that a tribute :)

Jill says

Before I was even halfway through, I knew I wasn't going to be putting it down until it was over.

It wasn't exactly nail-biting action that kept me intrigued, either. The entire universe and future situation created by Dickson was just really good. I don't read a lot of science fiction. Not sure why, either. I just

haven't. So this is probably a common thing in any science fiction story—describing the evolution of the universe so many years into the future. Despite how common it might be, I really like what he did with human evolution and what his projections for the further evolution of the human species were. It was very fascinating.

There were only two instances where he repeated himself in his explanations of how things worked. That probably only bothered me because I read the whole thing at once. But if you explain something once, it's the reader's responsibility to remember this for future plot points. Re-explaining it just makes me roll my eyes. I'm paying attention!

I also really liked a particular few paragraphs where the main character describes why loving a certain woman is different than any of the relationships he's had in the past. He talks about how he would always metaphorically create this amazing imaginary castle and bring his love to it, only to realize he doesn't know them at all. And that this is because they don't even believe in his castle. So the relationship falls apart. What he realizes about this new love is that not only does she believe in his castle, but she's already built one of her own. She's not relying on him to create a paradise for her. She just wants to share hers with him and have him share his with her.

"It was because she had built castles of her own, before I ever met her."

I thought that was lovely.

Though I found one or two battle-strategy sections to be a bit boring (only because I have a hard time visualizing those), they weren't drawn out insufferably long. The internal, political, and emotional battles that take place in this book are done quite well. I found the main character to be intelligent and intriguing. I had no idea how it was going to end, but was quite pleased with the course of events (even if they weren't all happy-ending-y).

I liked it enough to go back to the used book store where I found this one and buy a few others in the series. I got Dorasi!, Necromancer, Tactics of Mistake, The Spirit of Dorsai, and Lost Dorsai. I probably didn't need to buy that many, but they were \$4 each and have the retro covers 'n everything. Plus, I buy things. Books especially.

Nebula Books says

Originally a short story (that won the Hugo award) and later re-written as the third installment of the Childe Cycle, *Soldier, Ask Not* is heavy with themes of faith and philosophy and treads a thin line between logic and faith – never condemning nor promoting one or the other.

The title – *Soldier, Ask Not* – hints at the main themes of the book; the constant struggle between duty and responsibility; between blind obedience and discretion; between destiny and choice.

Our main character – Tam Olyn – was brought up with a nihilistic ethos that he has spent his life trying to shrug off. He has a 'divine experience' and is thus interpreted by some to be a man of importance; a man of great power and responsibility.

However, Tam is stubborn and arrogant and, through circumstances, sees himself as not a power for good,

but a force for vengeance and for change. He embraces his nihilistic upbringing and sets out to destroy those he feels have wronged him.

To read the rest of this review or read author interviews or science fiction, fantasy and horror reviews visit my blog: <https://nebulabooks.wordpress.com/201...>

Scott says

Reading this book really convinced me that Dickson meant for the Childe Cycle to be a self-contained trilogy in the beginning.

Soldier, Ask Not runs parallel to and sheds light on a pivotal plot point in Dorsai!. It also draws themes (directly and indirectly) from Necromancer and really helps to bind the two together in a cohesive whole.

Dickson did a great job of making me root for a protagonist who really seemed more like an antagonist; he was more sympathetic than I expected and I found myself not only curious about his eventual plans, but rooting for his success.

Dorsai!, Necromancer, and Soldier, Ask Not are all parts of a whole that illustrate Dickson's thesis about humanity and humanity's evolution; even though I'd originally wanted to know more about Donal Graeme's (the protagonist of Dorsai!) story, I was fairly content with the story that Dickson wanted to tell here about humanity.

I can't say, however, that I came away from this trilogy feeling incredibly impressed or moved. I think that's mostly because I've seen fuller executions of these ideas in books like Dune.

Gabriel Clarke says

Clearly I'm not done with these. There's something both sparse and torridly overwritten at once about this odd, humourless book. The "science" behind it barely holds together and the story, a twisty tale of revenge sought through Machiavellian manoeuvres of politics and manipulation, would function perfectly well without it. But the universe of the splinter worlds compels and somehow, even the awful Friendlies extract a modicum of sympathy. On to Tactics of Mistake, the first one I read back when I was sixteen.

Jacob says

A good solid SciFi that starts and ends focused on "I".

Lindig says

Of course, I read this many many years ago. I have fond memories of the whole Dorsai set of books.

However, I find this very difficult to re-read and finally quit trying. The main character was extremely obnoxious and all the females were extremely "feminine" -- very annoying. The ideas are still interesting, though. We'll see how the re-read of the others goes.

Stephen says

Ohhhh, potential-squandering **frustration**...thy name is **The Childe Cycle!!!**

Gordon Dickson's superbly premised, yet underachieving Childe Cycle has been a source of **teeth-gnashing, knuckle-whitening** frustration for me. This disappointing, expectation larceny began while I was reading the previous novel in the series, *Necromancer*, and then continued, and became even more pronounced, as I was reading this installment. In order to provide context for the source of my reading angst, I want to provide some back story on the series because it is the wonderful ideas and potential for awesomeness that Dickson created that cause its failings to burn like **lemon juice** upon my soul.

CHILDE CYCLE BACKSTORY

At some time in the future (approximately 100 years from now), humanity develops the technology to colonize distant worlds (**road trip!!**). By the end of the 23rd Century, humanity has spread like butter and settled 15 younger worlds which, together with "Old Earth," are called the Sixteen Worlds.

Earth-born inhabitants have remained pretty much like you and me throughout this whole period and are known as "full spectrum" humans. We can do a lot of things pretty well but are not the best at anything. The rest of the 16 Worlds have each formed a "splinter" culture in which one aspect of humanity has been encouraged over all others. The three most prominent of these splinter cultures are (1)the "**Dorsai**" who are master warriors both physically and as strategists and tacticians; (2)the "**Exotics**" who are philosophers, mystics and psychologists and have developed certain mental abilities as well; and (3) the "**Friendlylies**" who are deeply devout followers of a religion called the "One Faith" and can really spoil a party when they get their dander up. Each of the other "splinter" cultures focus on a different primary skill as well (e.g., agriculture, mining, commerce, science, ship-building, etc.).

Trade among the various worlds is done primarily through "personal service contracts." For example, the Dorsai might provide defense forces for an agricultural world in exchange for that world sending skilled farmers to the Dorsai world to implement the latest techniques in growing foodstuffs. In addition, each of the worlds is considered either "loose" or "tight" depending on the amount of freedom the individual worker has over his job placement. On "loose" worlds, the contracted worker has some say about where they are sent to work, while on "tight" worlds, the planetary government has complete control over each worker's contract.

CENTRAL THEME OF THE SERIES

The central theme of the Childe Cycle is human evolution. Throughout the series, there are various factions, philosophies, organizations, religions and movements that are all interested in the same fundamental thing. Namely, creating the circumstances under which humanity can best reach its full potential. The problem is that each group has a different idea about what the optimal path is for that progress. This creates the central source of conflict for the series.

PLOT SUMMARY

The main character in Soldier, Ask Not is Tam Olyn. Tam is a bad guy, kinda, sorta, but not really. He is just an angry, stubborn and very ambitious young man. The problem is that he is also incredibly bright and has been gifted with the ability to expertly read people and situations such that he is able to manipulate circumstances so that events will transpire as he would like. This ability to read people and events is a little like Asimov's "psychohistory" from the Foundation trilogy, except that Tam's ability is mostly instinctive. The end result is that Tam's ability makes him a kind of "focal point" around which major events occur.

I don't want to give away much of the plot so I will simply tell you that Tam becomes enraged following the death of someone he cares about and begins a long and complicated revenge using his unique abilities. This scheme of Tams may result in the destruction of an entire "splinter" culture which may have a serious and permanent effect on all of humanity unless Tam's plan can be thwarted.

OKAY, after that long (but hopefully useful) infodump...let's talk about **frustration**....

1. IMHO, the universe of the "Childe Cycle" is not just very good but actually **OMG outFRICKINGstanding** and has all of the necessary components to act as the backdrop for a very thoughtful, highly literate, philosophical SF series in the spirit of Frank Herbert's Dune. While not as rich as Frank Herbert's legendary creation, both lend themselves to more reflective, dialogue driven stories designed to address "larger issues of humanity."

2. The stories that Dickson has told up to this point within the Childe Cycle are very much consistent with the philosophical, meditative and social aspects of the Child Cycle universe. In other words, Dickson is telling *the right kind of story* to explore the most intriguing aspects of his universe.

3. Dickson clearly thought through the path that his Childe Cycle stories would follow (see the Central Theme above) and had a definite idea about the how the story of humanity's evolution would play out. This well-defined and consistent outline helped Dickson establish the very impressive and compelling dynamic within which the various groups and organizations struggle in order to accomplish the central theme of the Childe Cycle.

...after all that praise can you sense what's coming next, creeping closer and closer, yes it is the impending arrival to this review of a very, very large

NOTE: subtract one "t" from above.

Unfortunately, for all of the promise of the universe Dickson has created and the interesting philosophical themes explored in these stories, I have not yet been able to rate either Necromancer or this book higher than 3 stars. Something critical is missing. The characters, while intriguing, are just not quite enough to garner a full investment from me. While portions of the story are compelling and very well done, other portions break my narrative engagement like a commercial in the middle of your favorite show.

Something just hasn't clicked for me and it is driving me nuts because I love the universe and the central theme of the series. Part of me thinks that maybe Dickson just didn't quite have the writing chops to carry through on the ambitious project he envisioned. Whatever the reason, the books have not yet been able to get over the 3 star hump. It is very...wait for it... frustrating for me...

Notwithstanding my crushed expectations of the unfulfilled promise, I still intend to read the remaining

books in the series as there is much to like about them. However, I can not help but feel the stinging disappointment of what “might have been.” True happiness seems just out of reach for me, sorta like....

Still, there are some great ideas in this story and some portions that are very well written and compelling. Far better than much of the SF i have read and still one I would label as quality. Thus, a solid 3 stars for a series with 5 star potential.
