



Judgment at Proteus

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Frank Compton must join forces with his most feared enemies to defeat an ancient civilizations-devouring malevolence in the final installment of Hugo Award-winning author Timothy Zahn's Quadrail series

A dozen sentient species occupy the galaxy, and the Quadrail connects them all. Arriving at Proteus Station under a cloud of suspicion, ex-government agent Frank Compton finds he must answer for the death of six members of the Filly elite, a crime for which he has been falsely accused. Filiaelian captivity, however, is the least of Compton's worries, for his horse-faced alien accusers are guarding a terrible secret that dates back centuries: the Shonkla-raa, a race of super-soldiers believed to be extinct.

Invincible fighters bred for conquest and dedicated to the destruction of the Quadrail, as well as the annihilation of the unsuspecting billions who oppose them, the Shonkla-raa must be stopped at all cost. But to do so, Compton and his beautiful, enigmatic half-human partner, Bayta, will have to ally themselves with the insidious, mind-enslaving Mohdri, the malevolent group intelligence they have sworn to destroy.

Hugo Award winner Timothy Zahn concludes his sensational Quadrail series with a riveting futuristic adventure that combines the best of three popular genres—hard science fiction, mystery, and espionage thriller. *Judgment at Proteus* is a breathtaking tale of deception, murder, and desperate maneuverings in a secret war that threatens the survival of every living being in the galaxy.

Judgment at Proteus Details

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Jason says

Sort of ran out of steam to end the series. If it were a movie, critics would say there was far too much exposition. Just too many scenes of Frank Compton filling everyone in on all the stuff he figured out, or did, while everything else was going on instead of actually including all of that in the narrative.

And seriously, how many times does he "take Bayta's arm" to move her somewhere like she's a piece of luggage? Having read some 20+ Timothy Zahn novels, I've come to expect better.

Shawn says

A good end to a good series

Zahn created a galaxy peopled with variety and intrigue. The last installment had enough adventure for 2 books but, unlike some authors, he resisted the urge to stretch out the series for two or three more book. If you have read this far, you won't be at all disappointed by the return of several characters from previous novels and the surprising finale.

Benjamin Espen says

When Frank finally gets to the end of his quest, he finds out that he has been fighting the wrong war all along. But at least he's not on a train anymore!

Much of the action in Judgment at Proteus takes place on the eponymous Proteus station, centerpiece of the Filiaelian Empire and proud showcase of their mastery of genetic engineering. Unfortunately, Frank killed some Filiaelian walkers back in book 3, so now he has some 'splaning to do. Which of course he doesn't want to, since his battle against the Modhri has been an unauthorized shadow war waged for the benefit of the Spiders and their secretive masters.

That simple hook is enough to set in motion the denouement of a five book series, wrapping up a number of loose threads, and being a hell of a lot of fun in the process. I blew through these books over the course of a couple of weeks, thanks to a timely family vacation, but being able to pick up four of five volumes at once really helped a lot. There is something to be said for waiting until a series is complete to get started.

While these are quick and easy reads, this is not simply the equivalent of popcorn fare summer blockbusters, fun to watch and quickly forgotten. You could read the Quadrail series that way, and come away having had a good time. Zahn writes in an accessible style, and has been a popular writer for a very long time, so he's good at it. But I wouldn't have enjoyed the Quadrail series quite so much if there wasn't something more lurking under the surface.

Zahn just never makes a big deal out of the ideas he explores here. Frank is a bit of a loose cannon, always trusting in his brains, guts, and luck to get him through to the end. That is a perfectly acceptable strategy

when you are just a cog in the intelligence apparatus, high risk and high reward if you are indeed both clever and lucky. It clearly worked for Frank, right up until it didn't, and he got fired for making a big stink about something obviously stupid, that ended up being part of the Modhran shadow war before Frank knew what that was.

This is less good as a strategy when you are on your own, with the fate of galaxy riding on your luck. Unfortunately, Frank doesn't really know any other way to operate. Fortunately for him, others who are less clever but more systematic, are available to back him up. There are hints of this fundamental tension throughout the five books in the series, but it isn't a major plot, nor does it take up a lot of space in the text. It is just there to think about, if you find it interesting.

There are other interesting themes that clearly form the background of this series but are only mentioned in passing: unintended consequences, the price of making yourself open and vulnerable enough to love, how to ensure enough of an advantage to defensive warfare to make interstellar war unprofitable, what happens when you introduce a large number of fundamentally dissimilar alien species to one another. Each one of these things is big enough to write a whole book about, but Zahn did a good enough job on each one to just make it a background detail.

This makes his written worlds feel complete, rather than fantastical sets upon which his characters act out their lines, requiring suspension of disbelief to make the plywood and paint feel real. I could just relax into the story, and go along for the ride. The fact that Zahn can write this kind of thing year after year, over a career now stretching almost 40 years, is a remarkable accomplishment. And it is a hell of a lot of fun too.

Moses Operandi says

My hipster friends turn up their noses at science fiction. They're missing out. Timothy Zahn's stories have enthralled me for years, and Judgment at Proteus is a fitting end to the absurdly enjoyable Quadrail series. I've really grown to like Compton and Bayta, and I'm glad they went out with a bang. That's a bit of a spoiler, but not too much. Enjoy.

Scott Wozniak says

Satisfying Finish

There was the same action and conspiracy plot twists as the entire series. Plus he tied up all the loose ends and even used clues from early in the series to have the big reveal at the end. It was a strong finish.

Michelle says

What Zahn promised in the first book, Night Train to Rigel, he delivers in Judgement at Proteus. A phenomenal conclusion to a roller-coaster ride of a series.

Books4m says

Amazing series!! Strong finish .I loved every minute I spent aboard the Quadrail! Thank you Zahn!

Bill says

A pretty good series

I still think the second book was superfluous even though they tied it all together in book 5. The plot lines in book 2 could have been handled more succinctly as a couple of chapters in one of the other books.

Steve says

If this is the end if the series, it is a satisfying conclusion. But Zahn's characters and premise are fun, and I hope there will be more books about Compton and Bayta.

Bruce Meltzer says

Enjoyable read. Several interesting twists and turns. However, the ending (spoiler alert) leaves room for additional books to follow if the author so chooses.

I would still read the series again. Worth your time.

An Odd1 says

"Space opera" on the cover means preceding complicated details, ponderous back story, impossible to spell, pronounce, or remember names, slow momentum to a crawl. Even a chase or fight scene is laid out step by step, good for choreographing a film, not for keeping tension high.

"Fear is a biochemical response that can be controlled or ignored .. hopelessness is a lie and an illusion. There's always hope.. Always" p189. Frank resists the prime method of his enemy's psychological warfare. The appeal of this book is the persistent resistance of the human hero, and getting inside his head.

Others, fictional or real, may blame good guys for loss of innocent lives. Zahn makes us care about everyone, such that we mourn too. Through the voice of old warrior Frank, he vetoes regret and guilt, notes villains set the level of collateral damage. "You always think back and wonder what you could have done differently .. The cost .. was defined the minute they chose this time and place for their attack .. decreed .. civilians .. be killed." We must "make sure they died for a reason, that their lives were given so that others might live." p370.

References to old "dit-rec" dramas, like Casablanca, translates as maybe "recreational" somethings. Like

rom-com? I couldn't find the term anywhere, so I messaged Zahn on Facebook.

Frank Compton, narrating human, fights group mind Mohdri, who is trying to take over the galaxy. A scratch from Mohdri coral infects a target. When the growth is large enough, the ignorant "walker" blacks out every time the hidden Mohdri takes control. Mohdri now co-operates, in the face of a greater threat. the Shonkla-raa, who intend to enslave and destroy all other species. Shonkla-raa enlarged vocal boxes sing tones that take over Mohdri walkers and susceptible psychic communicators (view spoiler).

Frank is becoming enamored of his partner Bayta. She is part-human, but invisibly mind-linked to the Chahwyn, who hide the fact they created the Mohdri originally for their protection. They believe their newest creation, modified metal Spider protectors that operate the universal Quadrail transit system, can save them.

We can never be sure if Mohdri plans betrayal. "He doesn't want to be a slave." .. "I find that ironic." p 243. (view spoiler)

Fillies, horse-like aliens, are expert genetic manipulators. Extensive mandatory physical screening at their medical center, Proteus station, keeps the Mohdri out. Frank and Bayta escort pregnant human teen Terese, raped on Earth, invited here to fix her genetic abnormalities.

Local cop Emekai arrests Frank for killing six *santra* high-class Fillies on a train in a previous book. (Took me some time to catch up, never got used to translated speech depicted differently.) Minnario, a passing stranger, an alien Nemut lawyer confined to a wheelchair, offers to defend Frank at the trial, and reads up on the archaic rules, the Slisst Protocols. Judge *Chinzro* Hchuchu assigns two pink spiny (pineapple-skin-)armored canine beasts *miskai-dorosli* as guards, who Frank calls Doug and Ty.

At midnight, Frank investigates why Terese, in Building Twelve, is housed in an area suitable for more humans, and forbidden to visitors. The solution seems obvious. (view spoiler)

Twists are not simple. Layers upon layers snarl the threads. Evidence of a mole increases. Frank must get creative to escape traps. (view spoiler)

To give away any more would give away solutions. Every time Frank gets ahead, the enemy push back. Zahn's ingenious solutions are impressive - elevate rating, despite impossible spellings and "space opera"-ness. It was a tough read. I doubt I can do more of the series, forgetting too much jargon in between, most included above, so you get the sense of the challenge.

Typo: (first sentence, second line)

p 316 "hear me though the haze swirling" is "through the haze". To eliminate two close together "through" occurrences, I'd change "swirling through Bayta's mind" to "via Bayta's mind to theirs."

HBalikov says

Fine Print: I previously confessed my addiction to the Quadrail novels and vowed that I would go into rehab for the holiday season and see if I could throw that monkey off my back. It is now the new year and I can objectively decide that it would be foolish not to finish the series. Thus I have completed my review and you may find it below.

Judgment at Proteus “delivers exactly what Zahn’s many fans expect: memorable characters, intricate plot, fascinating ideas, and more than a modicum of wit.”

Just because I am willing to agree with Mike Resnick, Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author, doesn’t make both of us wrong.

If the names Bayta and Frank Compton are unfamiliar to you, please read Night Train to Rigel before reading any further.

Skip the next several paragraphs of background if you want to cut to the chase.

Frank Compton roams the Twelve Empires as a detective and “fixer” for his current client. The how and the why, I will leave to other reviews. He has talent and experience and his methods will not seem strange to any who are familiar with the worlds of Philip Marlowe and Jim Phelps. Compton has a dry sense of humor and a semi-firm belief that the mission is so important that it must be completed by any means available.

There are plenty of alien species in the galaxy of the Twelve Empires. Humans are not nearly the highest on the totem pole which includes: the Chahwyn, Filiaelians, Juriani, Bellidos, Halkas, Shorshians as well as the Spiders who run the Quadrail (that can take anyone at faster than light speeds around the galaxy). The Chahwyn created the Spider species. They also ran an experiment (I won’t spoil the details) that created the “special” human, Bayta, Compton’s associate.

A little about the Modhri (a coral-based hive species) that has aspirations of galactic domination: The Modhri was uncovered by Compton early in the series. Each of the books has a plot or subplot involving this species.

Zahn has done an excellent job of “world building” and has thought out not only the physical aspects of these alien races but how their thought processes might differ and on what multiple species might collaborate.

Now for the rest.

The Super Quadrail cross-galaxy ride of the previous book, The Domino Pattern, has left our team in Filiaelian territory where Frank and Bayta hope to keep one hop ahead of the Modhri’s plans for galactic domination. There is a new threat that appears at the end of The Domino Pattern and that is why we find Frank and Bayta heading to Proteus. They are also watching over a young human female who is going to be “cured” by the Filiaelian experts in genetic engineering.

Is the relationship between Bayta and Frank changing? Or, is it the circumstances of their mission? “I wanted to say the hell with this, to just lock the door and settle down here for the night where I could protect Bayta while she in turn watched my back. But I didn’t dare. We were already too emotionally close for comfort, and the Modhri was just waiting for his chance to ensnare us. And if he got me, I would rather die than be the conduit through which he got Bayta.”

Compton is charged with committing murder, though not on Proteus, and the Filiaelians decide to try him there. I was really impressed with the depth of the “Slisst Protocols” described by Zahn to govern the trial. Here is a sample: “The (Protocols) came from the ancient Filiaelian mode of honor-satisfaction via combat, and retain much of the same form and language. That’s why the overseers are called guardlaws instead of judges. The don’t so much rule on the case as watch what Chinzro Hchchu and I do and award the verdict on the basis of the strength and validity of our arguments.

The plot reaches a point where Frank has to consider whether he has been infected by the Modhri. And Zahn is very good at teasing out the consequences of that possibility. Though this can be read as a thriller with an “end of the galaxy as we know it” timer counting down throughout this book. I was both surprised and delighted that Zahn finds the opportunity, albeit at breakneck speed to ponder whether his hero’s “the end justifies the means,” approach is really the right course. We also get various species trying to be galactic dictator and there are threads of issues about how, even with the right intentions, unintended consequences tend to accumulate.

As usual, Zahn fills out these alien worlds for his galaxy of the Twelve Empires with delightful details including various cuisines ranging from Jurian braised flirdring to Filiaelian roast quipple on poro bread. I have to wonder how many aspects of the “other eleven Empires” in this galaxy from culture, to recreation, to technology, to reproduction Zahn had put together and decided not to use. Judgment at Proteus could easily have been two books, almost neatly divided in half. I am grateful to Zahn and the publisher for their decision to make the financial burden half as much. I have enjoyed the Quadrail series and Frank Compton.

If the series is over, does that mean that Zahn is also shelving Compton? If so, it’s sad.

Joe Jungers says

All in all, this was a pretty satisfying conclusion to the Quadrail series.

Pat Beard says

Fitting all action finish to this series - a page turner that I finished in one sitting. I liked the resolution to the problem(s) and the ways that the characters developed over the book and the course of the series. I hate to say goodbye to this particular universe.

Kathy Davie says

Fifth and last in the Quadrail / Frank Compton space opera series about Frank Compton and Bayta and their battle to prevent a galactic takeover.

My Take

Frank is so naughty---I love it---he reckons getting Doug and Ty used to table scraps and it not being appreciated is just one more reason to do it.

Zahn is not loathe to spring traps, create setups, and twist things around. I want to go back to the beginning of the series and read it all the way through in one sitting!

More dead bodies. More traps. More tricky shifting out from under. And very unexpected assignments when Proteus Station assigns Frank to investigate Tech Yleli's murder. The one Frank is accused of murdering.

Nothing is as it seems on Proteus Station. Earth and its Humans are seen as a vastly useful resource for the Shonkla-raa and Terese's pregnancy is part of a larger, much more nefarious plan. Then there's the Modhri and Shonkla-raa with their own twisted history and it's enough to terrify the Modhri! And Frank when he discovers that the Shonkla-raa tonal controls can freeze his own allies.

Still, that Shonkla-raa ability has a useful side effect much to Minnario's dismay. A discovery that forces the Modhri to acknowledge the Melding's and Frank's usefulness.

It's one betrayal after another in this installment and from some of the most unexpected sources. Yet these experiences also result in some of the most unexpected turnarounds.

I so regret that this series has ended...wahhh...

The Story

It's been four weeks since Frank killed Muzzfor and Frank has been summoned to Proteus Station to give his account of the battle to its direction and *santras*. A good destination to learn more about the Shonkla-raa and their connection to the group mind, the Modhri.

Frank's arrest for murder on Proteus Station sets it all rolling with cross, double-cross, and triple-cross. Genetic experimentation on Filiaelians, Humans, anyone. Even the group mind is concerned enough to form an unholy alliance.

The Characters

Frank Compton is a former Westali agent and now works for the Spiders to counter the **Modhri**, a parasite hidden within specially engineered coral---a group mind. One scratch and the Modhri will make its home within your mind. Controlling you without your knowledge. Easily spread from mind to mind.

Bayta is half-human, half-Chahwyn and represents the **Chahwyn**, the race of Spiders who operate the train that serves the universe. She is Frank's companion, partner, and liaison between him and the Spiders. **Sam** and **Carl** are the Spider defenders assigned to "protect" Frank.

Terese German is a Human whose rape-caused pregnancy is causing such physical distress that two Filiaelians, **Dr. Aronobal** and **Logra Emikai** (a Filiaelian and former cop), have agreed to escort her to Proteus Station where Terese has the best chance of overcoming her genetic disorders.

Minnario chu-Dettak is a crippled Nemut, a lawyer, and one of the passengers aboard the super-express train where Frank and Bayta fought the Shonkla-raa. The Filiaelian **Proteus Station** has a universe-renowned reputation of medical care and Minnario has suddenly received an invitation to avail himself of that care. Damned handy when Frank is charged with murder as soon as he enters Proteus Station!

Chinzro Hchchu is the assistant director of Proteus Station and he's really got it in for Frank. **Doug** and **Ty**

are the Doberman-like guards assigned to accompany Frank while on Proteus Station and prevent his escape or exploration of unacceptable portions of the station. **Usantra Dr. Wandek** is a Filiaelian in charge of Terese's case, a friend of Muzzfor, AND the judge at Frank's trial. *Hmmmm, I see a conflict of interest here...* **Osantra Riijkhan** has an offer of employment for Frank in return for Earth's safety and a warning **Isantra Yleli** is the murdered, unlamented Yleli's kinsman. Blue One, a.k.a., **Isantra Kordiss**, is another Shonkla-raa.

Senior Ambassador ChoDar is the second Modhri ally and offers safe travel. **Karak Fayr** commands the Belldic commando squad. **Larry Cecil Hardin** is an excessively wealthy industrialist. **Bruce McMicking** is Hardin's chief enforcement officer at Hardin Industries. **Euro Union Security Service Agent Ackerley Morse** is one of the new Modhri and he hates Frank. His new ally.

The Abomination, a.k.a., the **Melding**, are modified walkers, modified coral; they run off a different telepathic frequency. *Which you'd think would help!* Frank wants to know if the Modhri can Meld with others as they're doing with Morse. **Rebekah Beach**, *Domino Pattern*, is with the Melding now. And she is so excited to talk girl stuff with Terese.

The **Shonkla-raa** is a genetically altered sub-race of Filiaelians who claim they created and can control the Modhri. They're making a comeback, eager to reclaim their former glory. **Walkers** are the people under the control of the group mind(s).

The Cover

Eerie, the way the glowing red indentions in the side of this massive space station seem like eyes watching the approach of Frank and Bayta's shuttle.

The title is where it ends, with a *Judgment at Proteus*.
