



The Engineer ReConditioned

Neal Asher

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Mysterious aliens ... ruthless terrorists ... androids with attitude ... genetic manipulation ... punch-ups with lasers ... giant spaceships ... what more could you want? This great collection of 10 short stories by the author of Gridlinked, The Skinner, In the Line of Polity, and many more is a great read!

The Engineer ReConditioned Details

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Ren the Unclean says

In general, these short stories are not as polished and well realized as Asher's full length novels, but some of them are still very awesome. The Engineer, The Tor-Beast's Prison, and The Gurnard are my faves, in that order.

The organization of this volume is garbage. The stories are broken up randomly. Sometimes by an interlude from the author and a bold print heading, other times only by two regular line breaks. Even the table of contents doesn't list the stories correctly.

I feel like going through each one, for my own reference:

The Engineer: This is the titular story, the longest story, and is probably among the strongest. It has a lot of Jain stuff, which is mentioned in other Asher books I have read, but not explored to this depth. It is followed by a shorter story that may(?) be tied into The Engineer about Janer from The Skinner exploring a strange alien shell beast.

Spatterjay: I think the first story in this sequence is retold in The Skinner, as I already knew the story. Basically it is about Captain Ambel hunting for the Skinner. The rest of these don't seem to actually take place on Spatterjay.

The second story matches the tone of a Spatterjay story, as it is mostly about messed up creatures from the sea destroying the crew of a ship. Interesting enough.

The third story is more xenobiology mixed with theology. It is about what is basically a missionary who has come to a world to convert an alien species. This story is pretty weird.

The Owner: I don't know as much about this setting; I don't think there is a full length novel on it. It is sort of a wild west type world with a super powered cybernetic being watching over it.

The first story is sort of a police investigation drama at the beginning and a chase/gunfight at the end capped with a deus ex deus. This setting, with the Owner and his Proctors, is pretty interesting, though not much is covered in these short stories.

The world in the second story seems lower tech (dart-like guns instead of rockets) and feudalistic. Political refugees on the run from the government. The world is interesting, but I didn't find much I liked in the story itself.

Tor-Beast: Only one story in this setting, but it is one of the better ones in the book. This is the Cowl universe, so it covers time travel and Tor-Beast scales, but it also has a gravitic prison that is powered by its prisoner feeding on the life force of random people throughout time. This story is pretty mind bending and cool. Worth reading twice.

Tiger Tiger: This is actually an Owner story, but the book split it up. The tech in this story is even further regressed from the other two. Spears mainly. All three Owner stories taken as a whole are more interesting than each individually, and this one is the weakest.

The Gurnard: This should probably have been put in the Spatterjay section, as it is about alien ecosystems again. This one is pretty interesting; it manages to explore a complicated symbiotic relationship between alien life and the humans living on a planet while also being an indictment against blind faith! Nice work Neal!

SciFi Kindle says

This creative collection of short stories by Neal Asher will provide an excellent introduction to his work for those unfamiliar with it, as the standalone stories cover his favorite themes and strengths: high-intensity action, richly described alien biologies, villainous religious cults, and much violence. Returning readers will also be rewarded by references and tie-ins to his other future histories, The Polity, and The Owner universes.

The title novella, 'The Engineer', deserves special attention due to its length and polish. A Polity story, it tells of the discovery of an ancient alien escape pod by a science vessel who manage to revive the advanced being within. News of the discovery brings attention from various factions and soon a classic Asher full-scale conflict erupts. I was a little surprised by the altruism and bio-centric technology of the Jain alien in this story, having only the example from Asher's "Orbus" novel to compare with, but as is clearly shown with the various human factions in the Polity stories, species and societies are more diverse than any single specimen would illustrate.

The three "Owner" stories shared a common plot device for their climaxes, so I won't spoil them with a description, other than to say I would have appreciated a more varied 'reveal' in the stories chosen to accompany one another in a collection. Taken individually, all three are thrilling and wholly engaging stories that bring a low-tech fantasy element to Asher's SF which I hadn't seen before.

My favorite story in the collection, "Spatterjay" is probably the most dependent on a familiarity with Asher's other novels, in this case the Polity trilogy of the same title, as it deals with a setting and characters so vividly colorful that they are difficult to absorb in so few pages. It serves as a prequel to those novels, and even more so than any of the other stories in the collection it brings some wild alien biology to life for the reader- a whole ecology in fact!

The other five stories here each have interesting aspects, but can be grouped and summarized by saying they revolve around unique alien biological oddities which are expanded and extrapolated into skeletons on which to hang a brief story. Interpersonal drama, tension, and subtlety are not really to be found here, but imaginative and intense moments of action will make them memorable for most readers, I believe.

Titus L says

Amazing ideas as in these sort tales are what make this writer an inspiration to me.

Stevie Kincade says

Neal Asher is really damn good at creating aliens. There are a variety of interesting aliens in this collection and none of them are Prador!

I had heard that if you don't like Asher's early stuff to stick with him as he is one of those writers who get better with every book. Reading this collection of his short stories (and first novella) immediately after the brilliant Prador Moon raised my expectations for Asher into the stratosphere.

I LOVED the novella "The Engineer". I found it to be so clear and cinematic, devoid of any fluff. If I ever had the discipline to sit down and try and write a screenplay I would go with "The Engineer" because after reading it I can see the movie so clearly in my mind. The Jain are a fascinating species, I expect nothing less from Asher.

So having loved The Engineer so much I was ready for Gridlinked to rock my world. I think though at this early stage of Asher's writing he was better and more focused in the short format where I found "Gridlinked" to amble on a bit.

"Spatterjay" is one of my favorite short stories of all time. Asher incorporates biology into his fiction as brilliantly as Stephen Baxter does physics. Must avoid spoilers while convincing you to read...can't do it but trust me this is awesome! Made me want to skip straight to "The Skinner" and the Spatterjay trilogy but I am one of those people who have to read things in order.

There are 3 separate "Owner" short stories that have the same twist. I found this to be a fascinating insight into Asher's writing process. How he refines and tells the same story in a different way. The Owner universe feels alive and rich with ideas, an excellent series of short stories. I am sure when I read the novels I will be ready for "the twist" having read it 3 times.

Another great, original alien appears in "The Tor Beast" a time travel story that forms the basis of stand alone novel "Cowl".

The rest of the short stories were in the "good" range, to round out an excellent collection. I still recommend people to start with "Prador Moon" but this was a great "second introduction" to the world of Neal Asher.

In the introduction Asher says "I am a classic overnight success, ie that night was over 20 years long". He describes writing for **5 years** before getting his first story published, only for that magazine to immediately fold. He says "Writing is hard. Getting published is hard, and if you want easy money your best bet is to become an estate agent". Thankfully for the book reading public that persistence paid off. I became such an instant fan I have over 12 Neal Asher novels here on my "too read table" and I consider NA to be one of my favourite authors.

Mark says

The Engineer Reconditioned is a collection of short stories by sci-fi author Neal Asher, some in his popular Polity Universe, some not. One thing for sure is that it's well worth reading. Here's what's contained in this great collection:

?The Engineer - 8/10

The Engineer is the title novella in this collection and is a story about the discovery of a stasis pod that turns out to hold a Jain, an ancient race that is been extinct for millions of years. The story follows the science ship as it discovers the pod, a Polity dreadnought as it attempts to reach the science ship, and a group of mercenaries totally against any alien life and want to destroy the Jain and anyone that has had contact with it. If you've read any of Neal's other novels you'll know that the Jain are a highly advanced species, and one that has held quite a bit of interest for many within the human domain. The story itself is enjoyable, starting off at a slow pace when the discovery is made and follows through with an interesting and action packed finale. I think this is a story to read if you're familiar with Neal's previous novels set in the Polity, but not one for

newcomers as it does throw you in at the deep end when it comes to prior knowledge of the setting, although some aspects have small explanations.

Snairls - 7/10

Another Polity story, and one focusing on a character we know from *The Skinner*: Janer. He's still indentured to the hornet hive mind in this one and it's a look at another weird alien creation from Neal. It's not too long, but is Neal through and through, although it contains no action as such.

Spatterjay - 9/10

This is a short story that I really recommend as an intro to the Spatterjay series (*The Skinner*, *Voyage of the Sable Keech*, *Orbus*). It has Erlin, a character from *The Skinner*, in and we also get to encounter the Skinner himself. It's a great little story and one of the highlights of the collection.

Jable Sharks - 7/10

Another weird one from Neal, but I couldn't be sure if it's Polity or not. It sounds like a Spatterjay based story, but clearly isn't, although it is set on a boat and features a creature from the sea. A nice little ending rounds it off as a solid entry.

The Thrake - 7/10

This is one of Neal's stories that has religion as one of the central themes, and I must admit that I do quite like it. It has that 'I'm right because I'm religious' feel to it and the central character always finds ways to justify what he sees as a sign of sentience and religion when the scientists actually know the truth, but he just refuses to believe them.

Proctors - 10/10

Here's the first of three Owner stories in this collection, and probably my favourite stuff Neal has ever done. This one introduces the idea of the Owner and his Proctors which enforce his rules on his planets. The setting is not a high tech one, more like mid-20th century tech in a low population world. One of his rules is that the population of the planet is to not go above a certain amount and when it does the Proctors turn killers to bring the population back down to the required level - one of the reasons they are feared so much. The story follows a couple of groups of activists that go searching for a spaceship that has been seen to land near their town, the first group wanting it for themselves and the second in an attempt to stop them. I love this one!

The Owner - 10/10

The second Owner story and another gem in the collection. This one follows a widow and her daughter with her servant and son while they try to escape those that want to kill them. A code of honour on how they can be challenged is evident from the start and when they meet a new companion, the Daybreak Warrior, the story shifts a gear and more of the Owner's history is revealed. Once again I loved this story and have no issues with it in any way, very, very highly recommended.

The Torbeast's Prison 6/10

This story is related to Neal's novel, *Cowl*. It's a time travelling story following one man as he shifts from time to time trying to escape his inevitable destiny. There's a nice twist to the tale, but ultimately I found it to be the weakest on offer here.

Tiger Tiger - 10/10

The third and final Owner story in the collection. This one is more focused on one of the Owner's rules on the planet: 'Man must not kill tiger and tiger will not kill man.' However, a tiger is killed and many of the residents in the village are fearful of the retribution that will come. Again, Neal has developed a deeper

history of the Owner and done so in a great and very interesting way. There are some nice little revelations about the characters and the twist in the tale is not overly unexpected, but brings about a very satisfying conclusion.

The Gurnard - 7/10

The final story in the collection is another looking at religion, but also bring in one of Neal's staples to his writing - alien organism's. There is also a character from Neal's novels here - Erlin - who is studying the gurnard of the title and the religion that has grown around it. It's an interesting story and gives a good look at what the less developed cultures of the Polity are like, especially those around religion. Erlin's perspective is a good addition and made the story worthwhile, at least from the point of view of getting explanations to the central plot.

Conclusion

While The Engineer ReConditioned is a good collection, it's because of three stories that I consider this to be a must-have for any sci-fi fan - The Owner stories. I can't stress enough how amazing I find them and I rate them as my all time favourites. Really, they are that good. Don't get me wrong, the rest of the stories present here will be great for anyone who is familiar to Neal's writing, most of them very accessible to those new to Neal Asher, but it's because of the Owner ones that this totally unmissable.

Psychophant says

Ten years ago I would have given more points. Even two years ago it might have scored 4. But after reading most of Asher's novels this collection of short stories seems dated, repetitive and less polished.

Yet, I give the book one extra star because of its own interest tracing the genesis of Asher's different universes and tropes, and how some of his great themes were there already from the start.

Another problem is that Asher's ambitious plots and settings are not well suited to the short story format, as it requires space to grow and present itself.

The best part of reading this book is that it made me reread Spatterjay, a good novel.

Jen says

Early and new stories, with additional commentary about each story from Neal Asher. The stories touch on both the Polity and Cowl universes and introduce (to me, at least) the Owner universe.

Karina says

Friend insisted I needed to read Neal Asher because I'm a... Parasite enthusiast...? And he was right, too. Asher's aliens are all pretty cool-weird, though, not just the parasites among them.

The collection contains stories from several of the author's novel 'verses, so I know for sure which one I want to read next.

Andrée says

Still reading this as short stories are handy bed time reading - less risk of reading myself back into wakefulness.

I'm enjoying them.

They remind me of Ursula Le Guin stories i.e. very foreign/alien with questions about what it means to be 'human'

Not physically a quality book but not an issue at 50p!

Tom Oinn says

This is a great collection of short stories with Neal Asher's trademark edge to them. Unlike, say, the owner trilogy, this never goes too far though and while parasites are a recurring theme they're interesting and cleverly nasty rather than simply unpleasant.

The stories in the collection are mostly ones which were never published due to quirks of circumstance, and if, like me, you've read pretty much everything else he's written you'll find many of them to fill in backstory or to slot neatly into other series (the Spatterjay leeches make an appearance as does the mysterious Jain). Well worth a read.

Gareth Park says

a nice mix, some were brilliant, some were just good, i thought it was better than his other short story collection

Tim Hicks says

As others noted, this book appears to have been assembled by someone wearing a blindfold and boxing gloves. Mid-book, one of the stories ends and another starts without a break - not so much as a subhead or italics.

If you overlook that, it's good stuff. A couple of the stories drew me right in, a couple left me as more of an observer. But overall, a good read with some fresh ideas.

Tim Poston says

What more do I want?

Mysterious aliens, ruthless terrorists, androids with attitude, genetic manipulation, punch-ups with lasers and giant spaceships are all very well, but some decent proof reading would be nice. Most egregious, missing paragraph breaks across a change in point of view! Produced as a large 'trade paperback', typesetting good where algorithms are enough, but the publisher skimmed on humans. Eheu fugaces!

Mya says

I would have given this book 4 1/2 stars but it didn't grant me the option. A stunning collection of short stories based on popular Asher universes, I really enjoyed it but there is a sense of rough draft in two of the stories that leads me to believe that it was unfinished. Still to sate the Asher hunger, I found tales of the Polity, SpatterJay and even Owner stories highly entertaining.

Bernard says

A collection of Asher's short stories, including several from his Polity universe. I greatly enjoyed all of them, and would hope some day to read more of his "Owner" setting.
