



Flesh and Gold

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A mature alien woman judge sees an amphibious human woman, obviously a slave, displayed in a tank in front of a sex palace. And so an interstellar plot of murderous proportions involving many races and planets, galactic corporations, exploitive sex and horrible slavery is revealed.

Flesh and Gold Details

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Author : Phyllis Gotlieb

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From Reader Review Flesh and Gold for online ebook

Tony says

Good solid fun. If you read enough you already know the plot, but here language is the field of play and characters act under true motivation, and respond also.

Althea Ann says

This was a re-read.

I recommended it to my book club, and then couldn't make the meeting due to a family commitment, so I felt a little apprehensive about that. What if I didn't like it as much on a second reading? How would I justify myself?

Well, I should have trusted myself. I LOVE this book. If anyone else doesn't - well, then they don't, and we will have to disagree.

All I have to say is, I don't think Ursula LeGuin has ever steered me wrong. (She blurbed this book, and while many authors' praise is for sale, I don't believe that LeGuin's is.)

Primarily, this book is a mystery. But it's a mystery set in a vibrant, multi-species, semi-near future setting (500 years from now?) slightly reminiscent of ST:TNG. The main character is Skerow, a legal judge on a regular circuit. She's working on a rather backwater planet when her partner is murdered, and, simultaneously, she discovers a mysterious mermaid-woman enslaved in a brothel.

She embarks on a mission to bring justice to the enslaved and solve the mystery of the murder - but staying alive herself may turn out to be more difficult than anticipated.

The different races portrayed in the story are unique, believable, and finely drawn. The politics are seedy, cutthroat, and fun. There's human trafficking, gladiatorial combat, prostitution - and of course, everything comes down to money in the end.

The book really shines in the characterization, though. No one in this story is a stereotype... and even when they're a 7-foot-tall reptile, they're completely well-rounded, "human" beings with various interests and believable thought processes.

But what I truly love about it is how it presents a realistic world, where horrible things happen, and people are as nasty to each other as they can possibly be - without actually having a bleak world view at all. The existence of awful things does not negate the beauty to be found in life, or the possibility of making a change for the better.

Plus, it's just a great story.

Peter Tillman says

Gorgeous writing, wonderful 1960-ish space-opera plot, marred by an unsuccessful ending. Recommended. I

rated it 4.5+ stars after my first read, and downgraded it a bit on the reread. Still a near-great book.

Sta'atha Anfa Skerow is a senior interworld judge on the GalFed Assizes Circuit. A citizen of the Northern Spine Federation on Khagodis, she resembles (to Solthree eyes) a "streamlined baby allosaurus". A routine smuggling trial on Fthel V opens a trapdoor into a cesspool of treachery and corruption, cruelty and murder, slavery and redemption in a far-distant future.

Here are the opening paragraphs:

"My knife is missing," Nohl said.

"What does that matter?" Ferrier turned his eyes from the smoking volcanic peak on the horizon to the east and watched the waters of the bay dancing in glints of light from the lowering sun. On Khagodis the air is so thin that the stars are sometimes visible in daylight; now in the flaring blue Ferrier could see three of the system's other worlds. He had hooked the oxygen tube into the corner of his mouth and it bubbled slightly.

Amber lights glinted on Nohl's scales. With a pearl talon he flicked away an insect buzzing near his eye and looked down at the thin figure whose head came to his elbow. Ferrier was wearing white against the equatorial heat; his short jacket was closely fitted, and had double-breasted black buttons. Nohl was thinking that Ferrier's eyes were like the buttons, fixed and sharp on white skin. A thin skin over arrogance and greed.

Ursula K Le Guin's great cover blurb:

"Sex, violence, intricate plotting, light-speed pacing, an amazing variety of aliens, touches of Philip K Dick's sardonic humor and Cordwainer Smith's obstinate idealism make this novel dazzling."

More at my 1998 review, updated after a 2012 reread:

<https://www.amazon.com/review/R1KVKYP...>

Ayla-Monic says

I abandoned it. I am loving her writing style, but the story is simply not gripping me.

I really wanted to like this book because Gotlieb is a Canadian author and I really try to get as much CanCon as possible in my life. But, this just ain't cutting it.

In other news, I'm going to start *Stranger in a Strange Land* tonight, hopefully that one will go better!

Liviu says

really wanted to like this one but the ratio dated/writing style is too unfavorable for me

Dominick says

This first of a trilogy is good gutsy SF. Several plot strands across multiple worlds and involving both human

and alien protagonists weave a narrative of a future corporation with a slave breeding process, using cloning technology to create a slave race, and trying to create fertile clones who can therefore self-reproduce. The Galactic Federation, Gotlieb's far future space "Empire," acts in its usually only barely effective way to try to stop this. Great characterization, some genuinely unsettling concepts, but overall leavened with a strong sense of hope and potential, as Gotlieb's work usually is. Recommended for fans of literate and complex SF.

Catherine Siemann says

I wondered if, in such a diverse universe with so many different planets of origins, the court system would really resemble ours so much; wouldn't there be other conceptions? But I liked the judge character, especially; I also liked that all sentient beings were called "humans", whatever planet they came from (solthree, for example). Raises some interesting issues about sexuality, power, and etc.

Nando Martinez says

It took me 3 quarters of this book to finally get some sense of all the different life forms in it. There are lots of them. Some you just get to know by a quick mention. There are very few descriptions of how they look like or why it matters that they're from planet so and so. Just when things start to get good or I should say mildly interesting, the book ends. It doesn't leave you wanting to read more (being part of a trilogy and all) The story is weak. Hints of noir but not good enough.

Morgan says

Disappointing.

When reading a book full of dozens of alien species I ask, "what do these alien types add to the book?" In this case, I really can't tell.

The plot: a telepathic judge investigates a murder and human trafficking. But really it's more like, "a bunch of alien types bump around while a morose and naive judge (with 25 years experience) is shocked--shocked!--that corruption takes place. And then she writes haikus."

I've been slowly working my way through the Tiptree awards shortlist, but all too often I find shallow books that feature a weird sex scene or have a female protagonist and that seems to be enough to qualify them.

Alex L. says

Well written in the unmemorably way. I liked it at the time, and the world is well realized, but it did not stick. I liked it for the single enormous surprise, the first time an author had killed a character I quite liked with no warning.

Zachary Jernigan says

One of my favorite sci-fi books ever. Super weird story combining alien dinosaurs, a sensual male gladiator robot (c'mon, doesn't that sound AWESOME?), and the illegal trade in post-human merpeople.

Under-read and under-appreciated.

Tom Hayes says

What a great discovery Phyllis Gotlieb has been. What starts as somewhat confusing introductions to an array of strange characters is eventually woven together into a fantastic and sordid story. My measure of a good science fiction novel is to imagine if it would be able to stand if re-told in a different genre. *Flesh and Gold* stands to that measure. A good piece of Canadian Sci-fi and Canadian literature.

Lefty says

I never thought of the possibility of aliens as being sex-obsessed. I always thought aliens would be vicious genius mass murderers at worst, or arrogantly snobbish like Q at their best ... but never like this. Not sure what to think of it all.

AT says

A sort of film noir social sf novel that leaves just one too many questions for me. The atmosphere is well done but you don't get the impression of why this particular future is the way it is. A fun read, though.

UPDATE: I just read again and am adding a star. This book really stuck with me in an odd way and I enjoy the pulpiness mixed with a sort of sordid noir feel.
