



Vale of Stars

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Jene Halfner awaits the end of a hundred-year-long, deep-space colonization journey begun by her ancestors generations before. She has spent her life preparing for planetfall on Epsilon Eridani III, taking care of the growing number of victims of interstellar radiation aboard Ship.

What she will find upon arrival will change her perspective on life, and she and her descendants will live to face the incredible challenges their new world holds.

As generations pass, the women of the Halfner line uncover stunning secrets about their original mission, their new home on Epsilon Eridani III, and the future of the human race. Secrets that will challenge what they believe in, who they trust, and their perception of the ones they love.

Vale of Stars Details

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Author : Sean O'Brien

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Mary says

Vale of Stars actually drew me in and kept me going to the last page. I usually do not like stories where there are multiple generations and social issues and political conflict however, the author was able to draw me in and keep my interest all the way to the end. This may be for the very reason some others will not like it however; because the political and social aspects were presented at a high level instead of long drawn out details of those conflicts.

It was interesting how the evolution of the social structure was presented for family, science, religion, and government. For example there was the symmetrical presentation of how the colonists came to view the ship dwellers as gods and how the sea dwellers looked at the colonists as gods.

There are gaps between the generations, and the respective generational stories while tied together thru a common bloodline, seem to start at a new stage of the social evolution for the colonists at the beginning of each one. I can see that there could be more stories written in this same universe.

I will definitely be looking for more from this author. Anyone who can hook me into a story that I would usually get bored with someone to keep an eye out for.

Tim says

Another excellent sci-fi read which takes me away from my usual "epic battle" type books with a thoughtful journey through generations of colonists tasked with setting up home on another planet.

The title hits upon many talking points of interest and I particularly like the way religion was covered, showing mankind's ability to make myth from a factual basis. There were so many conflicting issues here, the atheist scientist that was infact seen as a God of sorts herself and the way that whilst we think we become more enlightened as time progresses, we do infact revert back to our natural instinct of social grouping.

Whilst this wasn't an all out sci-fi war with battles, casualties and conquest, its a very thoughtful book and a recommended read to anyone who likes a more considered approach to the future.

Highly recommended!

Jeff Miller says

I really enjoyed this - and not just because I designed the cover! I was fortunate to get an advance copy as part of the design gig, and this is another great book from Journalstone that I intend to share. This unique, multigenerational story centers on strong female characters (not all are exactly, um, strictly human), asking important questions about humanity while tickling your imagination all the way. I'll b especially excited to share this with my daughter when she's old enough - real sci-fi with great women leading the story. I DIG it!

Mirrordance says

Libro denso, lungo da leggere piu' della lunghezza reale. Una saga nel tempo, quattro parti che si susseguono come fossero 4 libri di una stessa epopea in cui le protagoniste sono legate da parentela, e ci permettono di seguire la narrazione nel tempo. Molti argomenti tipici della fantascienza vengono affrontati, a partire dall'inizio, il viaggio di colonizzazione di un pianeta lontano. Quando si ha la sensazione di sapere come va a finire, ecco che vi è una brusca virata, ma senza percepire uno stacco. Mi è piaciuto il modo in cui la narrazione continua, e viene tenuta alta la tensione e viene cambiato l'argomento affrontato. Il viaggio e la vita nello spazio ristretto di un'astronave, la colonizzazione e la convivenza, la relazione con gli "autoctoni", la scoperta della civiltà oramai estinta. Piacevole e non troppo scontato, considerando la difficoltà di "rinnovamento" nella fantascienza. Certo a volte si ha la sensazione di troppe storie in ballo e poco approfondite ma è interessante il concentrare la narrazione in un unico libro per dare in qualche modo un quadro piu' completo di piu' problematiche e il senso dello scorrere e dell'evoluzione, anche se poi c'è limitato approfondimento. Una saga vera e propria in 4 volumi approfonditi probabilmente sarebbe risultata banale e meno interessante. Era tanto che un libro di fantascienza non mi prendeva. Se devo muovere una critica ho trovato fiacca la fine, il libro converge in modo rapido, quasi forzato e poco chiaro, come se si dovesse trovare un termine a tutti i costi, ma questo non sminuisce la qualità del libro.

Mark says

Vale of Stars
By Sean O'Brien

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Summary:

A generational saga told through the actions of the maternal line of a single family about a voyage from Earth to colonize another world and the changes and evolution that humans go through in the depths of space and under alien suns on an alien world.

Genre:
science fiction

Main Character:
Jene, Kuarta, Yallia, Sirra. There's a lot of mirroring in this book using juxtaposition to tell the same story from different angles.

Favorite Character:
Sirra

Least Favorite Character:
Tann...he's the villain of the piece. He's the one I was supposed to hate. It worked.

Favorite Scene:

The whole last section of the book, the climax and denouement. Although Tann's final scene is pretty awesome.

Plot Holes/Out of Character:

Last Page Sound:

Wow! Those last 50 pages were awesome. The pacing and the story kicked up a couple of gears in the race to the end.

Author Assessment:

I would give something else by this author serious consideration.

Disposition of Book:

I liked it.

Why isn't there a screenplay?:

Not sure that the generational saga aspects of the story would convert very well to the big screen. Could be a Syfy series though with a season or half-season covering the adventures and lives of each of the female protagonists on their journey through time.

Chris Hawks says

I'll come right out and say it: **Vale of Stars** is a frustrating book. It's not well-written. It's heavy-handed. It tries to do too much. The characters are obnoxious. The science is laughable.

And *yet*.

...

In a nutshell, the story follows four generations of women, with each woman being the protagonist of her quarter of the book. It begins aboard a generation ship as it approaches its destination world, skips ahead in time to the planetbound colonies, and then expands out from there to the wider world beyond the colony domes.

From the very beginning, the characters drove me crazy. The bad guy(s) are bad guys just to be bad guys; sure, we get more insight to their motivations as the book progresses, but it turns out to be nothing more sophisticated than "I hate these people, so I'm going to be evil." The good guys (or gals, as it were) are just as unsubtle, always interpreting every action or opinion taken by the bad guys as this totally evil thing—not because it would make any sense to do so, but simply because these are the good guys, those are the bad guys, and this is the thing that needs to happen for the plot to go, and also because the author has his points that he needs to hit you over the head with as unsubtly as possible.

There is so much in this book that doesn't make any sense, beyond the non-existent character motivations. At one point, there's a biological transformation that's completely ridiculous. A little girl gets banished to the planet's surface, where she somehow founds a complete society including technology and infrastructure.

But buried inside all of the ridiculousness are some genuinely-interesting sci-fi novel concepts, including a halfway-decent first contact story, and the exploration of the worship of more advanced beings as divinities. And that's the most frustrating thing about this book: it takes three-quarters of the novel to get to the truly interesting stuff, but those ideas feel like distractions simply because of the way they're shoehorned into the rest of the story.

I would love to see some of these concepts expanded into their own proper novel (or novels) but I can't actually recommend *this* one. [2 out of 5 stars]

Marika Mullen says

I received an early reader copy of this book for Kindle. The story was interesting, but I found the characters difficult to connect with. While the story shows them in some difficult situations, it never stays with one character and time long enough for you to build up any affection or real concern for them. I found Yallia to be the most sympathetic as a child, but was turned off by her as an adult.

The world that O'Brien built is interesting, and I wish we had gotten to see more of it in the story. The writing is not terribly descriptive, which makes it difficult to picture the setting or the characters, which in turn makes it difficult to immerse yourself in the story.

[spoiler] I found the discovery of the ruins years later to be odd, considering the tech level. If the colonists knew that the ship was heading for 'the deepest trench' when it self-destructed, how would they not know about the ruins? Either the domers or the shippies should have found them from space in normal survey activity to identify the best place to establish a colony, unless there was some sort of screen that went away. I found the overall socialist and anti-religious sentiments to be annoying, but I did not lower the rating based on that. Overall, the book was not my style, and I would question how much the story and characters really appeal to a young adult audience.

Sharon says

I received this book as part of a LibraryThing giveaway.

A futuristic tale set in an alternative universe, away from Planet Earth, about a group of colonists nearing the end of a journey to a new world and then the female descendants of the original group.

This story engaged me with the detail of life, first on Ship and then on Epsilon Eridani 3. I especially liked the way the story went from one descendant to another which enabled a longer time frame and better story development, and therefore gave a greater depth to the story.

At the end of the story, all the loose ends were tied up but it still left a window open for a future story development story about Jene Halfner's relatives.

Overall, an interesting story, that I thoroughly enjoyed and which I would highly recommend.

Isis says

This is a fascinating book that takes science fiction and uses it in a loose way as a lens to look at the concept

of the history of man; circling back to the theory that humanity was partially, or wholly, a product of an alien species.

Jenes Halfner is the first in a long line of strong women that make radical impacts on their community - first in the spaceship that takes them to their new "home," and then on the planet's surface. Nothing is as expected when the travelers land and it ends up causing a major schism between two factions. This takes places over several generations and is filled with interesting ideas and looks at the different ways people approach the same issue or problem.

The book is somewhat cyclical, which lends to keeping the reader's interest, as do the astounding discoveries that are made over time, straight through to the climactic ending.

O'Brien does a nice job at world-building, giving us interesting characters to be invested in, and a well designed story arc that is smoothly paced. Definitely take the time to read this book, though some may find the very beginning a bit slow, it is worth sticking with it as it does pick up fairly quickly and keeps you interested for the remainder of the book.

Joe Young says

Interesting speculative fiction that follows a multi-generational journey of a colonization group that moves between galaxies seeking a new home. The spaceship is occupied by colonists and crew who are responsible for insuring the ship makes landfall safely. The colony forms a society based on equalitarian socialism with joint responsibilities for governing and supporting the mission. As the fifth generation of ship dwellers approaches maturity, the ship also approaches their destination planet with all the concerns that a foreign population could have about a new location being able to support human life. This is when a wrench is thrown into their self determined life. While attempting to survey the planet from a distance, they receive communications from a human population that has already colonized the planet. It seems their home planet developed a more highly efficient and powerful propulsion system not long after the first ship left. The second ship was built and sent after the first ship but, the distances involved and the lack of long range communication equipment allowed the second ship to overtake and pass the first ship without making contact. The second ship reached the target planet about eighty years before the first launched ship. When the first ship made contact with the planetary population, they found that all the hard work of colonizing had already been accomplished and the initial settlers had already braved the difficulties of building domes to raise their plants, animals and children in and had started terra-forming the new planet to make it more livable and better support the new population. They invited the newcomers to share their wealth and live among them. Some of those original settlers came to resent the new comers and looked for ways to differentiate the populations resulting in a class system the pushed aside the idealist socialism of the first ship population. All the problems of human evolution came to the fore and soon the leaders had to deal with the prospect of war between the various factions in the population. All the negative aspects of humans living together and trying to make a society function to support a growing population soon became apparent. Idealism was insufficient to limit the natural inclinations of man and soon power brokers evolved and worked to force their views on the remaining population. Discovering an intelligent native population that lived deep in the ocean caused another front to be opened for exploration and understanding. These newly discovered companions stressed the settlers resources and abilities.

The thoughtfully developed characters and the creative ways they dealt with their challenges individually and as a social group makes this book a delightful examination of self and how it compares to society in

various stages of development. I enjoyed the book and the challenge of integrating it into my internal social structure.

Cassie says

I really liked this story, and all its characters. I was not so sure of this book, but after reading the first page, i was hooked, I had to find out what happened next.

Kinsey_m says

I received this book as a member give away, and was requested to give an honest review in exchange, so I'll try to be as fair and honest as possible. I'm not a book finisher. There people who, having started to read a book, will continue till the end no matter what, out of a weird sense of duty. I'm not one of them. If I reach a point were I clearly sense that I'm not going to like a book, I just close it and change to another. There just are too many great books waiting to be read. Obviously, it could be that if I persevered, I would actually change my mind and come to love some of these books that I so quickly misjudged.

As you may have guessed, I did not finish Vale of stars. I did not even reach the middle of the book. This is not because I thought it was a bad book, not at all! From the part I read, it promised to be quite enjoyable and thought-provoking (interesting theme: percieved or real genetic superiority should mean privilege?), and interesting perspective: space travelers who have been born during the long travel to a distant planet and therefore only know the society of the ship.

However, and here comes a big SPOILER, after an exciting first part where a doctor and young mother causes the inhabitants of the ship to rebel en masse against the council who wants to direct all medical efforts towards healthy people, in detriment of some genetically flawed children, since they all will face a severe reduction in medical resources when they finally reach the planet, it turns out that the council knew all along that they weren't going to face a shortage of resources. On the contrary, they were going to have more resources than ever! Why did the council want to deprive the poor sick children? Were they simply evil? Who knows? They are all dead after the revolution, so it's impossible to find out! Moreover, after this revelation we simply skip about 20 years, and it appears that the revolution was utterly irrelevant... The only reason I can find for the revolution is to highlight the theme: those who were supposed to be genetically superior initially, are now genetically inferior. Which I'm not saying it's a bad point, but I just don't think that plot should be so obviously put to the service of a message.

I'm perhaps being very unfair here, but I couldn't face to continue reading knowing that the next part may turn out to be irrelevant as well.

I'm going to give the book 3 stars because the part I read was well written and engaging.

Barbara says

Received as part of LibraryThing's Early Reviewer November 2012 batch.

This speculative science fiction saga, *Vale of Stars*, by Sean O'Brien has to be admired for its ambitiousness and goals. While it makes a valiant attempt to reach those goals, however, it doesn't always succeed. The multi-generational space travel/settlement tale of earthlings bound for colonization on Epsilon Eridani 3 focuses on a family of women who each face heart-breaking decisions that ultimately cause irreparable harm to relationships, lives, and the fate of the colony, but mostly lead to angry regret. O'Brien stirs in ideas about genetic manipulation, philosophy, religion, politics, and prejudice, which might result in some juicy speculation had there been enough time – four actual books instead of one book divided into four sections called “books.”

There are several very interesting conceits within the book regarding how humans might adapt to persistent weightlessness and living in space, how a religion develops, how class warfare develops, and the more common – how one can go wrong when first encountering another sentient species. The development of these ideas is mostly satisfying, but – again – always seems to be dealt with as more summary than in-depth examination. Finally, there are very few male authors who can write effectively from a female perspective – Michael Dorris an outstanding exception to this – and O'Brien doesn't fare much better. I found his women characters in each section to be a bit angrier, quick to judge, and slow to forgive than was reasonable. This is not to say that women don't do this, but while O'Brien's characters exhibit these characteristics, they also choose men as partners who are their exact opposites – partners who are somehow flawed either in fact or in the eyes of these women – who they completely ignore when choosing the paths that so deeply affect the rest of their lives.

While this may sound as if it's a negative review, it's not meant to turn the potential reader away. *Vale of Stars* is an enjoyable read; however, it may leave the reader wanting more, not so much in a sequel but in a rewrite that lifts the narrative and dialogue a few grade levels, that develops characters a bit more, and that perhaps considers dividing the tale into several books rather than sections.

On a purely cosmetic level, I have to commend the JournalStone on the small number of typos in *Vale of Stars*. Having become an avid ebook reader and a composition professor and former technical editor, nothing frustrates a reading experience more than a multitude of typographical errors, which seem to be so commonplace in ebook editions.

Jens says

I got the book as part of the early reviewer program at Goodreads.

I liked the book in the end and think it is worth reading. It took me a while to get into it. There is a strong focus on social, ethical, and political questions that are relevant today and certainly worth thinking about. The story is placed on a space ship and later a different planet, but the problems that the characters encounter are familiar. At times I felt like there is too much pushing of specific views on those topics. However in the end I think there is enough room in the story to draw your own conclusions. The book could be used as a basis for discussions on those issues.

Alan says

Very few books grab me on the first page, and this book did! I enjoyed this fast paced Sci-fi story with several interesting developments exploring themes of how we fear and react to those who are different to us.

The structure of the book is in four parts and while this did speed up the pace of the story there were large gaps of time between each of the parts begging for more stories to be told. Some characters are well developed and I particularly enjoyed the main character in the latter part of the book, Sirra. I will gladly read more stories from Sean O'Brien.
