



The Colors of Space

Marion Zimmer Bradley

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-SUDDEN PANIC-

It was a week before the Lhari ship went into warp-drive, and all that time young Bart Steele had stayed in his cabin. He was so bored with his own company that the Mentorian medic was a welcome sight when he came to prepare him for *cold-sleep*.

The Mentorian paused, needle in hand. "Do you wish to be wakened for the time we shall spend in each of the three star systems, sir? You can, of course, be given enough drug to keep you in cold-sleep until we reach your destination."

Bart felt tempted -- he wanted very much to see the other star systems. But he couldn't risk meeting other passengers.

The needle went into his arm. In sudden panic, he realized he was helpless. The ship would touch down on three worlds, and on any of them the Lhari might have his description, or his alias! He could be taken off, unconscious, and might never wake up! He tried to move, to protest, but he couldn't. There was a freezing moment of intense cold and then nothing. . . .

The Colors of Space Details

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From Reader Review The Colors of Space for online ebook

Nicoleku says

I saw what people have said in previous reviews about the characterization and stilted dialog and expected it. Maybe that's why I was able to enjoy this story despite some rough patches. I wouldn't have minded if Bart was more fleshed out, and if his dialog didn't slip into rather unexpected decisions without a lot of what's-going-on-inside-his-head time. But past that, I loved this story. The world around the characters was very alive and the space descriptions were breath-taking (if you don't sit and worry about the scientific side of it). Out of the 8 other books I've been slogging through recently, this was like a breath of fresh air. Just don't take it too seriously.

Tsana Dolichva says

The Colours of Space by Marion Zimmer Bradley is not the first book I've read by Bradley, but it is the first I've read in several years. I listened to the LibriVox public domain recording, which is free to download from their website and from Project Gutenberg. On the other hand, compared with audiobooks read by professional voice actors, the quality of the books I've sampled from LibriVox (this one included) leaves somewhat to be desired. I suggest readers decide for themselves how problematic they find the quality (different chapters read by different people with a variety of accents). My review — henceforth — is about the story, not the quality of the recording.

The Colours of Space was written in 1963. I think if it was written now, it would certainly be counted as YA and would probably have been written with a different tone. I'm not sure it stands up to today's market. As it is, it provides an interesting view of science (fictional) ideas from the 60s including a misconception that the title is based on.

The main character, Bart, is seventeen and has just graduated as an astro(navi)gator. When waiting to meet his father at the spaceport, a different man shows up, claiming to be his father. Bart goes along with it because he doesn't want to put the man's life in danger from the alien Lhari who have a monopoly on interstellar travel. Supposedly, this is because humans can't survive the warp drive without being in suspended animation sleep but as Bart soon learns as he becomes embroiled in interstellar events, this isn't the entire story.

The main thing, I found, which distinguished this book from more modern YA is how stupid the main character was. Of course many YA characters make stupid decisions to drive the plot along and it wasn't really that. It's more that in recent books the characters appear to be cleverer and less... emotionally ignorant. I'm not sure that's the right phrase to use, but ignorant in different ways. By contrast, I was frequently (and incredulously) frustrated by how stupidly Bart was acting. Especially when he embarked on a dangerous saving the world mission without being in possession of very many facts or reasons (to motivate him, I mean). Mind you, his fumblings in the dark were amusing at times, just not intentionally. And he did get a bit smarter and more with it as the book progressed.

An other major source of amusement for me was the outdated science. The title of the novel — The Colours of Space — refers to the stars being much more brightly coloured when seen in space, as compared with when seen from inside the Earth's atmosphere. (There's another reference there to plot elements as well,

which I won't spoil, but I read the main reference as being to the multi-coloured stars.) The thing is, the phenomenon, as described in the story, is not entirely real. Yes, stars come in different colours, but those colours range from red to yellow, white and blue. There are no green stars. More on this over at my blog.

Mathew Walls says

Generic and dumb. And I mean both the setting and the protagonist. The setting because it doesn't make sense - the central conflict ends up being essentially meaningless, the way the world works seems incredibly unlikely and the science and technology contradicts both real-world science and itself - and the character because he just constantly does dumb things in order for the plot to progress.

So I'll start with the setting. There are humans and one species of aliens. Humans developed sub-light interstellar travel, then one day these aliens showed up with FTL. The aliens have a monopoly on their FTL tech. (view spoiler)

But that aside, there are still a number of other issues. Like the fact that the humans and aliens have been living and working side by side for generations, but never seem to socialise at all. (view spoiler)

Oh, and these aliens who discovered FTL space travel? They did it without maths. Or rather, their maths before they met humans is said to have been about equivalent to the ancient Greeks. Now the ancient Greeks did a lot of maths, certainly, but I find it just a little hard to believe that you could get from there to space ships without some advances in maths along the way. But no, the big thing the aliens got from humans was mathematics. It's like one of those games of Civilization where you skip some early tech and end up trading superconductors for the wheel.

It also had some pretty annoying quirks which I suppose were just products of the time it was written, like referring to the human species as "man" and having all of one female character, who seemingly exists just to be the protagonist's love interest at the end. I've read worse, but I did find this book quite irritating.

Mary JL says

This is not a well known book by MZB. In point of fact, it was one of her first novels before she became a big name author. And it was originally marketed as a juvenile--but I read and enjoyed it as adult.

It is a perfectly good space adventure novel==disregard the reviews on the back and read it. It is a short quick easy read. Nothing unusual or fantastic but it shows Bradley's early writing style. I have a particular fondness for this book because it was the first book by Ms. Bradley I ever read.

J.L. Dobias says

The Colors of Space By Marion Zimmer Bradley

I remember reading this a long time ago. Many times. Some time after the 1963 edition was published. I decided to read it again and see if it still stood well against time.

Bart Steele is a young Vegan who has come to Earth to study at the academy. He's a product of a human and Mentorian pair, although he lost his mother, the Mentorian, early in his life. His father, a Terran, owns a space shipping business that struggles as it must against the monopoly that the Lhari race has over interstellar flight. The Lhari have made it clear that only Lhari can survive while the warp-drive is active and that all other races must go into cold-sleep.

This monopoly causes Bart and many others to have a prejudice against the Lhari.

Upon graduation Bart is to meet his father at the Lhari spaceport where he will leave Earth and return home. But Bart will never see his father again and will be catapulted into a universe of danger and intrigue. He discovers his father and several others have died while trying to obtain the secrets of the Lhari and of the warp-drive. Bart is thrust into his father's world while he's become a fugitive from Lhari authorities.

An important plot point is that the Lhari are not able to perceive colors the way humans and Mentorians do; and this becomes a major plot device or I should say part of several plot devices. This is the only part that my more mature insight has quibbles about during this read. There are some big things that are hinged on this color disability that might not work quite as well as I once believed. One major one is that the Lhari could not tell something was red hot because they couldn't see the red. Since often survival hinges on such things there would likely have been another way for them to discern that a surface they were working on, in their ship, might be hot.

Most everything else in the story seems to stand the test of time and still seems to work quite well to move the plot along. Since not enough is revealed about how a specific disguise is worked out, it might seem a bit thin but it still works here.

The story itself beyond being science fiction seems to contain a mix of moral elements as regards prejudices and race hate. It becomes a story of a young man's journey to grow to maturity and whether he can alter his thinking and his beliefs when the time comes; or if he'll let the rage building inside to overflow and color his own sense of justice.

Even after all these years this is not only a great Classic; but it stands as a story that SFF fans should love and would stand well with other YA novels today.

J.L.Dobias

Jimmy says

As a book this doesn't age terribly well. The tech is something that can be ignored but the naive thought is what would happen... Nope

Alina says

The Colors of Space was an enjoyable, imaginative young adult science fiction novel written by Marion Zimmer Bradley early on in her writing career (1963). This was a nice story about a boy forced to grow up

fast and expand his understanding of the universe and the beings around him. After an adventurous search for his father, Young Bart Steele takes on the responsibility of proving that humans can survive the rigor of interstellar travel in a conscious state, in the process he begins to understand the alien Lhari, who have a monopoly on interstellar travel, and questions how mankind should go about becoming masters of interstellar travel themselves.

Ms. Bradley paints a vivid picture of what the future Earth and the many human occupied planets must be like and introduces the Lahari, an alien species very much like humans. She establishes the importance of interstellar travel and how it's done. The story is packed with details about how humans and Lahari are similar and how they are different both physically and socially. Much of the story is about seeing deeper than one's looks.

To read more of my review visit my website: [www.writeralina.com/2015/06/03/the-co...](http://www.writeralina.com/2015/06/03/the-color-of-space/)

Judy says

This is one of MZB's early books (she began publishing in 1958.) It is a stand alone, not part of any series. Sometimes considered to be a young adult novel, it features a young man just graduated from college.

Bart Steele, the recent graduate of the Space Academy on Earth, learns that his father has been murdered but has sent him a message: "Bart, I send money and instructions by my friend. Do as he says. Don't go home, Dad."

The time is far future, space travel is common, but the secret of travel faster than the speed of light is jealously guarded by a non-human race, the Lhari. The pace is relentless and Bart becomes the young man who must wrest the secret from the Lhari by going undercover as one of them.

Though the writing is a bit lame, the story is a fun read with interesting twists. Bart learns that the Lhari are non-violent and peace loving but color blind. His mission is to avert war while learning the big secret without being discovered. What he discovers is the "eighth color."

If college graduates these days had chances to grow up as fast as Bart had to, who knows what our future would be.

Amy says

I love when I find little novella gems like this one. With a book that's only about 100 pages long, I worry that I'm giving away the entire story by telling the basic plot, so I'll have to be careful. The setting is a future when we've encountered another intelligent race in the universe, and they've shared some (but not all) of their space travel secrets with us. It's that one little secret that the Lhari refuse to share with us (and one small lie) that allows them to have the monopoly on warp-speed space travel. Our hero, Bart, is flung headlong, unwillingly, and without choice into an adventure whose main goal is to uncover the secrets and lies of the Lhari. Along the way, he finds an 8th color and a more civilized race than he originally expected.

I feel as if I'm leaving out so much about what I love in this book by trying to tiptoe around some of the major plot points: the disguises, the relationships, and the social hierarchy between the races. But one interesting point that I won't leave out is that the Lhari are color-blind in the sense that everything that they see is monochromatic. This means that they cannot see the beauty of space in the brilliancy of color that humans can. Identification of bodies in outer space can never be made by color without the use of a spectrometer. And what a pity. There's one scene in this book that I love in which Bart is watching the beautiful colors of space pass by and lamenting that his Lhari friend cannot appreciate it with him. It brought to mind the beautiful scenes of warp-speed space travel from the television series *Stargate Universe*.

A search for an item which is an 8th color that Bart has never seen before plays a large part of the plot of the book. For what it's worth, my earliest memory is wondering why the world wasn't as brilliant as I'd expected and asking myself: "Where are all the other colors?" I don't know where I got the idea we didn't have enough colors in the world, but I still do sometimes wish there were more ... or that our eyes were able to see more of the color spectrum such as ultraviolet like some birds & insects can. i09 has an interesting article about hypothetical colors and impossible colors. Apparently, though, some humans with aphakia can see ultraviolet light. But I'd not want to have to have cataract surgery to acquire such an ability. And I would doubt that a normal human would be able to see an 8th color without the genetic disposition of tolerating brighter light than normal as Bart has. But it doesn't seem that the 8th color is ultraviolet or he would have certainly encountered it on earth before.

I've written so many words for such a short book, but I felt that I had to. I only wish that the author had other books that looked interesting to me (she tends to write fantasy instead of sci-fi, and I tend to like sci-fi far more than fantasy). However, I keep encountering mention of the "Darkover" series and am curious enough to have downloaded the first novella of the series (*The Planet Savers*) since it was free. I fear that it may be a gateway drug to a different genre. We shall see.

Anyway, do yourself a favor and get a free e-copy of this book to keep around to read when you're in the mood for a sci-fi space-travel novella.

Jared Millet says

I first read this book thirty years ago, then recently came across it free on Gutenberg. I'm surprised how much of it stuck with me. When I was twelve, I had no idea it was a YA novel (the paperback wasn't marketed as such) nor did I realize the book was already 20 years old. I was reading lots of Golden Age SF at the time, so by comparison *The Colors of Space* probably felt positively modern.

At the time of its original publication, I wonder if it was a little subversive. After all, it involves the human race being economically subjugated by the alien Lhari, whose monopoly on interstellar travel is based on a lie - that humans can't survive FTL except in hibernation. Once the whole us-vs-them scenario is set up, though, the whole story becomes an exercise in humanizing the enemy. The plucky teenage hero masquerades as one of the Lhari, infiltrates one of their crews, and sets out to steal the secret of Warp Drive (five years pre-*Star Trek*) - but comes to realize that the Lhari aren't evil, and that for the most part they're just a bunch of regular guys (except for the retractable claws and color-blindness).

That such a "why can't we all just get along" story was written in the paranoid "with us or against us" years between Korea and Vietnam just goes to show that in science fiction you can get away with anything. Then again, at least the bad guy aliens were good old capitalists at heart.

S.L. Jones says

A sweet and simple space adventure. Good moral and satisfying conclusion.

Some quotes:

"Thousands of years ago, men had spread out from Earth—first to the planets, then to the nearer stars, crawling in ships that could travel no faster than the speed of light."

"the never-changing, ever-changing colors of space"

"The cold knot of fear, never wholly absent, moved in him again."

"he looked out through a great viewport into bottomless space"

"Maybe there's no such thing as a limiting speed. Someday we'll reach true simultaneity—"

Jonmontanavega says

YA coming of age novel from celebrated SF author, with differences between aliens and humans theme.

Netanella says

The Lhari spaceport didn't belong on Earth.

Although I haven't read any MZB in a long time, her *The Mists of Avalon* and the *Darkover* series remain some of the best works of fantasy. She is, simply, an amazing author. *The Colors of Space*, an early work of hers written in 1963, displays many of the author's amazing qualities of writing style and messaging. The best scifi tells not just a story of the fantastic, but also relates something about ourselves in the here and now. MZB was always very good at this, and here she speaks to prejudice and war. *The Colors of Space* works well for a young adult audience, although parts of it haven't aged very well, particularly the descriptions of spacecraft computing. Overall, very nice.

Charles van Buren says

Excellent example

Verified Purchase(What's this?)

This review is from: *The Colors of Space* (Kindle Edition)

Excellent example of Bradley's juvenile fiction. I read it as a child and found it still interesting as an adult. We now know that despite her ability as an author, Bradley's personal life was less than exemplary to put it mildly. I understand that the publisher of her digital books is donating all income to childrens' charity. I do not know about the hard copy books. Perhaps her daughter, who asserts that she was abused, benefits.

Lightwhisper says

Another fantastic tale by this great author. Very inspiring!

Kat Hooper says

Originally posted at FanLit. <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/>

Bart Steele has been off at the Space Academy and hasn't seen his father in years. When he goes to meet him at a Lhari space station, Mr. Steele never shows up. Instead, he sends an agent with a message for Bart. The Lhari, an intelligent alien race, suspect that Bart's dad has stolen the secret of their warp drive. If so, this means humans will be able to manufacture their own warp drives and the Lhari will no longer have a monopoly on out-of-system space travel. The Lhari are trying to hunt down Mr. Steele and Bart is in danger, too.

Off goes Bart to try to find his father and his father's secrets. All he knows is that the secret to the Lhari space drive has something to do with an eighth color that humans have never seen before (Marion Zimmer Bradley's science is a little off here. Well, a lot off, but let's just ignore that, shall we? Because the idea is so lovely, even if it's scientifically ridiculous. I don't want to be Professor Party Pooper.).

The Colors of Space is a lot like one of the Heinlein Juveniles I read as a kid. The story is simple, Bart is a competent and likeable fellow and, although there is some grief for Bart, the story comes to a sweet, if predictable, end. There is just a bit of appropriate social commentary about the warlike nature of humans and some lovely imagery as Bart contemplates the beautiful colors of space. (I won't mention again about the scientific implausibility of that.)

I listened to Jim Roberts narrate the CD version of The Colors of Space that Brilliance Audio has recently released (it's been available at Audible since 2010). Roberts isn't the best reader, but he gives the book an old-fashioned feel that I liked in this case. The Colors of Space is five hours long on audio and is appropriate for any age. You can get a free version for Kindle, then you can buy the Audible edition with Whispersync for only \$2.99. (Please don't tell Brilliance Audio that I told you this. It was nice of them to send me a free copy of The Colors of Space to review.)

Lynda says

Humans have long dreamed of space travel, but the aliens they've met are not sharing the secret of how they travel between galaxies. They say humans cannot survive their shift into warp drive, but there are a few who have learned otherwise!

Tom says

The Colors of Space
by Marion Zimmer Bradley
read by Jim Roberts

This is one of Marion Zimmer Bradley's earliest books and is a solid enjoyable book. It's short, the pace keeps moving, and overall comes to a satisfying conclusion.

Mankind has expanded throughout the solar system and nearby star systems but it takes years to travel those distances with their current technology. Sometime in their exploration they met an alien race called the Llari who have the capability of faster-than-light travel. The Llari are happy to supply such transport to humans but won't share the secrets of their technology with humans. The humans and Llari entered into a mutually beneficial relationship for interstellar travel, but some parts of humanity have become disgruntled of the monopoly the Llari hold. Our protagonist Bart Steele gets involved in a human plot to discover this secret in this story.

The book is fairly simple so don't expect any deep/intricate character development, but it explores interesting social issues like relating to people different from yourself, friendship, and loyalty.

Jim Roberts has a great voice but his performance comes off kind of stiff and dry. As I got further into the book, I either got more used to his reading style or he relaxed a bit in his reading. If trying to decide between the print or audio version, the audio book version is pretty good but I don't think it adds anything to the enjoyment of the book.

Chris Fellows says

Yes, the characterisation is wafer-thin. The world-building is dodgy-as, the narrative is held together with coincidence gum and *deus ex machina* wire, and the plot point that is the fulcrum of the whole story is one of the more ludicrous bits of pseudoscience in Space Opera history. Nevertheless, I am giving this five stars.

You see, I read this book when I was very young, so I could visualise the scenes with the vividness of the very young, so the enthusiastic descriptions of the beauties of space have sunk deep into my marrow and become part of my being:

Swirling past the ship, gleaming in the reflected sunlight like iron filings moving to the motion of a magnet, were the waves upon waves of cosmic dust- tiny free electrons, ions, particles of gas; free of the heavier atmosphere, themselves invisible, they formed in their billions into bright clouds around the ship; pale, swirling veils of mist. And through their dim shine, the brilliant flares of the fixed stars burned clear and steady, so far away that even the hurling motion of the ship could not change their positions.

One by one he picked out the constellations. Aldebaran swung on the pendant chain of Taurus like a giant ruby. Orion strode across the sky, a swirling nebula at his belt. Vega burned, cobalt blue, in the heart of the Lyre.

Colours, colours! Inside the atmosphere of Earth's night, the stars had been pale white sparks against black. Here, against the misty-pale swirls of cosmic dust, they burned with colour heaped on colour; the bloody burning crimson of Antares, the metallic gold of Capella, the sullen pulsing of Betelgeuse. They burned, each with its own inward flame and light, like handfuls of burning jewels flung by some giant hand upon the swirling darkness. It was a sight Bart felt he could watch forever and still be hungry to see; the never-changing, ever-changing colours of space.

More importantly, in a genre which usually presents violence as the main way for protagonists to solve their problems, the Colours of Space is a magnificent description of non-violent conflict resolution. Both the possibilities and the limitations of non-violence are shown. The protagonist decides that the means do not justify the ends, and makes a hard decision not to resort to violence. Things work out okay in the end for everyone, but it is not a Care Bear universe where a happy ending was a foregone conclusion: people on both sides have been killed for less, though off-screen. The motivation for the antagonists to settle the conflict non-violently makes sense. The way the ending unfolds without bloodshed made a strong impact on me when I was very young and holds up well today.

I first became aware of our symbiotic bioflora from reading this book, so it played a role, I am sure, in determining my present conviction that our bacterial-pals-who-are-fun-to-be-with are more important than commonly supposed, and more effort should be put into understanding them.

On re-reading, I have also got a sneaking suspicion that the protagonist's selfless revelation of his exceedingly valuable information to humanity at large played a role in determining my present attitude towards 'intellectual property'. (viz. Property is theft. Intellectual property is intellectual theft. All that can be known or created exists eternally in the mind of God.)

So: read this book when you are still young, and let it work upon you, and you will probably turn out like me.

Diane says

I liked the story a lot, interesting concepts and engaging characters, but I'll tell ya, it was hard to enjoy it too much due to the narrator of the audiobook version I got from Audible.co.uk. I understand that LibriVox has a version of the book as well, which I'm tempted to download and compare. Amazing how a bad reading can ruin a whole book.
