



Shadow Captain

Alastair Reynolds

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The gripping sequel to the Locus award winning science fiction adventure, *Revenger*, tells a story of obsession and betrayal as two sisters hunt for the greatest treasure in the universe.

Adrana and Fura Ness have finally been reunited, but both have changed beyond recognition. Once desperate for adventure, now Adrana is haunted by her enslavement on the feared pirate Bosa Sennen's ship. And rumors of Bosa Sennen's hidden cache of treasure have ensnared her sister, Fura, into single-minded obsession.

Neither is safe; because the galaxy wants Bosa Sennen dead and they don't care if she's already been killed. They'll happily take whoever is flying her ship.

Shadow Captain is a desperate story of cursed ships, vengeful corporations, and alien artifacts, of daring escapes and wealth beyond imagining ... and of betrayal.

For more from Alastair Reynolds, check out:

Revenger

Elysium Fire

Shadow Captain Details

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Author : Alastair Reynolds

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From Reader Review Shadow Captain for online ebook

David Harris says

I'm grateful to the publisher for an advance copy of this book via NetGalley.

Following from 2016's *Revenger*, *Shadow Captain* picks up the fortunes of the Ness sisters, Arafura and Adrana, now that they have found each other, destroyed the dread pirate captain Bosa Sennen and seized her ship, the *Nightjammer*.

If *Revenger* was subtitled *The True and Accurate Testimony of Arafura Ness*, then *Shadow Captain* is written from Adrana's. Together the two volumes dramatise the distrusts that has been sown between the sisters - in particular by Bosa's attempts to condition Adrana to be her successor. Bosa is a wonderful, monstrous creation, not one woman but a whole series pursuing her cruel schemes out there in the darkness on the edge of empty space... Bosa may be dead but the grip of the shadow captain is still tight on this book, with a real doubt as to whether or not Adrana has a bit too much of Bosa in here.

This story is very much a yarn in the best, Stevensonian vein. It may be set millions of years in the future, after the Earth and all the planets have been shattered and reworked into millions of worlds that form a cloud around the sun. There may have been umpteen 'occupations' - civilisations reaching across the solar system - in all that time. There may be aliens ('crawlies'). But it's a pirate novel, all the same, as 'sun jammers' - spacecraft propelled by vast sails to catch the solar flux - ply their trade, 'privateers' raid cryptic, deadly vaults - 'baubles' - which contain client treasure and technology and above all, in the way that the story is ruled by lust for the clinking 'quoins' which have become humanity's universal store of value. Rumoured to contain human souls, rumoured to... well, there are all sorts of rumours, the quoins have an air of mystery about them, a mystery that Bosa was apparently determined to crack.

Reynolds pays close attention to the mood and language of his book, adopting a distinctive vocabulary (references to 'coves' and 'leagues' abound) that reinforces the nautical atmosphere. Together with the scattering of small ports furnished by his millions of artificial worlds and the fragmented, disparate nature of the society that inhabits them, we have the perfect background for a story of escape (the Ness sisters originally ran away from their safe home to escape boredom and marriage and to seek adventure), treachery, revenge (of course) and battle (of course).

As the story opens, the two sisters are reflecting on their position. Their ship, *Revenger*, formerly *Nightjammer*, and her ex captain, have such a grim reputation that they're liable to be engaged on sight by any legitimate vessel (and most that aren't). Nobody is likely to believe the story that Senn is no more - it's just the sort of ruse she'd invent to take in an unwary captain. So how can the sisters and their crew trade for necessities and recruit the new shipmates they need? Will they be driven into a pariah existence, on the edge of the Empty, everyone's hand against them?

Reynolds has great fun with this scenario, with the mistrust between the sisters and with the lingering doubts about Bosa while steering his craft - sorry, the language is catching! - from skirmish to mystery to raid. There's even an extended sequence with a distinctly noirish feel, taking place on a beaten up space station ruled over by a grotesque crime boss and where it actually rains most of the time. Yes, I know that sounds as though it shouldn't work but work it does, creating a real atmosphere of menace and threat.

Behind all this, of course, is the deeper mystery, the story of the Occupations, how they happen and why they

end and the nature of the quoins. The successive civilisations - interspersed by ages of barbarity - mean that humanity's history and destiny is shrouded, hidden (and one begins to suspect, there are those who want it to stay that way). Driven by nothing more than sheer curiosity, the Ness sisters are determined to find the truth - if not swallowed up first by pirate ghosts, deadly baubles or some other catastrophe they bring down upon themselves - and I really, really hope that Reynolds writes that resolution to the series.

Excellent space opera-y, pirate-y adventure. Strongly recommended.

Helen French says

Shadow Captain is part two of a trilogy, and I foolishly jumped in here rather than starting with book one. Does it matter? I was able to get into the story pretty easily. From what I can make out, the first book is from the point of view of Fura Ness rescuing her sister Adrana. Book two is from Adrana's perspective and the author has dropped in snippets of info here and there to get you up to speed.

The Ness sisters have taken over a notorious pirate ship previously run by Bosa Sennen but in doing so have been changed inside and out, which leaves their relationship in a tricky, delicate place. They run with a loyal crew, flying across the galaxy in search of fuel and treasure. Fura also has secret plans of her own. Adrana knows something is up but now how best to force out the truth. Things escalate when they realise they're being followed by another ship that will doubtless think Bosa is still on board and try to shoot them down...

I found the sisters fascinating characters and I enjoyed the complicated layers to the plot, working out who was lying about what at any given time. For me the supporting characters weren't entirely fully rounded but that is possibly attributed to missing out on book one. The ship and the worlds they visited felt solid to my mind and I'd like to learn more about their universe.

Warning, it does end on a cliffhanger and I am now super keen to read the next one (and the first one).

Lulai says

-- I received this book through NetGalley against an honest review. --

I loved the first book in the series and I was delighted to have the sequel and be able to read it in advance, but I do not know what happened, I did not really appreciate my reading.

When I reread my review for Revenger, and I see what I think of this sequel, there is somewhere a bug. The elements I liked in Revenger are still valid, especially the richness of the universe because we learn a little more about it in Shadow Captain and the author leaves us with new questions for the future. The questioning around the waves of civilizations has enormous potential, the author barely explore it in this sequel and I hope that book 3 will reveal many new stuffs, I would have just wanted to learn more about the other races of aliens because I think this is a major key to the plot.

For the characters, the first volume followed Fura that I adored, this sequel focuses on Adrana, I find her character more dull than Fura. She has been under the thumb of Bosa for months and the consequences of this remain too small in my eyes, yes she has excesses of anger, but that's it. Where is the psychological

torture, the brainwashing, I would have liked the author to take the bias to make Adrana darker, especially since she has Fura in front of her who keeps all her secret and who is in my eyes much better built. I am therefore mixed with Adrana, I think that alternating points of view between the two sisters could have been a good idea.

My big flat comes and it's the plot, I'll be sincere apart from fleeing, I found that there was nothing else in terms of action, yes the author distils us in small points some important information, but everything happens mostly in the last quarter of the novel. And then I had this feeling of passivity, apart from Fura, no one makes clear decisions. Frankly, it's a very strange feeling, because I know the potential of the universe and the series and at the same time I am deeply disappointed by Shadow Captain. I am still curious about Volume 3, but it will not be a priority when it will be released.

Brian Clegg says

One again, Alastair Reynolds demonstrates his mastery of complex world building. This is a sequel to *Revenger*, but while it's ideal to have read that first, I didn't feel a huge loss from not having done so. (But I'll be going back to read it.)

What sets these books apart is the richness of the setting. The Ness sisters, Adrana (the narrator of the book) and Arafura, along with their small motley crew, sail their spaceship through a far future solar system, where the planets have long since been dismantled to produce millions of small habitats and storage asteroids known as baubles. The civilisation in the system has risen and fallen many times, leaving mysterious technology (and contact with some low grade aliens) in a scenario that mixes high tech with a setting that is strongly (and intentionally) reminiscent of the world of seventeenth century shipping.

Spaceships are primarily powered by vast acreage of solar sails, privateers hunt bounty from the baubles and even the language has an element of period feel. The result is a very impressive, immersive environment. The Ness sisters have captured the vessel of the feared pirate Bosa Sennan - they need to survive, somehow avoid being mistaken for pirates and interact with lowlifes on a frontier miniature world when one of their crew is seriously injured.

Part of the cleverness in the way Reynolds weaves his world together is the mix of very everyday and the bizarre and innovative. Ships communicate from a 'bone room' where the skull of a long dead creature, invested with a kind of artificial life, provides a mental connection to other similar setups. Some of the characters suffer from a strange infection that gives their skin a glow and gradually makes them paranoid. Even the currency they use is mysterious. And underlying it all is the gradual revelation of a huge, time-spanning story that explains the regularity of the rise and fall of civilisations in the system - this is far from resolved and left for future entries in the series.

As is true of other Reynolds titles (*Elysium Fire*, for example), the only real weakness is characterisation. The Ness sisters are from modern SF central casting, where it has become a cliché for the central character to be a very young woman. Despite being 18 and 19, they run the ship and act as the officer class - but there's nothing in their characterisation suggestive of their age - it would have made more sense for them to be in their 30s. Most of the other crew have very little depth - this is primarily reserved for the baddies, who can be a little pantomime, but there is something there.

Frankly, though, in this thoroughly enjoyable adventure, this lack is a very minor factor. There is so much

going on, and so much depth to the world building that the reader is carried along brilliantly. The puffs on the cover call the series 'Pirates of the Caribbean meets Firefly' and 'Treasure Island meets Moby Dick in space.' The most effective of those comparisons is with the superb TV show Firefly, which was frontier cowboys in space, but that was set in a very conventional space universe. Reynolds gives us so much more to explore and enjoy. Excellent stuff.

Chris says

copy from Netgalley in exchange for a review

I really enjoyed Alastair Reynold's 'Revenger' when it came out last year. A blend of sci-fi buccaneering in the mode of Treasure Island and Indiana Jones style archaeology made for a snappy, compelling read. So I was quite excited to get my hands on the sequel, 'Shadow Captain'

This is a book about monsters. It centres on Adrana Ness, whose sister Fura was the protagonist of the first book in the series. Though Fura carries scars, Adrana has problems of her own. She spent more than a little time in the company of a notorious pirate captain, being conditioned through trauma to become that captain's eventual replacement. Fura we've seen already in the first book, a fierce soul, tortured, compromising with potentially appalling consequences to rescue Adrana and take a ship from Bosa. Adrana is...quieter. More concerned with the effects that the pirate captain may have had on her mind. Perhaps more introspective.

But make no mistake, Adrana is still a Ness, and still a monster Her steely determination is a trait shared with her sister, and one which comes off the page with the force of a freight train, alongside an eloquent, thoughtful internal voice. This is a young woman who is not going to take any crap from anyone, even her sister – unless it quietly serves her goals to do so. She's always looking at the angles, trying to work out what's real and what isn't, to understand where she sits in the scheme of things. This is a rawly shining portrayal of a fiercely intelligent woman on the edge – striving with each breath to achieve her goals, whilst trying to work out exactly what they are – and if they're her goals, or ones left behind by the ghost of someone else in her head. The dynamic between Adrana and her sister is impressive for sure; both broken, twisted people, trying to do the right thing even if they aren't sure what the right thing is. They, and their associates and antagonists, are drawn in the gently exaggerated fashion of an R.L. Stevenson story – given traits that make them larger than life, while their actions make them even more so.

This is a story of swashbuckling and adventure beyond the stars. But it's also a story which wants to look unflinchingly at the price such a life costs. Our heroine (or heroines) are doing what they must to survive. Sometimes they're not making the right calls. Sometimes their ruthlessness saves their lives, sometimes it's an impediment. But they feel like two roughly oriented siblings, trying to rub along in far, far less than ideal circumstances. That's what Reynolds has done so well here – given us a seething sibling rivalry, rooted in horror and gross technology; and provided both pints of view over the course of several books. As a result, we're now seeing each party from their external and internal points of view, and the frisson is delicious.

The short version is – the relationship between the sisters shapes this book, and it's absolutely pitch perfect; dark, playful, thoughtful, with undercurrents, like ice in a darker sea. You can feel the Ness sisters similarities in their growing inhumanity, even as they tidally creep away and toward each other.

For the crew of the Revenger, you see, victory hasn't been entirely sweet. They have a ship, and a crew, yes. But nobody else is likely to believe that they aren't pirates. So begins another adventure, looking for

somewhere to buy fuel that won't ask too many questions.

The universe that Reynolds has created for Adrana and the rest to explore carries his usual grand scope. Thousands of worlds in an intricate dance across the stars. Millions of years of history, much of it a blank space to the inhabitants of this space. The characters are the centrepiece, for sure – but the universe is one of sweeping grandeur. There are baubles – rocks filled with treasure, but also filled with traps, monsters and risk. There are populated worlds with a population in the thousands, rusted soldier-bots without explanations. Stations floating in the depths of the void, avoiding answering too many questions. This is a vivid, detailed world, one with far, far more questions than answers. Fair play to the characters for recognising that, and delving into the mysteries. And fair play to Reynolds, for giving us a playground which is successfully so grand in scope – thousands of worlds backed against a sun – yet so intimate, as we follow characters around the minor eddies of worlds around that sun. What population centres we see fit into the Stevenson aesthetic – pirates, madmen, fools, a grim and gritty universe demanding much and giving, well, nothing. But they're lavishly described, with not an atom out of place. This is a living, breathing, broken world, but one whose grandeur is undeniable.

The plot – well, it's a farrago of suspense, of revenge, of bad decisions made under pressure. Of conspiracies and half truths. There isn't the clarity of revenge that the first book gave to us, no, but a web of obfuscation and partial understanding, wrapping a lot of human, understandable, very poor decisions, and an exploration of the way those decisions affect both the immediate parties, and the universe at large. The former...well, this is an exploration of the way people become monsters, each step seeming like the right one in a long chain of self justification. The universe? Well, read and find out. It's a page turner, I'll tell you that. A rip-roaring tale which makes you want to know what happens next, between crosses, double-crosses, vengeance, and some incredibly poor choices. The adrenaline is there, the action, the heart-breaking emotional investment.

This is a story to break hearts and make you turn pages. It's great stuff; pick it up, you'll want to know what happens next.

Empress Reece (Hooked on Books) says

4.5 stars ...

The only reason I didn't give it 5 stars because the pacing was a little slow at times especially when the focus was on Adrana and Fura's relationship and all of their secrets.

It was also hard to believe that Adrana gave in so easily to partnering with Fura since in the beginning she was so adamant that she didn't want anything to do with her sister's obsession.

I loved their time at the bauble and at Wheel Strizzardy; those were two of my favorite parts of the story. I'm also looking forward to seeing what they encounter in the outer reaches and how the Quoins come into play.

Claudia says

Ah! I'm beginning to see the familiar Al Reynolds yet again! He doesn't linger much in the YA field, despite the Ness' sisters age. The story picks up from the end of the first volume, *Revenger*, and builds strongly.

However, I'm surprised at myself: how did I miss the fact that *Revenger* series is going to be a trilogy? The good thing is that this second part doesn't suffer from middle book syndrome, on the contrary: things are getting hotter, complicated, the mystery of the quoin is somewhat unraveled, Bosa Sennen is still a big influence and the most significant part, in my opinion, is brought into light but not revealed. The worst part (figurately speaking) is that this hugely significant part is to be developed in the next book, which I have no idea when will be published...

That being said, I enjoyed it to the fullest. If the first story is told from Fura's point of view, here the narrator is Adrana. The sisters complement each other perfectly, they are the yin and yang of the crew. New characters are brought to life, some despicable, others not so much but all equally interesting. We get to meet new baubles and worlds and based on Bosa's belongings, some really fascinating, albeit scarce and teasing, details about the Occupations.

The more I delved into the story, the more compelling it gets. As usual, Reynolds leaves us with more questions and scenarios than answers, but that's what makes his stories great and that is what I love about his writing, beside the fascinating worldbuilding, timeframe and scope. He is one among the very few SF writers who manages to surprise me with something in each of his works.

And if anybody knows when the third is out, for I didn't find anything about it, please do tell me.

>>> ARC received thanks to **Orion Publishing Group / Gollancz** via NetGalley <<<

Ran says

[defeat Bosa Sennen at the cost of a few important things (life, sanity, appendage, etc.) (hide spoiler)]

Mark says

This time last year I was reviewing Alastair's *Elysium Fire*, the sequel to *The Prefect* (aka *Aurora Rising*.) In 2019 I'm now looking at another sequel - this time to *Revenger*, published in 2016.

Shadow Captain continues the story of *Revenger*, a mere few months after the end of the first book. This was where (spoiler alert!) the two young sisters, Adrana and Arafura (aka Fura) Ness, managed to kill a notorious space-pirate, Bosa Sennen, and take over her ship, the *Revenger*. Both of these did not escape the plot of *Revenger* unscathed – the book finished with many of the Ness's crewmates dead and their spaceship destroyed. Fura ended up having to eat raw lightvine to survive, which has left her 'full of glowy-stuff' and can mean changes in behaviour and eventually a painful death. Adrana, this time the teller of our tale, has also suffered by being tortured by Bosa and is now suffering some sort of PTSD.

Much of *Shadow Captain*, being set a few weeks after the end of *Revenger*, is about what to do next, having "won the battle but not the war", so to speak. The solution for the crew of the *Revenger* is to spend time in the outer reaches of the Confederation, where they (or perhaps more obviously their ship) will be less

recognised. As well as this, such covert action allows the crew time to get used to one another, work out how to run the ship and adjust to the new situation. They decide to do this by modifying the *Revenger* to make it look less like Bosa's old ship.

First, they have to collect fuel from an old bauble (which are ancient technological artifacts), which leads to a rather exciting, if creepy, adventure. The crew then decide to head to Wheel Strizzardy, an old and rather decrepit space station where they can get supplies and repair/rebuild their ship. On the way to Strizzardy the crew get the impression that they are being followed, a situation confirmed when one of them is injured by stray gunfire when working outside on the hull. It seems that two spaceships are after a bounty placed on Bosa's old ship. The *Revenger* returns fire and damages one of the stalking ships by accident, before moving on to Wheel Strizzardy.

On their arrival at Strizzardy the group find that the station is as decrepit as they had expected and run gangster-style by local crime-boss Mister Glimmery. The crew of the *Revenger*, now in disguise as the crew of the *Grey Lady*, find themselves being watched by Glimmery's henchmen. With one of the squad in the local hospital, the team scramble to get sorted but find that they become part of Glimmery's power games between the gangster and the local aliens. They are also told that one of the ships that was chasing them is about to arrive at the space station...

When I reviewed *Revenger*, a few readers made the comment that the book had many of the elements of a Young Adult novel – young protagonists following a *bildungsroman*-esque journey, etc etc. I disagreed, finding the book as accessible but perhaps more subtle and perhaps more violent than the usual YA text. Here that idea of being for younger readers is shaken off convincingly. This is darker, bleaker and more typically Reynolds' work.

Whilst it's not straying too far from the original brief outlines of the characters, the world-building is great and the internal monologue of Adrana is convincing. As the book progresses it appears that neither sister is totally free of Bosa Sennen, with Fura making some questionable decisions in the way that Bosa would have done and Adrana having moments of intense hatred and rage which she feels she has to control. Both of these actions lead to a build-up of tension, as the reader is never sure until towards the end whether this will affect the rest of the crew or not.

The title is a subtle reflection on this – it shows Fura & Adrana as captains of a spaceship in hiding, but also suggests that the sisters as co-captains are a shadow of the *Revenger*'s previous owner, captains who have to prove themselves to others that they are worthy of the role, but whose position is still influenced by the presence of Bosa.

As with the first book, there are some shocks and revelations at the end (though at least one that was guessable) and the ending is a bit of a cliff-hanger where loyalties and friendships are tested. Don't expect everything to be tied up! But overall the pace, as it goes, starts slow but builds nicely, to the point where the book becomes un-putdownable. Whilst there are clichés (it is, after all, space pirates!) there were times when I genuinely wasn't sure where this was going to go. I will now wait impatiently for the third novel.

In summary, *Shadow Captain* is a middle book that does what it means to do – builds on the set-up of the first and then extends it into something darker and more complex before making you want to read the next. This could run and run as a series, something I would gladly like to see happen.

Vincent Thurgood says

I've read both of the Revenger books in two or three days each. The book club which I read the first book for was divided over the book. It was a YA book and it wasn't "hard SF" were the criticisms of the people who didn't like it. I felt it was a good yarn and the second book, told from the POV of the other sister is an improvement on the first. It starts more or less where the first book ends with the villain of the first book dead but not entirely out of the picture, as her ship is now in possession of the sisters and their crew. But is her soul in possession of them?

The need to get fuel for their launch and the suspicion they're being pursued are the first of a number of crises they have to try and sort out. Alastair Reynolds does a great job of putting his characters through the mill: there are some unintended casualties and some unexpected hazards that have to be encountered. Will the sisters fall out irrevocably over the deceptions that they contrived?

Reynolds' channels the uncertainty and danger of the present into a plot that culminates in the ultimate unintentional anarchistic undermining of the status quo of his imagined universe. There's more than a nod to Iain M. Banks' Culture here: a subtext on the state of the nation in this book - a crumbling infirmary that is held up by cables from the "sky" and can only be accessed by a rope ladder might be a comment on the Austerity era NHS. Is Wheel Strizzardy the isolationist UK of post Brexit or Far-Gone Glimmerly a Trump/Putin strongman criminal-leader? Read it yourself and make up your own mind.

Annemieke / A Dance with Books says

Thank you to Gollancz and Netgalley for the review copy in exchange for an honest review

Books are strange things. Sometimes you can be past the first 100 pages and wonder where things are going and are you even really enjoying it. By the end you are hooked. That was Shadow Captain for me.

Shadow Captain is the sequel to Revenger, and follows the new crew of the newly named Revenger after the events of the first book. It starts up a few weeks after it and instead of Fura's point of view we now get her sister's. This took some getting used to for me. For 400 pages I was in the head of Fura, seeking revenge. Now I was transported to the person who was the reason of her revenge. Her view on Fura is very different from what I experienced in the first book and it took some getting used to. Fura of course has had to do some bad things and that changed her.

Adrana herself also took some getting used to. I think the trouble I had was that she was so influenced by Bosa, enough to put a knife to her sister's troth. Yet in the first 150-200 pages we rarely notice this. This is a conscious choice by her we discover and once we did start seeing Bosa's influence on her I felt things fitted more.

In a way this second book is a set up book. An in between book. It deals with the consequences from killing Bosa and taking their ship. Things aren't as easy. They also have to learn how to crew together despite some of the lying that has happened between them and figure out a chain of command. There is also grief and the aftermath of their traumatic experiences that floats to the surface here and there. This book was necessary for them to be able to really go for what their story is about. The questions they (or rather Fura and Adrana) and I have about their history. About how things work. About what will happen to them in the future.

Also the ending, totally called that before Adrana even thought about it. So when is the next book coming

out?

Lou says

Shadow Captain, the sequel to one of 2016's best science fiction novels, is even more entertaining than Revenger; in fact, it's preposterously good. This futuristic pirate tale from master space-opera writer Alastair Reynolds is a unique and original take on space adventure, and this time revenge and grief are at the forefront of characters minds. It's enjoyable to see the progression and evolution of the characters, the Ness sisters in particular, as they continue their adventures aboard the Nightjammer.

The author dials back some of the horror elements that are present in the first book, but the action remains thrilling and plentiful. Reynolds's worldbuilding is some of the best in the business, and this world is no exception. It's richly-imagined and elaborate with lots of attention to detail that most writers don't give a second thought to. His characters are superbly drawn with real grit and gusto and are easy to cheer for and relate to as the story unfolds.

The narrative shifts from Arafura's in Revenger to sister Adrana in Shadow Captain, but neither of the girls are as innocent and hopeful as they were when this dark journey began. It's on quite a regular basis that the second novel in a trilogy suffers from middle book syndrome, but there's none of that here; this is even more enjoyable than the first book. I love that the author provides food-for-thought about all manner of things, the most fascinating of which is the possibility of alien life, and even after finishing I am still thinking about some of the questions that arise in this beautifully woven tale.

Those who enjoy sci-fi, cyberpunk and young adult adventures will find plenty to revel in here; just be sure to read the preceding book before this, it will make little sense otherwise. I feel it will even appeal to those who read thrillers as it has plenty of thrills, danger and surprises and fantasy fans will enjoy the pirate aspect of the novel, and yes, before some smart arse points it out, I know pirates exist. I am now so, so excited for the next instalment, so don't make us wait too long, Mr Reynolds!

Many thanks to Gollancz for an ARC.

Olav says

Almost exactly as good as the first one. For better or for worse.

Character development is shallow AF. Adventure is well paced. Fun but disposable. Interesting world building.

Unseen Library says

I received a copy Shadow Captain from Hachette Australia to review.

Tens of millions of the years in Earth's future, during the period known as the Thirteenth Occupation,

humanity travels across space in sailed spaceships, with many crews searching for relics and treasures from previous eras of human and alien occupation. For years, the greatest threat to these ships was the legendary pirate Bosa Sennen, whose deadly black ship, the Nightjammer, ruthlessly hunted down and ambushed hundreds of ships, killing all onboard, before vanishing back into the darkness. Continuously moving her consciousness from one body to the next, Bosa was able to keep her reign of terror going for years, becoming a near-horrifying myth throughout space. However, Bosa unexpectedly lost everything when she came up against the Ness sisters, Adrana and Fura, whose courage and daring resulted in them taking Bosa's ship and her life.

Now the Ness sisters command Bosa's infamous ship, rechristened as Revenger, and seek to make their own fortunes. Veering away from the ship's previous profession of piracy, the Ness sisters and their crew scavenge through old abandoned bases, attempting to find lost treasures or supplies as they slowly establish a new life for themselves. But the legacy of Bosa Sennen is constantly around them, and not even her death is enough to end her legend.

While Adrana seeks to come to terms with the horrors she witnessed as Bosa's captive, Fura becomes obsessed with finding Bosa's hidden cache of treasure from her extended lifetime of piracy. En route to the planet of Wheel Strizzardy to find a source who may be able to lead them to the pirate trove, Revenger is attacked, forcing the crew to brutally defend themselves. Arriving at their destination, they find that ships they encountered were hired by a consortium of hundreds of planets who have placed a massive bounty on Bosa Sennen's head. What's more, they do not particularly care if she is already dead, as long as her ship and all aboard are captured and destroyed. Now, with an armada behind them and the crew of Revenger stuck on the gangster-controlled world of Wheel Strizzardy, the Ness sisters must find a way to escape with the information they need. But are they prepared for the devastating secrets their search will uncover?

Shadow Captain is an intriguing and enjoyable piece of science fiction that follows a mismatched group of semi-pirates as they navigate their way through space. Reynolds has created an ambitious new universe for this series, and set an interesting and compelling story in the heart of it. Unfortunately, I never got a chance to read the first book in the series, Revenger, beforehand, and this somewhat negatively impacted my enjoyment of this book, as I failed to understand several key aspects of the series universe. Despite this, I ended up really liking this fantastic read and I am looking forward to the next book in the series.

Click link for full review:

<https://unseenlibrary.com/2019/01/12/...>

An abridged version of this review ran in the Canberra Weekly on 10 January 2019:

<https://unseenlibrary.com/2019/01/10/...>

Or visit my blog at:

<https://unseenlibrary.com/>

M Alan Kazlev says

Light Spoilers

Alastair Reynolds is probably my favourite science fiction writer. I always find my imagination stimulated by his incredible worldbuilding, and I love the way he so often has strong female characters as protagonists.

Of his universes, Revelation Space / Galactic North universe is classic quasi-hard (no FTL) SF on an epic galactic scale, comparable to Baxter Manifold Space series. Terminal World is a highly original riff off Vernor Vinge's "zones of thought" idea. The vertical city of Spearpoint consists of different zones and vertical levels of ascending technology and laws of physics. Pushing Ice has humans stranded on an isolated settlement in a huge megastructure, dealing with different very strange aliens.

Finally, his Revenger Universe can only be describes as a sailpunk version of Joss Whedon's Firefly. Millions of years in the future, the solar system has been remade into thousands of small worldlets, each with its own "swallower" or black hole at the center to create artificial gravity. Ships use solar sails and ion drive to travel between worlds (no FTL). Like the Whedon-verse, all the action takes place in a single solar system made up of a huge number of worlds. It's a sort of super united nations with tens of thousands of member worlds, each world being autonomous and equivalent perhaps to a city state.

I loved Revenger. It was one of my favourite, if not my actual favourite, scifi book, and, like all such rich ideas, has been hugely influential on my own worldbuilding and scifi imagination. And hence I have been waiting impatiently for the sequel for the past two years. If my review is more critical than it could be, it is perhaps due to my high expectations. Sequels, whether in books or movies, are rarely as good as the originals. For me, Neuromancer was by the far the best in William Gibson's Sprawl Trilogy. Everyone agrees the original Matrix was the best in the Wachowskii's Matrix Trilogy. (A rare exception here, is The Empire Strikes back which was clearly superior to the original Star Wars)

At the end of Revenger, the first book in this universe, the protagonist, Arafura (aka Fura) Ness, managed to rescue her sister Adrana, kill the notorious space-pirate, Bosa Sennen, and take over her ship, the Nightjammer. Revenger ended with most of their crew dead and Fura having to eat raw lightvine to survive, which turns people into psychopaths and eventually kills them, while Adrana was psychologically scarred from being brainwashed and tortured by Bosa, who wanted to turn her into her replacement.

Shadow Captain takes place not long after the events of Revenger, this time told from the perspective of Adrana. No one outside the central characters knows Bosa is dead, so Adrana and Fura are concerned to keep their identities secret.

Basically Shadow Captain can be divided into three unequal parts.

The first third or so of the book follows the theme of Revenger. This was my favourite part of the story, with its exciting theme of a bunch of outlaws in a ship, and often, in a very powerful ship (think the Blake 7, LEXX, and Farscape TV shows). There is adventure, exploration, and danger.

Moreover, with Fura was infected by Lightvine, and Adrana conditioned by Bosa, both sisters carrying some of Bosa murderous traits around in them, it was shaping up to be an edgier version of Karl Gallagher's Torchship trilogy or Becky Chambers' Long Road to an Angry Planet. I quickly tore through the pages; I couldn't get enough of it

To my frustration, the narrative soon becomes bogged down in the second and longest part of the story. With a wounded crew member, the crew have to dock at a large space station world, where they have no choice but to deal with the criminal boss, Glimmery, who runs the place. This takes up literally half the book, which is an incredible waste of worldbuilding and storytelling opportunity.

As a a result, this amazing universe, with its Congregation of tens of thousands of inhabited worldlets, its solar sail clippers, its treasure worlds or "baubles" waiting to be cracked open, and cycles of civilizations set

against a background of thousands and even millions of years, so full of is so rich and full of diverse possibilities, is constricted into a tired formula of protagonist-antagonist on a single world. For anyone who prefers a story set in a larger canvas of adventure, this is hugely frustrating.

The third and shortest part picks up the pace again, with the crew again back in space, but now the story feels rushed, more like an outline than a completed novel. For the most part there's little dialogue or interaction with the new characters, or even between the old and new characters, such as what one might expect from the first part. It's as if the whole story is rushing to its denouement. At the end, there is more dialogue and more interaction between the characters, but this is only as the lead up to the final reveal.

In the end, Shadow Captain disappoints. I'm left with amazing worldbuilding possibilities, an under-utilised favourite trope, and a story that for at least half the book is too reliant on a formulaic bad guy to drive the narrative tension. A more spaceship-based approach, visiting different worlds and even encountering different crews, would I feel be better suited for a story set in, and exploring, such a vast and amazing universe.
