



Century Rain

Alastair Reynolds

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Three hundred years from now, Earth has been rendered uninhabitable due to the technological catastrophe known as the Nanocaust. Archaeologist Verity Auger specializes in the exploration of its surviving landscape. Now, her expertise is required for a far greater purpose.

Something astonishing has been discovered at the far end of a wormhole: mid-twentieth century Earth, preserved like a fly in amber. Somewhere on this alternate planet is a device capable of destroying both worlds at either end of the wormhole. And Verity must find the device, and the man who plans to activate it, before it is too late—for the past and the future of two worlds...

Century Rain Details

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Author : Alastair Reynolds

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From Reader Review Century Rain for online ebook

Apatt says

“That’s the problem, you see. I mean, time travel is definitely involved here, but not in quite the way you’re thinking.”

Time travel—but not as we know it—is the strongest, most imaginative and most remarkable aspect of *Century Rain*. The other Alastair Reynolds books I have read are all set in the far future*, a future so far flung practically nothing is recognizable except some human characters. *Century Rain* is quite atypical for Reynolds, it has two plot strands, one ostensibly set in 1959 and the other in 2266.

In 1959 Floyd, a private detective, is hired to investigate an apparent suicide which Floyd’s client believes to be murder most foul. The investigation uncovers some very strange facts about the dead girl. In 2266, an archeologist, Verity Auger, is tasked by her superior to travel to what appears to be Paris 1959 to recover documents left by the dead girl. She soon discovers that all life on planet Earth of 1959 is in danger from a mysterious conspiracy.

The 2266 setting is familiar Reynolds territory with weird technology and more AIs than you can shake a stick at. However, the 1959 plot line is a showcase for Reynold’s versatility, it reads mostly like noir or hardboiled crime fiction, as exemplified by the likes of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, that is until the super strong creepy kids with horrific black teeth show up in pursuit of our heroes. I much prefer the 1959 parts of the book, it is a fun, almost old school, romp**. However, fans of Reynolds’ space opera need not worry, the spaceships, posthumans, robots and weird nanotechnology are all in place. No alien makes an appearance up but they graciously left behind some artificial wormholes and mind boggling BDOs.

Reynolds always makes an effort to develop his characters and he does a better job of it than most sci-fi authors. The main characters of *Century Rain* are likable, complex and believable. As usual with Reynolds, there is a little romance, bantering humour, and some pathos. These humanizing elements are always welcome (in moderation) in sci-fi. My only complaint is that the 1959 setting is mostly abandoned in the second half of the book after the two plot strands combined. The space chase and launching of smart missiles are fairly standard space opera shenanigans and pale in comparison to the first half of the book. Though a special mention must be made for the “*snake robot marked with the crossed-out “A” that meant it was most definitely not Asimov-compliant*”.

Century Rain is not top tier Alastair Reynolds but it is by no means a disappointment. It is very imaginative, nicely written and well paced. I would have liked more adventures in the 50s and less space battles but maybe that's just me.

* Except Doctor Who: Harvest of Time which is set in the 70s, but although it is a wonderful Whovian romp, it is not a “proper” Reynolds novel.

** Though I have to say once the action moves from Paris to Berlin I feared the wurst (?° ?? ?°)

Fun / Interesting quotes:

“I’m a private detective. If I don’t get clouted on the head at least once a week, I’m not doing my job

properly.”

This is almost Jeevesian:

“What she’s saying,” Tunguska interjected, adopting a conciliatory tone, “is that there are some things you might be reasonably expected to have a useful opinion on...and some things you might be reasonably expected not to have a useful opinion on.”

“I see,” Floyd said tersely.

“And I’m afraid the matter of hyperweb navigation falls resoundingly into the latter category”.

Does this sound topical to you?

“The Fascists got what they deserved,” Floyd said.

“My husband lived long enough to see those monsters come to come to power. He saw through their lies and promises, but he also knew that they spoke to something nasty and squalid in the human spirit. Something in all of us. We want to hate those who are not like us. All we need is an excuse, a whisper in the ear.”

This doesn’t sound like much but it almost isn’t a metaphor, as Verity Auger’s artificially implanted linguistic skills begins to deteriorate.

“My German’s a bit rusty this morning. That didn’t help.”

This is a great potted history of computers:

“The Germans developed high-altitude rockets to bomb London. Within a couple of decades, the same technology would put people on the Moon. The Americans developed atomic bombs that were used to flatten Japanese cities in a single strike. Within a couple of decades, those bombs had become powerful enough to wipe out humanity many times over, in less time than it takes you to make breakfast. Then there were the computers. You’ve seen the Enigma machines. They played a significant role in wartime cryptography. But the allies played a significant role in wartime cryptography. But the allies built bigger, faster machines to crack the Enigma messages. Those machines filled entire rooms and drank enough power to light up an office block. But they became smaller and faster: much smaller and much faster. They shrank down to the point where you could barely see them. Valves became transistors, transistors became integrated circuits, integrated circuits became microprocessors and microprocessors became quantum optic processors...and still it snowballed. Within a few decades, there was no aspect of living that hadn’t been touched by computers. They were everywhere, so ubiquitous that you almost didn’t notice them any more. They were in our homes, in our animals, in our money, even in our bodies. And even that was just the beginning.”

Chris says

Imagine how good Alastair Reynolds could be if he learned how to write a decent conclusion. However, the fact is that he writes fascinating, compelling stories, develops interesting, empathetic characters, and immerses you in incredibly detailed universes based on concrete possibility based in science.

And then he abandons them. Every single book of his I have read, including Revelation Space, Redemption Ark, Chasm City and Absolution Gap continues with the plot at a breakneck pace, until the final 15-20 pages. It is then apparent that he has no idea how to wrap up the story, and just throws down some notes as to how he would finish the story and walks away. This was frustrating enough after the Revelation Space trilogy that I swore that I wouldn’t read another of his books. However, the stories are so good that I have gone back on that pledge and read two more of his books.

And truth be told he's good enough that I will likely continue to read, no matter how frustrating his inability to close actually is...

This is a five-star sci-fi novel, but I'm taking off one star just because he never learned to properly conclude a story

Claudia says

Al Reynolds is an unpredictable writer. This time, instead of his usual dark hard sci-fi, he delivered something entirely different.

Set up on two levels, Earth in 2266 and an, let's say, alternate one in 1959, the novel combines a highly technological post-apocalyptic world (which will never cease to amaze me) with a crime-mystery story and a musician-detective which at first I thought it was a combination between Poirot and Holmes, but later discovered that was inspired by inspector Maigret. There are a lot of clichés used to outline the world of those years but not at all out of place. In fact, the insurmountable differences between the two worlds are the spice of this story.

If you're a fan of crime&noir literature and a light sci-fi work will sound appealing to you, then grab this one. It will take you on a spectacular journey.

Brendon Schrodinger says

Tagging 'Century Rain' was a harder job than expected. It's kind of an alternate history, but not quite. And it's kind of time travel, but not quite. But I can hang the science fiction and mystery tags with no second thoughts. So do these not quites make a not quite good story? Not at all. And while the book was not groundbreaking, nor did it take me to new undiscovered places and wonders, it was quite fun and held my attention all the way through.

Susan White died under suspicious circumstances. Well that's the way her landlord feels, but not the Parisian police. Therefore her landlord decides to hire a private detective to investigate the crime. Here we meet Ffloyd and Custine. Two down and out ex-cops who also play jazz semi-professionally. Everything is all set for Parisian Noir, but what's this about Paris in the 23rd century, a maverick archaeologist and a wormhole?

So yes, somewhat predictable, but great fun. And Reynolds injects some hard-core physics in the mix, but not too much. Just wormhole physics (probably mostly made up) and speculation about gravity waves. All add a little bit more spice to the mix.

I did prefer the first 2/3 of the novel which is set in the alterno-20th century Paris. The Ffloyd and Custine pairing is great. But Verity can be a bit pig-headed and predictable. The last 3rd was mainly space opera and while it was OK, it was nothing new or unusual. Like a toned down Iain M Banks section.

But I'm glad I pulled this volume off my shelf. It's been languishing there for a while (5 years it seems from the publishing date). This edition was part of the Gollancz Space Opera range which I had to buy because I

was collecting all their SF Masterworks at the time. So while I wasn't astounded, I had a lot of fun reading this and it was very readable. I'm definitely going to pick up another Alastair Reynolds novel.

Karl says

Perhaps Four and one half stars over all, "Century Rain" is a hard science adventure mixed with an old-style murder mystery.

Gabrielle says

Paris, noir murder investigation, time-travel, archaeology. Gimme, gimme, gimme!!! I do so love it when a writer takes all my favorite things and puts them into a book I can devour excitedly. A part of me is always a bit frustrated I wasn't there early enough to write it myself, but what can you do? I opt to simply enjoy the ride.

In 2266, a nano-robot apocalypse has forced humans off their home planet; Verity Auger is an archaeologist who digs up evidence of the past civilisation from an eerily deserted Paris. After one of her research expeditions goes wrong, she is recruited by a secret agency who wants to send her back to Paris. Like way, way back... Her storyline is intertwined with Wendell Lloyd's, a jazz musician/private detective who works in 1959's Paris. But then again, it's not quite the 1959's Paris we know from our history books... In this slightly off City of Lights, Lloyd investigates what seems at first like a suicide, but the deeper he digs, the more he realizes there is much more to this case than anyone could have anticipated.

It's impossible to summarize the plot more than this without giving it away, and this book is simply too awesome to spoil. Alastair Reynolds is an astrophysicist, and it shows: the sciency bits are well-written and make sense. But don't make the mistake of thinking this is dry just because the author is a big nerd: his prose is evocative and lush. I was pleasantly surprised and very excited by the style of "Century Rain"; it's a real pleasure to read a gorgeously written book that doesn't underestimate the reader's intelligence! I could see the story unfold before my eyes and many scenes kept me on the edge of my seat, manically turning the pages. Of course, this book requires patience. No exposition is given about Verity's world until very, very late, so you just have to roll with a few weird words without fully knowing what they mean for quite a while, but that turns out to be part of the perfect pacing! And when the explanations do happen, they are as disturbing as they are familiar - and well worth the wait!

Strong and realistic female characters in sci-fi are not exactly a dime-a-dozen, but here we have Verity. Very intelligent, driven, stubborn – but also too dedicated to her job to find enough time for her marriage or children. Her mind is sharp, but she has a very short fuse and her impulsive reactions have a way of complicating things... I liked her just as much as she annoyed me, which is really perfect. You know early on that her storyline will inevitably cross Lloyd's, and I couldn't wait to see how the disillusioned jazz-loving detective would deal with the hot-tempered archaeologist.

This book really impressed me and I can't recommend it enough and not just to sci-fi fans: everyone who loves a good story and great writing needs to get a copy of this genre-bending book! 5 stars and a well-

earned spot on my "favorite" shelf!

William says

First 40% was different and fun, very good.

My advice: Read the first 40% and then stop when "they leave". Pretend it was a novella and ends well.

Rest of the book was boring, long-winded verbal diarrhea, insulting. 250 pages too long. It's like those 1/2 hour documentaries on Discovery Channel that have been stretched to an hour, to fill space and add more advertising, repeating the same words and footage again and again. Crap.

NOTE: Please, please also read these Reynolds masterpieces:

Turquoise Days, a novella, and short stories Enloa, Weather, and Zima Blue. Surely his finest works, along with House of Suns.

Adrian says

I've recently become a big fan of Alastair Reynolds, and with good reason! His currently released clutch of Science Fiction stories are inventive, well written, suspenseful, surprisingly close to actual scientific theory and generally really rather good. Despite his great writing style, it's always worth noting that, while many of his stories work as stand alone reads, they really are best when tied into the overarching world, and the explanations of his plethora of inventive new technological macgubbins can seem very stuffy and over-long if your not the type to care about how finely and realistically crafted his work is (I think those in the know call it "*hard Sci-Fi*", but I don't know if I'm in the know, so I really don't know, y'know?).

Century Rain is a bit different for several reasons. Firstly, it's a complete stand-alone story, with no links or mention of his other works. Secondly, its premise involves flip-flopping (note: not the technical term) between gritty film noir land and slick sci-fi in a move that might sound schizophrenic but actually works really well.

I don't want to give anything away (beyond what's on the blurb at least), but the marrying of these two very distinct worlds and the clashing personalities they contain is done brilliantly, with a deft touch that stops it ever becoming unnatural. The characters are a brilliantly written band of wildly varied people (something Reynolds is a bit of a master at), the story full of intrigue and mystery, and both settings are so well-realised as to be characters in their own right. He never overdoes the technological descriptions, which might upset fans of the awesome ideas the Revelation Space arc is stuffed with, but really improves the atmosphere and feel of the overall read.

Personally, I can't recommend this enough. It's a fantastic, gripping book that is both clever and enjoyable without ever being overwhelming, and a great change of style and pace to other sci-fi and detective stories. First class!

Emma says

What to say?! This is a truly bonkers book - 500+ pages of wormholes, spaceships, alternate histories, 1950s detective fiction, romance, futuristic science fiction... There is a lot to enjoy in it, and a lot that I did enjoy, but unfortunately my overall impression isn't completely positive. The first two-thirds were good and there was some great, pacily written plot, interesting characters and touches of humour as the portion of the book set in an alternate Paris of 1959 came to its conclusion. After that, when the action and main characters transferred to 24th century space, I'm afraid that it all started to unravel and get too much for me.

Not only do I think it was too much for me, but also rather too much for the author. In trying to cover too much ground what Reynolds has ended up with is a book which feels 200 pages too long and yet a bit unsatisfactory. For me, this is because there are pages upon pages of tiresomely tedious description of a chase through space to try to save the world (well, one of the worlds, and one that isn't really real at that!) it is all wrapped up very quickly with loose ends escaping all over the place! Having spent time earlier in the book convincing the reader of an unlikely romance, Reynolds then contrives to allow the lovers to walk away from each other irreparably without a backward glance. Questions and parts of the plot which have been key - and belaboured as such - earlier on are either forgotten or simply swept away. Just why was the main character chosen to undertake the mission? What were the messages being sent through the wireless set all about?

As those of you who read my reviews know, science fiction - both its content and the style of prose it tends, or perhaps needs, to be framed in - isn't really my thing. This is perhaps the main reason for my rather muted enjoyment of this book and I will confess that there was a particular bit of dialogue just over halfway through that made me pause. One of the characters uttered the words "Don't die on me now, not after all we've been through!" and somewhere in the distance the bell tolled for my enjoyment of this book...

David Sven says

I learned a new word. *Nanocaust*. Artificially intelligent nanotech designed to control the weather and reverse global warming stops responding to human commands. More nanotech is designed to combat the rogue elements. They go rogue as well. After eight levels of nanotech are released the micromachines start consuming everything on sea and land for fuel – including us.

This story takes place some 300 years in the future. Nobody lives on Earth. Humanity is divided into two main groups – Threshers and Slashers. The Threshers control access to Earth and live in a network of structures orbiting Earth called the Tanglewood – reminiscent of the RustBelt or Glitterband in the Revelation Space series. The Threshers reject the use of nanotechnology, seeing it as the evil that destroyed their world. Shortly after the Nanocaust all digital data became corrupted before it could be transferred to hard copy, leaving a vacuum in historical knowledge. To regain some of that knowledge teams are sent back to Earth, braving the elements and the *Furies* – rogue nanotech clusters - to collect and bring back as much of their lost history as possible.

The Slashers on the other hand embrace nanotechnology and use it to enhance themselves physically and intellectually – in that regard they are almost identical to the Conjoiners, also from the Revelation Space series. The Slashers control the rest of the Galaxy. They have also discovered a network of wormhole portals AKA The Hyperweb – left behind by some unknown alien entity, which allows fast travel throughout the

galaxy. Also discovered scattered about the Hyperweb are dyson spheres large enough to contain planets. Nobody has been able to find out what exists inside the spheres...until now.

I loved the background and the world-building. It's a bit derivative of the Revelation Space Universe – but as I loved that world anyway it wasn't a negative. I was immediately drawn in at the beginning. Unfortunately, the two main characters of the book were a little bland to what I was expecting. The story had a lot of potential being part '50s noir private eye, part borderline horror (view spoiler) and a few interesting plot elements like time travel and alternate history - But there was just too much time spent doing ordinary boring stuff -and the two main characters were rather ordinary I thought. It just didn't have the same edge I've gotten used to from Revelation Space. So the middle felt a little bogged down and the ending a bit rushed.

Still, there were enough cool ideas and concepts to make this an enjoyable read and I'm looking forward to digging into more Reynolds in hope of discovering more of what I like about his writing.

3 stars

Jason says

5 stars

This fairly long novel is a true testament to the fact that sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This is an accessible hard science book mixed together with an early detective noir story.

As for the science it reaches for some very big concepts and contains many intriguing technologies. It however is lite compared to that of the wondrous science from the Revelation Space series. The world building however, is top notch and the back story of the war between the Threshers and the Slashes told through out this is fabulous.

The detective noir of an alternate 1950's Paris is good but really only touches on themes of old school mysteries. Without being political Reynolds paints this alternate Earth minus WWII by choosing not to comment on why the divergence from our history has come to pass.

Floyd and Auger are one of the best complimenting pairs that I have read about in quite some time. Their relationship grew in a real way and you really felt it as it changed. They had great playful dialogue, deep meaningful actions, and they genuinely ended up caring about each other. They seemed to both be genuine articles and good, albeit flawed people.

With all respect intended this book played out to me like a hard science version of a Dan Brown novel. That is probably why I just could not put it down. Like all great thrillers the reader needs to feel invested in the lives of the characters for them to truly work. That is exactly what Alastair Reynolds has done here, and it made everything else work. This is a thrill ride filled with chases, shootings, stabbings, freakish child like killers, nano everything, worm holes, spaceships, nukes, and so much more. Reynolds has to me created a future classic science fiction novel that is quite accessible to readers that might be put off by hard science.

In case you could not tell by my review, I loved this book. I highly recommend this as a good starting point

for those not familiar with Alastair Reynolds or his Revelation Space Series.

Liviu Szoke says

I read this wonderful book back in 2011, without knowing that Alastair Reynolds will become my favorite SF writer. Think about a noir-alternate universe-postapocalyptic-hard SF novel. Oh, and I forgot about the horrible scary children-fighters who hunt the main character at some point, so this novel takes some horror turnings, as well. If some romanian publisher will translate this book, I am sure that many readers will become very happy (the same like me, of course)!

Daniel says

Ova knjiga je mis mas svega moguceg. Imamo klasicnu detektivsku pricu, alternativnu istoriju, putovanje kroz vreme, klasicnu naucnu fantastiku, itd... i sve to smuckano na skoro 700 strana. I moram priznati ovaj buckuris je sasvim dobro uspeo. Nisam to ocekivao :)

Samu pricu necu spominjati sem da kazem da je odlicno napisana. Nema dosadnih momenat, vecina stvari te uhvati nespremne, odnosno pola vremena nagadjas sta ce se desiti... STO JE ODLICNO. Moram da priznam da se u poslednje vreme to ne desava bas cesto. Likovi su isto interesantni, ne previse duboki ali dovoljno razvijeni da te zainteresuju za svoju sudbinu.

Jedini detalj koji mi se nije svideo je kraj knjige. Motivi negativaca su mi nekako suvise nejasni, odnosno znam sta rade ali nisam siguran tolko zasto rade to sto rade.

Sem toga puna preporuka.

Cecily says

WOW! What a cracking - but crazy - read. I'm still reeling from it. It doesn't get muddled or daft and yet it has everything... really... **everything**: time travel, spies, archaeology, cyborgs, a love triangle, wars, wormholes, virtual reality, a quest, death and sacrifice, murder mystery (with all the usual clichés lovingly included), nanotech, code-breaking, genocide, bodysnatching/ swapping, bootleg music, ecological disaster, white-knuckle chases, wraith-like horror characters, alternative history, secret passages, ethics of immortality, terraforming, some steampunk, a nod to Casablanca and an even bigger nod to (view spoiler), and the weirdest biological weapon I've ever heard of! It even has some strong and significant female characters, which is not exactly the norm in sci-fi.

SETTING & PLOT

It is primarily a detective drama in a noirish sci-fi setting. Whereas all the other Reynolds' I've read have three threads of story, this has only two: Paris in 1959 and Paris in 2266. The difference between the two versions of the city were enhanced because I read this before and after Mieville's "The City & The City" (<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>), which is also a noirish detective thriller, featuring archaeologists and set in two versions of a city, albeit a very different sort of separation.

Floyd is an impoverished private eye in 1959, whose excitement at the prospect of a case echoes my own feelings about the book: he "felt a weird sense of vertigo: a combination of fear and thrill that he knew he would not be able to resist. It would pull him deeper and it would do what it would with him." Similarly, there's a character who doesn't want to be a detective, but gets sucked in - just like the reader.

One thread starts off as a slightly odd murder investigation; the other is a slightly odd quest to retrieve historical artifacts (though the most important artefacts turn out to be a rather bigger concept). As with any good thriller, what seem like trivial asides often turn out to be important later.

WRITING STYLE

As usual, Reynolds' story is told in a very visual way: at times it is almost like watching a film: the chases, the wraiths, and especially a nail-biting scene where someone is looking for a vital bit of paper that is not quite hidden (will they find it or not?).

There are a couple of places where the exposition of backstory and science is explained in a slightly heavy-handed way (and a couple of the baddies are not much of a surprise), but those are trivial issues when there is so much good stuff crammed in barely 500 pages.

THEMES

When you climb off the walls from the relentless excitement, this raises many profound issues:

- * How do we know what is "real" and what is simulated - and does it matter? Who decides? (view spoiler)
- * If you could be immortal, or virtually so, would you want to be, and to what lengths would you go?
- * If you could have the (appearance of) whatever you wanted, whenever you wanted, would you tire of it? What if you could even conjure things we can't imagine: "colours were unfamiliar (and heart-wrenchingly beautiful) , but she could hear them, fell them, smell them"?

Four more (view spoiler)

MISCELLANEOUS QUOTES

* "New patterns would begin to emerge from the doughy grey of unstructured cloud... But right now the clouds were bickering. The patterns formed and decayed at an accelerated rate, with lightning of a kind of emphatic punctuation to the dialogue. The clouds fissioned and merged, as if negotiating age-old treaties and alliances."

* "Charm was what he excelled at. If anyone sensed his underlying shallowness, they usually mistook it for

well-hidden great depth of character, like misinterpreting a radar bounce."

* On the dangers of studying maths too deeply (Reynolds was a physicist before turning to writing): "she had studied mathematics so furiously that after an evening manipulating complex bracketed equations, simplifying forms and extracting common terms, her brain had actually started to apply the same rules to spoken language, as if a sentence could be bracketed and simplified like some quadratic formula for radioisotope decay."

* "like an electric shock without the pain... a sharp inquisitional light... it lasted an eternity and an instant."

* "The trains waited with snorting impatience, pushing quills of white steam up towards the roof... Its red tail light spilled blood on to the polished surfaces of the rails."

No technology is omnipotent even if, to quote Arthur C Clarke, it is sufficiently advanced to be indistinguishable from magic: "In the presence of a wizard, she wanted miracles, not excuses." With this book, I felt the story was being told by a wizard with words; no excuses were necessary. WOW!

Nikki says

I reread this with my sister for the first time in about ten years. It's a book I've always thought fondly of; I enjoyed it, as a teen, but my sister adored it. It's actually the book that got her back into reading after years of not caring for it at all. I enjoyed several of Reynolds' other books, too, but haven't read any of them for... actually, far too long. So how did it measure up?

Pretty darn well. The hard SF aspect I enjoyed less than I used to (though I also grasp it better than I used to, I think), but the politics I enjoyed more, and followed a lot better. I was still lamentably slow about a couple of points (let's just say that close reading is a good idea before you ask the author about something which turns out to be incredibly obvious), but I'm more politically engaged now, so that aspect was more interesting to me than before.

I expected it to be mostly about Verity Auger for me; I remembered her as badass, and I didn't remember much about Floyd at all. But despite myself, I found myself drawn into both stories, and hooked by the way the two stories converged; at one point I had to go grab my sister and yelp about how badly I needed a happier ending. And while there's plenty of space for more story, at the end of *Century Rain* — there's a whole complex past and present sketched out that Reynolds could play with, not to mention the future of the characters — it's also a satisfying end, if bittersweet. The characters are ready for a new stage of their lives, while their immediate arcs have come to an end.

And can I still see the world going the way it does in *Century Rain* — the climate change, the increasingly desperate solutions, the loss of information because digital libraries are so vulnerable? Yes; those aspects remain perfectly relevant. It doesn't seem to have aged badly, which sometimes hard SF can because of the science and the predictions it makes about the future.

Definitely enjoyed it — and more than I expected to, I think!

Originally posted here.

