



Foreigner

C.J. Cherryh

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The first book in C.J. Cherryh's eponymous series, *Foreigner* begins an epic tale of the survivors of a lost spacecraft who crash-land on a planet inhabited by a hostile, sentient alien race.

From its beginnings as a human-alien story of first contact, the *Foreigner* series has become a true science fiction odyssey, following a civilization from the age of steam through early space flight to confrontations with other alien species in distant sectors of space. It is the masterwork of a truly remarkable author.

Foreigner Details

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From Reader Review Foreigner for online ebook

Neil says

This is my first attempt at Cherryh, and I'm on the fence as to whether or not there will be more. I'm surprised that the reviews of this aren't more tepid.

The atevi are interesting: the alien species at the heart of the book, dark-skinned, larger than humans, but more importantly hardwired in a different way. Their society runs on hierarchies based on duty, but friendship and trust are notably absent. They are mathematically astute and tend to glorify numbers and seem to desire to reduce decision making to equations. If an individual is getting in the way of the greater good, it's acceptable in their society to hire an assassin and remove them, but this hiring is a matter of public record.

A ship full of humans has become lost in the galaxy where the atevi live. Eventually they decide to move on to the atevi planet. This well-intentioned choice is still an invasion and eventually leads to war between humans and atevi. Most of the book picks up (after two interesting early chapters that unfortunately don't really go anywhere) a few generations later, after a truce has been reached. The humans give the atevi technology (their society is at first far behind in technology, but the gap is narrowing) in exchange for being allowed to survive in the face of the atevi's vast numerical advantage.

The story is told from the point of view of Bren Cameron, who has taken the role of paidhi. The paidhi is the only human who lives among the atevi, a very complex diplomatic position, as the differences between the atevi and the humans are not always obvious on the surface.

But it's here where the story break down for me. As interesting as Cherryh's concept is, the execution is pedestrian. The insecurity of Bren's position leaves him constantly dithering and his perspective grows tiresome, too introspective. He doesn't know what's going on and for much of the book, very little happens. The book would be more entertaining if Cherryh had found a way to show us what the atevi are like through more action instead of telling us through Bren's rather bland stream of conscious. One of the challenges Cherryh sets for herself is to make the atevi difficult to understand as a species yet still make us interested in the atevi characters. Unfortunately, and I think particularly because we see everything through Bren's eyes, this doesn't happen. The atevi all blend together, with the exception of one conniving dowager in exile.

To me this book only builds up steam in the final chapters, and by then I'd ceased to care. After 400 pages of reading, I felt like I'd reached a starting point for the series. That's a bit longer than I like my prologues! It took me a long time to get through this book, and I don't know if I'll continue the series.

Maria Dimitrova says

I really wanted to like this. And for a time it seems like I will. And then boredom hit. Bren is one of the most boring characters I've ever met. The atevi were incredibly intriguing but because of Bren's POV I feel like they never really got a chance to shine. The last few chapters provided the bulk of entertainment and even made me curious about the rest of the series. So maybe, just maybe, I'll read the sequel. One day. But not too soon.

Bradley says

Third read, 8/18/16:

What can I say? Until it gets to Bren, I'm not attached to the story much, but the fact that so much of them comes back to haunt us in subsequent novels makes me *want* to pay attention. But other than that, once Bren is in the spotlight and we're in his head, I'm there, and this becomes one of my favorite novels. :)

Why? The psychology, mainly. The Atevi are really fantastic aliens and the real diamond in this series is the fact that they are not hardwired the same way as us. Their knee-jerk reactions are *not* ours, and Bren, our interpreter/diplomat, starts out in the middle of an assassination attempt on his life for reasons he doesn't understand and political associations and alien emotions that refuse to be cracked. It doesn't help that the Atevi think of everything in a type of numerology, that word orders and groupings of people or objects are either fortunate or unfortunate, that Bren must do the equivalent of tensor calculus with every sentence, and then he gets thrown into the really life-threatening situations.

The whole novel is about trying to understand his situation, and its harrowing and I'm just as concerned and confused as the MC. And this is still true even when I've read a good portion of the rest of the series and this is my third read for this one. Can I be even more impressed than this?

Will Bren's decisions alter the destinies of the stranded human colony and the aliens? Is he betraying his own kind? Or can he rely on his gut reactions? Can he ever trust the Atevi?

Totally amazing thriller. :)

Original review:

My personal favorites of Cherryh are the Foreigner books, hands down. And that's even while excluding her actual Hugo winners, Downbelow Station and Cyteen.

It's been so long since I started the Foreigner series that I only very vaguely recall having to struggle a little bit at the beginning. The second readthrough, on the other hand, was an absolute joy, picking up and retaining all those previously annoying details that then brought the tale to life. Nothing is wasted. The tension between remaining loyal to the human community and getting sucked into the political tensions of an interesting alien race that could seriously benefit from a greater stream of technology was like a draft of pure clean water in comparison to so many years of ham-fisted Star Trek.

The seriously twisted mental gymnastics of having to speak through numerology made me really believe, deep down, that these aliens were not only brighter than us, but they were also natural Shakespearean poets. I also learned more about herd mentality from this book than I did from any other source, and she made it truly exciting.

What will Bren do? Will he betray his own kind? Is it right to do so? Is he being set up to die?

The poor Paidhi was so lost. I loved it.

Jokoloyo says

I blame Michael Whelan who made attractive cover art. The cover art is displaying black tall warrior class alien. The cover is too tempting for me than I bought it without much thinking. The cover (as if) promised military-space opera. But the first book is more like planetary adventure than space opera.

This novel has good opening, but after that the story is dragging with unmemorable ending (I don't remember the ending, and I don't really care). And there are a lot of plots/questions unresolved.

Then I found out that this book is the first of a pretty long series (around 20 years in the making between book 1 and book 15). Maybe that's why the ending is not so satisfying, but that's my opinion.

Maybe I have wrong expectation that resulted in 2 star rating. I expected a single novel story, not a beginning of a long series.

Veronique says

I'd never heard of Cherryh or of her epic sagas, but after reading many stellar reviews from fellow readers, I thought I really needed to try her.

Foreigner, the first in the series of the same name, is an intriguing read. A human starship finds itself lost in space. Queue a few generations later, and this little enclave of humanity has split into two factions, one that stayed on the Phoenix, the other taking refuge on a planet that supports life, but inhabited by a hostile, sentient race. The novel charts these events very quickly, a sort of prelude to the real story that focuses on the relationships between humans and the atevi through the eyes of the paidhi, a human diplomat cum interpreter of both language and cultural differences, working at improving dealings between the two races. We meet Bren Cameron when an attempt is made on his life. Or is it? Although Cherryh uses the third person, we only get Bren's very limited point of view and the narration feels very much like a stream of consciousness, as we follow his thoughts, fears and doubts. The result is very psychological, confusing, slow at times, but also immersive and fascinating.

This was not an easy read. Bren's ramblings are convoluted and makes the reader as lost as he feels. He knows something big is going on but he can only deal with the little matters around him, since left in the dark, and thus he tries to do the best he can, while over analysing everything. Also, his position has quite a female slant: he is surrounded by a race that is both bigger and stronger than he, and he relies on them for everything. Thus he only can use diplomacy, words his only weapons. Cherryh seems to like to convey this first contact story from unconventional angles, and through her writing style, the alieness of this people. I did like it but I believe that a re-read would probably give a different light on events and people, and improve the experience.

In the meantime, I need to hunt the second instalment, which seems to be hard to get.

mark monday says

well-respected and prolific science fiction author-cum-scifi-anthropologist C.J. Cherryh puts her

considerable gifts to work in this introductory volume to her elephantine mega-series, as she begins a sensitive new tradition: fiction that is specifically geared to those unfortunate individuals who have no experience in reading, as well as to our fellows experiencing severe mental challenges. i for one appreciate the effort and am happy to report that the writing in this novel makes every attempt to be as repetitious, plodding, and as glacially-paced as possible, in order to allow the novice and/or challenged reader to fully grasp the ideas on display. to that end, each and every thought and concept and character bit is repeated extensively, often repeatedly within the same page, and upwards of a dozen times over the course of, say, two or three pages. surely this bold strategy will only serve to support those first-time readers in their endeavors, and can only help those challenged by low memory capacity and extremely short-term attention spans. the reader can literally forget or skip entire passages, and lo and behold, exactly the same commentary will reappear, again and again. bravo, Cherryh! this is certainly a step in a brave new direction. it is no wonder that this novel spawned so many sequels!

i have constructed a brief fantasia that illustrates this arresting technique:

Bren was extremely worried about the assassination attempt and was quite annoyed that his freedom of movement had been compromised. A worrisome Bren couldn't believe he had to suffer an escort everywhere! "I really am awfully worried that I can't phone home", said Bren, as he huffily realized that his ability to buy canned meat alone was no longer possible. "This really bothers me, I can't even leave my apartment without an escort!" notes Bren, as he paces his apartment in frustration. It was driving him crazy with annoyance and worry that not only had an assassin tried to kill him, now he couldn't travel alone anymore. He could not leave his apartment alone. After all, an assassin had just attempted to murder him. An actual assassin! Trying to murder him! It was all so worrisome. And as if the assassination attempt wasn't enough, now he couldn't even leave his apartment unaccompanied. "This is really very annoying and I feel awfully compromised, so much so that I am genuinely worried," reflected Bren.

okay, this novel gets an extra star for two opening chapters (or "books", as Cherryh sees fit to call them) that are well-written and genuinely riveting, and that have nothing to do with the tedious narrative that follows.

Maggie K says

ugh. I was about halfway through this book and said out loud "Yay, something happened!" and realized I could no longer waste time with this. (Except for the first two introductory books) it was the most repetitive thing ever! Bren can't go anywhere by himself. Bren is bored. There was what possibly could have been an assassination attempt and now he is locked up somewhere, and he is worried. That is all, and i wrote it in three sentences.

I REALLY wanted to like this book, and I hear it gets better, but if i saw the word worry one more time I would have thrown my book, and I really hate book abuse.

Stefan says

Foreigner is one of the most in-depth, uncompromising examinations of the way cultures interact in science fiction. Rereading it after all this time and with the added benefit of having read some of the later books in the series, I discovered a whole new level of complexity that's probably almost impossible to appreciate on a first reading—complexity on almost every level, from Bren's personal life and the subtle interactions of the

atevi characters on the micro-level to the incredible socio-political depth on the macro-level.

Read the entire review on my site Far Beyond Reality!

Lindsay says

This year (2016) C.J. Cherryh was given the SFWA Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award, something I think she was long overdue for. I hadn't read a Cherryh book for quite a while so I thought it was very appropriate to read one now, and while I've read this one before a long time ago, I never continued with the series due to availability issues where I lived at the time.

En-route to build a new space station as key outpost for human expansion the *Phoenix* suffers an accident during its faster-than-light travel and ending up completely lost in space. The ship emerges in a binary solar system with huge radiation hazards. After refueling at great cost the *Phoenix* eventually limps its way to a G-class star.

From there a station is built orbiting the inhabited planet.

Cut to generations later, and there is a push for station personnel to make a landing on the planet and contact with the aliens, mainly to get out from under the thumb of the descendants of the *Phoenix* crew. A landing is made, and so is first contact with the alien Atevi, gold-eyed, black-skinned humanoids with a deeply strange culture.

Cut to many more generations later. The space station is derelict and the *Phoenix* has left. There is now a population of over 4 million humans living on the planet of the Atevi, but isolated to an island, and relations between the humans and the Atevi are very complicated, largely stemming from a treaty between the two species after a war precipitated by extreme misunderstanding between the two cultures.

In the current day there's a human position, the *paidhi* or interpreter, but the position is far more than just a linguistic one. The role of Bren Cameron, newly appointed paidhi is to interpret the differences between the species, something that seems to be an impossible task given the vast gulf between them that Cherryh writes so brilliantly. Bren's part of the story starts with an assassination attempt on him. That's nothing unusual in Atevi culture, where assassination is an accepted and licensed way to deal with disputes, but it is unusual for the paidhi, because his position is primarily a diplomatic one and attempted assassination is a pretty fundamental breakdown of diplomacy. From there Bren is clearly being carefully managed by his Atevi companions and seems to be explicitly being isolated from communications and information, culminating in him being shipped off to a country estate/medieval fortress. There he finds himself being hosted by the fierce grandmother of the leader of the faction of the Atevi the humans have allied with and still very much under the threat of assassination.

In my opinion, this story illustrates much of what makes Cherryh's writing so great. An intense view on Bren focusing on his feelings, doubts and thought processes while being explicitly out of the loop on what's really going on. He's also almost completely lacking an internal model for how his companions are making decisions regarding him and his welfare and much of the attention in the book is devoted to him trying to reason all this out. The Atevi are deeply associative beings, but lack concepts like friendship and interpersonal appreciation, instead focusing heavily on loyalty and betrayal. They're also incredibly thin skinned and can be deeply offended by things like the number of words you use in a sentence when

addressing them.

So like much of Cherryh's other work, we have incredibly in depth world-building as well as really alien aliens, made all the more alien by their similarities to humans. Like a conceptual uncanny valley.

It's also only the first book of a series of trilogies and things are far from resolved at the end of this novel, although there is a satisfying conclusion to this one.

Cathy (cathepsut) says

spoilers for the general storyline

I really liked the first two books or sections of this novel. First the arrival in the planetary system, then a fast forward of a few generations to the planetary settlers and first contact with the indigenous population of their chosen planet, the atevi. I enjoyed the setting in space and the glimpse at societal differences between the humans onboard of the ship. Down below I had fun reading from the POV of an atevi and his human counterpart was an interesting character as well.

Unfortunately, with the beginning of the main storyline, my enjoyment took a nosedive. Another jump to several hundred years later. Humans and atevi have been at war and resolved it by humans living secluded on an island. Bren, our main character, lives among the atevi as the sole human, a diplomat and interpreter of the sometimes incomprehensible language and cultural concepts of the atevi. The atevi don't know friendship, trust, don't comprehend the idea of borders and separate nations. Instead there is loyalty, betrayal, complicated relationships with other factions, sanctioned assassinations and people with delicate sensibilities.

The culture of the atevi reminded me of feudal Japan and made me want to re-read *Shogun* by James Clavell.

Could have been fantastic, but isn't explored as much as I would have liked. Instead we are shown this world through the limited view of Bren, who is a whiny little shite that obsesses endlessly about inconsequential things like getting his mail and being perpetually worried, but never does anything. By the halfway point of the book I was annoyed, bored and skimming.

On top of Bren being a boring character, the writing was repetitive and progressed glacially slow. I like my stories plot-driven, endless navel-gazing over the same points and ideas for pages after pages holds little interest for me. Also much of the story happened in the off. Bren spent most of his time sitting around, agonizing over one thing or another. There was very little doing. Except for the last 50 pages or so, when we got a little action.

The other characters were even shallower than Bren. Not much character development. Little humour.

The last 20 pages were not bad, I just wish the rest of the book had been that lively. Mostly it dragged, I was bored. I did not connect to any of the characters, the story was pretty bloodless.

Nonetheless I am actually interested to find out what happens next. Maybe I will get the next book at some point. Considering that there are about a million sequels after this book, I think it is safe to say that this first book is set-up. One can hope, that there will be more plot development in the next installments...?

Andrew Obrigewitsch says

"I wrote this 50 page short story, what do you think?" Said C.J. Cherryh.

"It's great, but can you stretch into a 20 volume series of 500 page books? Because that's what we really need." Said the Publisher.

"Sure I can, I just will start the first volume off by turning the one paragraph stay in mountain resort into 400 pages of repetitive introspection on the part of the main character. And then I will turn the 2 page chase scene into 200 pages. And we can go from there." Said C.J. Cherryh.

This book should really be retitled "Much to do About Nothing".

Now don't get me wrong C.J. Cherryh, is very talented. She can do things like make the fourth book of A Song of Fire and Ice seem incredibly fast paced. She can make drying paint seem like the most interesting thing to watch in the world. Now very few authors can boast of such achievements, it must take a lot of hard work and dedication to make so little take up so many pages. I know if I had that talent, I would have found English classes to be very easy in school.

She has a great ability to get ideas across too, given how many times things are repeated in the book, even the most dense could not help but get the point.

I would love to read the next book in the series, but there is just so much that needs to be done first, like reading anything else I can find anywhere else. In fact given a choice between counting how many kernels of popcorn come in a bag and reading the next book, I think I would start counting. But when I finish doing everything else I can find to do, I will read it.

Good job C.J. Cherryh, your writing is really something, or is it a lot of nothing?

Gary says

On the surface this seems like kind of a dull read. However, the story line intrigued me. Bren, an ambassador to a planet with alien overlords and a small, struggling colony of humans, tries to step carefully through the minefield of politics and alien thought.

Personally, I like the isolated, paranoid feeling and the alien characters felt like real people as the author slowly and carefully worked her craft. The names got confusing, though. I noticed a far from complete list of terms at the back that contained many of the names of the main characters. That helped me keep track. The cast is introduced early on and they stick around throughout, so it isn't a case of revolving characters. It's just that there are so many of them and the names are alien. Places and people seemed the same to me at first until I got the hang of it. I was reading a paper copy so I noticed the list in the back. On a Kindle I doubt I would have.

The protagonist, Bren, is a weak but intelligent character and the supporting cast of aliens, hostile and sort of friendly, are definitely more powerful. If you're looking for an action shoot 'em up alien story, this will bore you. If you enjoy extremely detailed worlds and characters, you will find yourself getting lost in this one at

times.

Overall, I liked the book and plan to continue the series.

4.5 stars

Markus says

It's somehow proved impossible for me to get into this book. There is nothing appealing about either characters or setting to draw me in, and there is something about the writing and the sentence structure (paragraphs usually consist of a single sentence, even the longest ones) that completely puts me off. I thus simply feel like I'm looking at words rather than reading. But as I've heard good things about the series, I might try again at some point in the future.

For now, no rating given as I put it down too quickly.

Gergana says

Review contains fanart and images done by me. ^.^

Sci-fi...

Let me tell you something about sci-fi books... they are scary! No, I'm not talking about movies or TV series, and yes, Astronomy was one of my favorite subject in school. But for some reason, sci-fi books are generally on a completely different level for me.

I have ventured into sci-fi territory before ...

And, occasionally, I would find something "comprehensible" enough for my fairies-and-dragons-obsessed brain.

Buuuut, in most cases...

...I would be completely clueless of what's going on.

Ahem....Anyways, one day I stumbled upon C.J.Cherryh's book – *Foreigner* and **it appeared to be everything I ever wanted from any sci-fi OR fantasy book.** The synopsis hinted at politics, intrigues, inter-racial relationship, adapting to new culture, space... stuff, overall – a potential for me to enjoy it as long as it wasn't too philosophical, too military orientated or too techno-terms heavy.

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THE REVIEW (yep, finally)

I was very cautious when I started *Foreigner*, but as I kept going I found myself falling in love with the potential of the series. Not only did it have great unique and fully-developed characters, an original setting,

an intriguing new race with strange customs and behavior, it was just addictive. True, the first book was rather strange (I'll talk more about it later), but the possibilities were endless and I was curious to see where the characters will go!

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SETTING AND RACES (aka. the prologue)

The books starts with a quick recap of how the humans, whose ship was stranded in unknown space, ended up on their new alien planet.

All you need to know is that the Humans were far more technologically advanced than the planet's inhabitants – the Atevi, who were rather perplexed to see some pale short strange-looking creatures obsessing over their flora and fauna and considering moving in.

The initial amity between the newcomers and the locals didn't last for long and, a few years and MANY misunderstandings later, a war ensued between the two species. Humans, despite their superior weaponry, had no chance of winning against a race that specialized in warfare and assassination (and outnumbered them 1 to a few millions). Eventually, a peace treaty was signed by both races, allowing humans to live on the island of Mospheira on a few conditions:

- Humans would share technological information with the Atevi (not too much at a time as to not cause disturbance among the more orthodox of the race)
- And NO human would be allowed on the Atevi continent, except for one – the **Paidhi** (something like the ambassador of the human population and, most importantly, the translator).

For full-resolution go [Here](#)

The "Mospherians" were more than happy to agree and finally enjoy a peaceful and boring existence. Meanwhile, the human paidhi's role was to guarantee all demands are met and the peace treaty maintained. A task not as easy as you might think - you see, **the Atevi are very strange**. Assassination is legalized (in fact, the assassin's guild is one of the most respectable institution on the planet), words such as "friend" "love" "feelings" are absent from their vocabulary and they are also EASILY offended by the weirdest things such as **NUMBERS!**

Numbers are sacred with the Atevi – their sentences have to have felicitous (fortunate?) numbers such as 3,7 and so on, while 2, 8,etc. are Baaaaad! E.g. - if you suggest " **a pair** of apples" or your sentence has the dreaded **8** words in it, that would imply that you wish the Atevi you were speaking to bad luck or something worse. Considering how superstitious this race is, it's very likely they would kill you on the spot! That's why, the Paidhi's role is essentially **DIFFICULT AS HELL!**

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PLOT (aka. the actual story)

An assassination attempt is made on the life of the new young paidhi – Bren Cameron. Unlike his predecessors, he is far more open-minded and ambitious to build better relationship between the two races, which could lead to major shifts in power in Atevi society. Tabini-aiji, the leader of the biggest and most powerful association on the planet, decides Bren is useful enough to be protected, so he sends him away to his grandmother's fortress deep into the continent.

Tabini's grandmother, Ilisidi, is VERY traditional and strong-minded person. She despises the human influence in the Atevi's way of life, so Bren has to be extra careful – one slip and the old lady would order his assassination in an instant. Why would Tabini send him from one dangerous place to another?

As time passes by, Bren falls in love with the old-fashion way of the Atevi, but there's something troubling him...He feels like he's being tested and he has no idea why. He can't decide who is the enemy and whether any of the Atevi, or the Humans for that matter, mean him any good. And what was the purpose of the assassination attempt anyways?

~*~*~*~*~

My opinion

I just finished book 6 at the moment, so this will be more of a general rant (without any spoilers!), but it will, hopefully, give you an idea of what the series is all about and whether it's worth investing your time.

What I liked

1. The Foreigner series is **easily accessible for non-hardcore sci-fi fans!** You heard me right, there are no cryptic technical terms, no existential philosophy to put you to sleep, no military mumbo-jumbo and so forth. At least, not to an excessive extent.
2. **Characters are so well-developed that sometimes I forget they're fictional!** Bren is likable and not that interesting at first, but as the series progresses, he keeps changing and evolving. His two guards, Banichi and Jago, are just as intriguing, complex and sometimes even hilarious when they try to understand human logic. A new cast of character is added as you go and they're perfect in their imperfection- just like real people.
3. **World-development** It's quite good in the first book, but it gets massively awesome by book 6! Can't say why, or I'll spoil the series for you.
4. **Atevi culture** There are cases where their superstitions regarding numbers is completely impractical (such as rooms that have one main entrance and two emergency fire exits, because having 3 doors is luckier number than 2) But most importantly, the Atevi are 90% unique in their ways, you can barely understand their logic at first. They're huge and violent, yet appear calm and collected, they value interior design and clothing with delicate lace, they're obsessed with etiquette and politeness and would gladly share a decorative cup of (poisonous for humans) tea with you. It's just a great original culture with its own perks that enriches C.J.Cherryh's world and I love it!
5. **PLOT TWIIIISTS** GOD, there are some AMAZING, mind-blowing plot twists and especially massive ones towards the last 10% of EACH book! A couple of times I could see the twist coming, yet, the way it was presented STILL managed to blow me away!

What I disliked

Despite "Foreigner" being in my top 10 favorite series of all time, there are still elements that do not agree with me and it's only fair that I share them as well.

1. **First book is the weakest.** Yes, many of us have heard this before. Overall, the first book serves as a semi-introduction to C.J.Cherryh's world and politics and it can be slightly underwhelming, with barely anything important happening for a long period of time. Especially if you're expecting space battles and so on (oh, they're coming, just not in book 1)
2. **The pacing varies, some times it's brilliant, fast, exciting, while other times it can be slow and**

repetitive. Spending a good amount of time in Bren's head and listening to him over-analyzing and going through a situation for 10 times until he comes up with an awesome idea can be slightly boring.

Nevertheless, these moments don't last for long! (except maybe in the first book...sorry)

3. **There's a definite lack of great young female human characters**(20-40 years old). Yes, the old ladies are awesome, the Atevi female characters are even more awesome, but when it comes to the young female characters ...

4. And lastly, **the majority of the humans very often behave like a very ignorant nation without any culture or appreciation for history** (at least up to book 6 so far). Some times, they even feel more alien than the Atevi (*says a person who spent a whole summer in the Louvre, staring at vases, mummies and paintings of semi-naked people*). Also, the humans in the book can be VERY self-centered and politically illiterate. Their general stupidity annoys me, which makes it kind of hard to root for them ^__^

Conclusion

Will I recommend this book to friends? If you're looking for a light, jolly book with juicy romance and predictable plot – look elsewhere, I'm afraid. *Foreigner* is a sci-fi series that's just ... unique in its own way:

- 1.it's not action-packed at first, although the battles get more and more epic as you go!
- 2.it's not filled with existential questions that will make you contemplate life, but it does explore human nature and our ability to adapt and accept diversity and challenges as they come.
- 3.it's not an easy series to get into, but it's damn right worth trying... :3

Apatt says

“Here, human beings had to remember that the universe was far wider than their little nest of stars—that, in the universe at large, silence was always more than the noisiest shout of life. Humans explored and intruded against it, and built their stations and lived their lives, a biological contamination of the infinite, a local and temporary condition.”

C.J. Cherryh is one of science fiction's most important women writers, her name is often mentioned alongside Ursula K. le Guin, Octavia Butler, Anne McCaffrey and other female sf legends. She was named Grand Master by the SFWA in 2016 for her contributions to the literature of Science Fiction and Fantasy. The only snag is my previous reading of her books did not go well. I gave up on Cyteen after 50 pages or so, I finished The Pride of Chanur, but it was a struggle. Still, I persisted because she is apparently one of the greats and I am a connoisseur of great sci-fi, I don't want to miss out on an author of real significance in the genre.

Foreigner is possibly my “make or break” book where Ms. Cherryh is concerned if this works out it would be my gateway to her long-running series. If not we will have to go our separate ways. This book immediately grabbed my attention with the prologue where a spaceship called Phoenix comes out of hyperspace to find that they have arrived at an unplanned and unknown location. The crew has no idea of what caused this navigation error and, worse still, where they are, or how they can get home. Lost in space, like that classic 60s sci-fi tv show. I was settling in to find out how they get out of this jam when, in the next chapter, the timeline jumps 100 years. Some of the crew have taken the Phoenix to explore the galaxy they found themselves in, while others land on a nearby occupied planet in the hope of finding a new home and to make first contact with the native sentient race called the Atevi. The depiction of first contact is quite gripping, I love first contact stories, but then the narrative does something very unexpected, in the next chapter the timeline jumps another 150 years! Now the human colonists have established a colony on an

island with permission from the relatively primitive Atevi aliens in exchange for our technology. At this point, we are introduced to the series protagonist, Bren Cameron, who is the interpreter for humanity and lives among the Atevi in one of their cities. As soon as he appears in the narrative he finds himself a target for assassination with no idea of who may be behind the attempt, and why. He is the lone human among millions of aliens who do not have a word for “friend”, “like” or “trust”. ~~Nail-biting adventure~~ convoluted political intrigue ensues.

I love strange, inscrutable sci-fi aliens, like the Ariekei from China Miéville’s *Embassytown* and the Heptapods in Ted Chiang’s *Story of Your Life*. Initially, I found Cherryh’s Atevi disappointingly human, they don’t look all that strange and their culture has many human characteristics and facilities.

An atevi

However, the *Foreigner* series has been described as “anthropological science fiction” in that it explores the theme of an outsider trying to understand the culture and lifestyle of an alien species by applying his own incompatible culture and experiences. Indeed, as I read on, the Atevis begin to seem more and more alien. They have no word for many of our abstract concepts (friends etc.), and they have words which cannot be directly translated into English. As for being inscrutable, Bren certainly finds their action and motive completely baffling, in spite of speaking their language. The alienness of the Atevi is very subtle, Bren has no trouble communicating with them on a superficial, practical level, but the nuances of both the human and Atevi species are mostly nonsensical to each other.

Bren Cameron by the legendary Michael Whelan

Once *Foreigner* focuses on Bren Cameron the story becomes entirely concerned with political intrigues among the Atevi. From this point, there is nothing particularly sci-fi about much of the story. This is not a good development for me because I don’t care much more political fiction, even with sci-fi trappings. To Cherryh’s credit the book is never downright boring, though it does plod along at times and the novel becomes very dialogue intensive and I began to lose interest somewhat; Bren’s expressions of self-doubt, confusion, anger and fear also become rather repetitious. He also comes across as rather ineffectual and weak for a protagonist. By the time I finished the book I was interested in what will happen next in the inter-species relations. However, I also felt ambivalent about reading any more of this series. The problem – for me – is that while C.J. Cherryh, is clearly very talented, she seems to be interested in exploring themes that do not interest me, alien political machinations especially. Having said that, the excellent Jo Walton reassured me that the series get better and better as it goes on (18 volumes now, I think). Hopefully, there will be less emphasis on politics. The character of Bren Cameron is also said to be much more sophisticated in future volumes and I am interested in how he develops in the long run. So I am still interested in the next volume *Invader* (*Foreigner*, #2). As for this volume, I can recommend it with the above reservations.

Quotes:

There wasn’t a clear word for like. It meant a preference for salad greens or iced drinks. But love was worse.

The whole atevi hardwiring was different, the experts said so. The dynamics of atevi relationships were different... in ways no paidhi (interpreter) had ever figured out, either, possibly because paidhiin (interpreters) invariably tried to find words to fit into human terms—and then deceived themselves about the meanings, in self-defense, when the atevi world grew too much for them.

Impossible to conceal their foreignness, impossible to trust a species that couldn’t translate friendship,

impossible to admit what humans really wanted out of the agreement, because atevi in general didn't—that foreign word—trust people foolish enough to land without a by-your-leave and possessing secrets they hadn't yet turned over.

No matter that assassination was legal and accepted—you didn't, in atevi terms, proceed without filing, you didn't proceed without license, and you didn't order wholesale bloodbaths. You removed the minimal individual that would solve a problem. Biichi-gi, the atevi called it. Humans translated it... 'finesse.'

You couldn't go on giving atevi bits and pieces of tech without accelerating the randomness in the process, meaning that atevi minds didn't work the same as human minds, and that atevi cultural bias was going to view certain technological advances differently than humans did, and atevi inventiveness was going to put more and more items together into their own inventions.
