



Telempath

Spider Robinson

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Spider's 1976 first novel, in its umpteenth reincarnation.

Isham Stone is the second-best assassin left in a shattered world. He's many miles from home, half-dead, his left arm is gangrenous, and he possesses--like everyone else--a sense of smell 1000 times better than a wolf's. Ahead of him, in the stinking ruins of New York, hides Carlson, the greatest killer of all time. All Isham has to do is stay alive long enough to find Carlson and kill him. But Carlson is guarded by ghosts. They rode the winds when Earth was bubbling rock, shared the world with men for a million years, and though we sensed their presence we never truly believed in them--for in our arrogance we assumed life was an exclusive property of solids and liquids... Now they've declared war on us, and our species is nearly annihilated...thanks to the man Isham has come to kill.

The first third of this book, as "By Any Other Name," won the Hugo Award for Best Novella, the first of Spider's 3 Hugos.

Free sample chapters available from Baen Books: [http://www.baen.com/chapters/W200104/...](http://www.baen.com/chapters/W200104/)

Telepath Details

Date : Published June 26th 2001 by Baen Books (first published 1976)

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Author : Spider Robinson

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From Reader Review Telempath for online ebook

Hilary says

There ought to be a bookshelf tag for "gave-up-on-this-book-and-I-will-never-finish-it" -- I generally enjoy Spider Robinson's books, but this one never engaged me...

Daniel Malcor says

Packed full of wonderful ideas and characters

As post-apocalyptic stories go this is one of the more hopeful, and there are many important lessons learned along the way.

Isblue says

Not a bad first novel. You can see his influences quite plainly and for the most part they continue in his later novels and stories. I can not fault a writer whose main theme is empathy is humankind's best hope.

Allan Dyen-Shapiro says

1976, high point of the New Wave in science fiction, and Spider Robinson is doing everything opposite to what's trendy. The man worships Robert Heinlein. The old definition of science fiction--a scientific advance causing human problems that get resolved in the story--a definition seemingly more of the 1930s-1950s than of the 70s, pervades his first novel, a book that was recommended to me. So now I read it 38 years later.

The scientific speculation is indeed original--what would happen if a scientist infected the entire world with a viral delivery system that changed us so that we vastly improved our sense of smell? He extrapolates tamely--Could we live in our polluted and smelly world?--and wildly: what if there are sentient beings living among us made of plasmas (high density gas) that we can now smell? What if they were what previous generations barely glimpsed and thought of as ghosts?

Authorial intrusion is generally frowned upon, but in this book, I smiled at it. The characters reflect the author and serve as a mouthpiece for the views of the hippy generation. Love is the ultimate answer. And smoking pot is at least a big part of any temporary answer.

It's very much not idea-driven, as much New Age science fiction was. Especially odd was its treatment of race. Three of the main characters are black, but only one talks in a "black power era" vernacular. And yet, there's no comment on anything race-related. It's as if the characters just suggested themselves to the author and started talking, with no attempt to explain themselves. The complete lack of any touching on race relations (in 1976) may be because it just didn't register with the guy--the Internet says his wife was black; perhaps that was just normal to him.

It's very much not character-driven. The characters serve a purpose in advancing ideology, much like in Heinlein, just this time it's Robinson's ideology (very different from Heinlein's).

It's not literary. The prose is pedestrian. In fact, it's loaded with puns, in a way that probably amused the author more than most of the readers. And the references dropped were those of interest to the author too (Heinlein gets referenced as the author of the literary masterpiece that introduced grokking as a concept).

As this was the era of great literary science fiction (think Delaney, Silverberg, etc.); it probably took some chutzpah to be so retro.

But it has a zillion plot twists that hit me as totally unexpected.

So, if you're looking for a fast-paced, plot-driven, traditional SF novel (and you don't mind veneration of pantheism, marijuana, expanding one's consciousness, etc.), this one was fun.

Megan Baxter says

But back to this book, which is a very early one by my favourite author of all time, Spider Robinson. As such, it has yet to develop many of the themes that will run so strongly through all of his books, but the seeds of them are there.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at Smorgasbook

Kallierose says

This is another post-apocalyptic book, which is a genre I really do enjoy. There are twists and turns, and personal discoveries, and without giving anything away I'll just say that I really enjoyed it. The comedy of Robinson's Callahan books is replaced with compassion, and he does both emotions very well. His writing reminds me a lot of Heinlein, who is another of my favorites, but he brings a modern twist all his own to this book.

Amanda Bynum says

OK, this book was whack. I had to read a sci-fi story for a competition-within-the-competition, and this one was short, and on hand, so it seemed a good choice. And it was fine, really. But WHACK. It had a bunch of pot-smoking, and all kinds of love-making, and then there were ghosts (but not really), and dead guys (but not really), and noses smelling at 100 times the power of wolf's due to a diabolical experiment (really). And a leopard.

I like most of Spider Robinson's stuff a whole lot more than I liked this. Stick to hard-drinking aliens, Spider, and less of the end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it business.

Dragondreamsjen says

Odd... But worth reading .

Kevin says

Telempath,

This book was written 1976 and is steeped in hippie ideology's. (Smoking pot to achieve a state of Zen and the ever famous, 'peace and love will conquer all.') The idea the book is based around intrigued me and is relevant to the problems we face in the world today; terrorism. The problem with the book is that the old hippie ideas don't hold water in the real world.

(ALL VIOLENCE)(CAN BE AVOIDED BY THE TRULY SERENE MIND)

This is straight from the book. Sometimes I felt the author was forcing his views on me as I read.(Not that I disagree with all his views.) I just don't like to be force-fed political view points while reading sci-fi.

The writing style at time's annoyed me. The author had tendencies of introducing characters from nowhere then giving the ever famous (Info dump) to explain who they were. Why not work the characters into the story? What was the rush? The book is short as it is.

What could have been a very good story fell short of the mark. I read the reviews posted before mine and I couldn't disagree more with the high ratings. I'm hard pressed to give this book a 3 star rating, but I will. I like Spiders 'Callahan' stories but I had a very hard time digesting this book.

I know many praise Spider and look upon him as the next Robert Heinlein, and these followers will have a hard time with my review. I just want to say, "I tried to like the book. I really did." I just don't feel it's worthy of a 5 star rating. I gave it 3 stars, but It felt like 2 1/2

Ilona says

I first read this one when it came out back in 1976 and I hadn't realised how much my taste in reading had changed over the years. I don't know if it's because I was a single teenage girl when I first read it and am now a widowed mother in her 50's but it wasn't as good as I remembered it. Don't get me wrong it was a wonderful book but the impact it had back then just wasn't there any more. I would recommend this if you enjoy nostalgia and the idea of peaceful solutions and a plot so twisted it makes your mind spin but otherwise I think it would have been better for me to have remembered this book rather than reread it.

Johnny says

For me, Spider Robinson has always been synonymous with the *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon* series, several

marvelous collections of short stories with puns and unforgettable characters. I hadn't been aware that he had published a full-length novel about a year before the first collection of stories was published. Except for having a couple of characters who enjoyed exchanging puns, *Telempath* has a very different dynamic than the Callahan stories. I was intrigued from the beginning and delighted to discover that the wild ride I began with an unintentional killing ended quite differently than I expected.

Telempath begins with violence and suspense. The protagonist is the paternalistic-styled "Hand of Man" programmed to wreak vengeance on the mad scientist who brought about the apocalyptic destruction of much of humankind. Though well-written enough to pull me in, it didn't surprise me greatly. Many books in the 1970s were dystopian, post-apocalyptic stories. It went with the times in the post-Vietnam Conflict Era. And, I wasn't surprised that the protagonist toked as often as possible. After all, a former literary agent for Spider once told me that the only time she ever smoked pot was under his tutelage. And, I wasn't surprised that a novel which began with a violent quest could evolve into a quest for peace. The question was what that price for peace would be.

What really surprises me is that I was totally unaware of this book until I found a worn copy at a used bookstore. *Telempath* might not be a Hugo winner, but it is a solid work; it contains some beautiful writing. "It seemed as if I was in some immense devil's autoclave, that ignored filth and grime but grimly scrubbed out life of any kind." (p. 4) I also liked, "But Pasteur was a boob and a braggart who frittered away valuable time in childish feuds with men unfit to wash out his test tubes. Genius is seldom a good character reference." (p. 12) Another good line was, "Time did not pass; it tailgated." (p. 169) If lines like that don't grab you, *Telempath* is not for you.

In addition, I enjoyed references to other media and literature. At one point, Robinson has an older character quote Bogart's line at the conclusion of *Casablanca*. The odd alliance/friendship implied in the détente between Rick and Louie in that scene is appropriate for the new rapport between characters Robinson tries to convey in his scene. At another point, there is a paraphrase of Psalm 8's famous, "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" though Robinson may or may not realize that the famous question precedes an awareness of how important humankind really is. Then, again, the fate of the entire planet is on the person recounting that Psalm, so maybe he did (p. 215). Finally, in an homage to science-fiction greatness, Robinson evokes the famous idea of "grokking" from Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (p. 220). If you know what happened to the protagonist in that novel, you'll realize how it is both appropriate to the situation in the book where Robinson uses it and keeps the suspense at a high level as to whether the protagonist's plan will succeed or not.

So, *Telempath* is filled with assassination subplots, terrorism subplots, class warfare (though the lines are drawn up somewhat differently than pure economic status), and an alien presence. To survive, humanity has to figure out how to evolve and how to communicate with said alien presence. The machinations sometimes take a little too long with pacing that seems like someone working to a word count, but each twisting path is worth following to its conclusion. And the message, with both a socio-ethical and ecological sensitivity, is as relevant to today as it was in 1976.

Ann aka Iftcan says

I first read the beginning of this novel back when it was just a short story. It's taken me this long to realize that Spider expanded that short story and made it into a full-length novel.

I enjoyed the short story greatly, and, well. . . I think that Spider should have LEFT it at that length and come up with new characters for this story. The first half of the book are excellent, good world building and lots of action to keep you involved. The second half, while OK just doesn't match the intensity of that first half.

This book was really more of a 3 or 3.5, but, because I DID enjoy that first half so much I bumped it up to 4.

I've re-written this review a half dozen times, but still am not happy with it. All I can say is--if you enjoy Spider, read this. If you haven't ever read anything by Spider, start with a better book, like one of the *Callahan's Place* books or *Mary's Place* books. Altho I will point out that the *Mary's Place* books are a spin-off of the *Callahan's* books. Still both of these sets are much better than this one, and gives you a better grasp of Spider's true talents.

Marianne says

What if our sense of smell was hyper-stimulated? Though this isn't the most amazing book I've read, it travels some strange paths along it's post-apocalyptic way, and the story kept me engaged to follow it through. It finishes with a warm and fuzzy feel-good ending. Can't we all just... get along?

Jay says

not as much telepathy as you might expect from the title; but an action packed post-apocalyptic adventure.

Chris Northern says

Spider Robinson's first full length novel is an absolute gem with a plot so convoluted (yet clear) that it would blow your mind to have it explained in one or two paragraphs. I won't even begin to try and explain it.

One of the main ideas, and one that runs like a golden thread throughout Spider and Jeane Robinson's work, is the idea that empathy can be thought of as the embryonic form of telepathy.
