



Time Salvager

Wesley Chu

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Convicted criminal James Griffin-Mars is no one's hero. In his time, Earth is a toxic, abandoned world and humans have fled into the outer solar system to survive, eking out a fragile, doomed existence among the other planets and their moons. Those responsible for delaying humanity's demise believe time travel holds the key, and they have identified James, troubled though he is, as one of a select and expendable few ideally suited for the most dangerous job in history.

James is a chronman, undertaking missions into Earth's past to recover resources and treasure without altering the timeline. The laws governing use of time travel are absolute; break any one of them and, one way or another, your life is over. Most chronmen never reach old age; the stress of each jump through time, compounded by the risk to themselves and to the future, means that many chronmen rapidly reach their breaking point, and James Griffin-Mars is nearing his.

On a final mission that is to secure his retirement, James meets Elise Kim, an intriguing scientist from a previous century, who is fated to die during the destruction of an oceanic rig. Against his training and his common sense, and in violation of the chronmen's highest law, James brings Elise back to the future with him, saving her life, but turning them both into fugitives. Remaining free means losing themselves in the wild and poisonous wastes of Earth, somehow finding allies, and perhaps discovering what hope may yet remain for humanity's home world.

Time Salvager Details

Date : Published July 7th 2015 by Tor Books

ISBN : 9780765377180

Author : Wesley Chu

Format : Hardcover 380 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Time Travel, Fiction, Dystopia, Fantasy

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From Reader Review Time Salvager for online ebook

Bradley says

I really wanted to like this more. There's a lot of great things that can be said about clarity of style, fairly well-developed and interesting characters, and a promising concept, and this novel had it all, including an interesting hard-sf opening with a doomed space battle with highly advanced humanoids, but unfortunately, all the promise kinda fizzled.

This is a time travel book, isn't it? There was too little time travel. Even the rules against doing it too much turned out to be so much hokum, and the worst that can be expected is just the time-traveller's body giving out. (Sure, that's bad enough, but there's always a way around such things. After all, they have time and times that are much better at healing failing bodies, but such a fix was never explored.)

Instead, we have an Evil Corp trope, which can be done smart or not, depending on the author's talent, but the fact that our future is such a shithole because of stupidity and greed is simply a too obvious worldbuilding technique. Clarity of prose can easily lend itself to a much more complex and compelling plot.

Did I really want to wind up reading about a small band of shit-dwelling future bostonians living a stone-age existence while a handful of super-bright and/or super-powerful tech-wielding outcasts befriend and later try to save the earth from the muck of industrial byproducts? No, not really. This was supposed to be a time-travel novel. There's all of HISTORY that could have been plumbed. Including that present's future.

Was I disappointed with the direction the story went?

Well, let me throw out a caveat: The whole novel was competent and the action scenes were fun, the characters were believable and the growing love wasn't too painful to read. James's handler was definitely a bright point in the novel, as was the turnaround of the auditor. From the very start of the tale, I was hooked and flew through the pages, just wanting to see what would happen next, thinking that I was going to be in for a real treat of imagination and discovery.

Of course, that's where I went wrong. Perhaps the fact that this is only a book one out of an unknown number will clear up and develop a better story, later, such as turning this primitive tribe into a team of outlaw chronomen, but then again, maybe not. I'd say this novel is redeemed, if it eventually turns out to be true, but otherwise, I'm stuck sitting on my hands and wondering if I had just read anything more than a mediocre tale.

My only complaint is in the fulfillment of the social contract between author and reader. I wasn't as satisfied as I should have been, based on the promises that the prose started me out with.

We'll see for the later books. I'm not giving up just yet.

Brandon says

Wesley Chu's Time Salvager presents a bleak vision of mankind hundreds of years in the future. While technology has advanced to the point of interplanetary travel and colony settlement, supplies are running

low. Luckily for the human race, they've perfected time travel! Using this technology, a select few are tasked with going into the past and bringing back resources in an effort to further humanity's survival.

Because time travel is tricky and even the slightest modification of the past can have effects on the future, a governing body dubbed ChronoCom was created. This organization trains men and women – Chronmen – to slide into the past, grab what is required and return to the future, hopefully avoiding any activity that could seriously alter the timeline. I say seriously as no matter what chronmen do, a ripple effect will always be created – the key is to make it as manageable as possible. How you ask? By going into what are perceived as “dead time-lines” – think salvaging a ship just as it is about to sink to the bottom of the sea. There's also a specific set of time laws that everyone must follow – and breaking any time law is met with swift and severe punishment. I'll get to that later.

Because travel (or jumps) back and forth through time have a tendency to rattle you like paint shaker, Chronmen have a particularly short shelf life, despite specialized training as well as medication provided to try and lessen its effects. So when Chronman James Griffin-Mars receives a job that upon completion would sever his contract with ChronoCom thus pushing him into early retirement, he jumps at the chance to take it.

Remember those time laws? Well, against better judgment, James breaks one of those during said job by bringing back a resident of the past in an effort to save her life. When ChronoCom discovers James' disregard for the rules, a universe-wide manhunt begins.

Time Salvager reads like a sprawling, sci-fi epic movie – which I suppose makes sense given how quickly the film rights were snatched up. I was surprised with how well everything flowed given what needed to be established in terms of world-building – very impressive work on the part of Wesley Chu considering this is only his fourth full novel!

The ending of Time Salvager isn't so much an ending as it is a lead in to the sequel Time Siege, which is tentatively scheduled for May 2016. I'm on the edge of my seat when it comes to this one.

Also posted @ Every Read Thing.

Check out my interview with Wesley from 2013!

Joel says

A really creative, enjoyable, and well written book wime time travel. Great characters, no overuse of tech or plot devices, and great dialogue. Not normally my "thing" per say, but it sucked me in and I plowed through it in just a couple of days.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2015/07/06/b...>

Full disclosure, though I am writing this review for the ARC, I actually had the distinct pleasure of being a beta reader for an early draft of Time Salvager last year, and I just want to say now that being able to

experience this story again felt even more amazing. Wesley Chu has already shown a flair for writing thrilling sci-fi adventures with his Tao trilogy, and there's no doubt that his new novel is another strong entry into the genre.

Time Salvager takes us to a future where Earth has become a toxic wasteland. Those who could afford to get off-planet have long since taken their lives to the outer solar system, but this dispersion has also created a greater need for resources to support the population – resources that Earth is no longer in a position to provide.

Enter ChronoCom and their elite corps of time-traveling agents, aptly known as “Chronmen”. If the present can't provide the resources that humanity needs, then they shall plunder the past. However, messing around with the chronostream is always dicey, so chronmen are dedicated to keeping their ripples in the past as small as possible so that the timeline can heal itself before effects can be felt in the present. This means that a lot of rules get in place, and the harshest punishments are brought down on those who break them.

Unfortunately for chronman James Griffin-Mars, on his final mission in the twenty-first century to secure his retirement, he experiences a moment of madness and breaks the most important and unforgiveable rule of all. Unstable and already close to snapping, James spontaneously decides to rescue a young woman named Elise from her fated death and brings her back to his time. Viewed as a temporal anomaly that must now be eliminated, Elise is forced to go on the run with James as the full might of ChronoCom descends upon the two fugitives.

Firstly, time traveling stories are always tricky to pull off, and admittedly I can't think of too many where some willingness to turn a blind eye to temporal paradoxes and contradictions is at least required. Time Salvager is no different, though to Chu's credit, the time traveling system he proposes is compelling and well-developed. Even though it may not stand up to heavy scrutiny, the process behind the technology lends itself perfectly to the story which will delight readers who are in it for the action and the entertainment. In other words, yes, you'll probably have to roll with the punches, but at the same time I'm hard pressed to think of any other instance where doing so has been more fun.

Those who have read the author's Tao series may also notice that the story of Time Salvager has a darker, more despairing vibe. Much of this has to do with the protagonist of James, whose long years working for ChronoCom and salvaging dead-end timelines has exposed him to too much death and destruction. Added to his overall jadedness are the dangerous physiological effects of doing too many time jumps, the character of James Griffin-Mars is definitely not singing a song of sunshine and rainbows. Perhaps the only reason I like Wesley Chu's Tao books slightly more is because of the emotional cocktail of desperation, hopelessness and pent-up rage that is James' personality. It fits who he is and makes for interesting development later on in the novel, but it does give Time Salvager a certain gravitas and makes it a heavier read.

Chu, however, did impress me with his characterization of Levin Javier-Oberon, the ChronoCom auditor tasked to capture James and Elise. With his complex view of the world and the way he believes things should be, Levin became my favorite character as soon as he was introduced as a point-of-view character. I can't even really bring myself to name him as the antagonist; it doesn't seem fair just because Levin is rigidly tied a set of moral standards that happens to be the antithesis of James'. I hope we'll see more of Levin in the next book, because I'm not ready for his tale to be over yet, especially given how the book ended.

It goes without saying, I'm really looking forward to the sequel. Time Salvager feels like the next big step in Wesley Chu's writing career, which continues to rise promisingly. This book does a fantastic job setting up for a fast-paced sci-fi thriller series that is brimming with potential, and you really can't ask for much more.

E.J. says

Really enjoyed this time travel novel from Wesley Chu. I've never read him before, but it was a delight to find he's the real deal as an author, constructing a realistic future world that feels both advanced and yet grounded. His prose is also rich with detail, but not overwrought. This is especially unique of any time travel story as most authors get mired in the vortex of time travel paradoxes and the reader is often inundated (read: confused) by questions of physics. Here, Chu gives us a few rules and keeps the story moving. The confusion is also mitigated by the fact that we're not returning to the same time over and over and over again so tireless attempts to track story threads is unnecessary.

I also enjoyed the characters, particularly the protagonist and his habitual adversary Levin, who reminds me of Javert from *Les Misérables*, who puts law above doing what's right. The story ends with some questions, which I presume will be answered in a book two. For my part, I'll be eager to check them out.

For science fiction fans that like their stories with a little more meat on the bone, this one's definitely worth your TIME.

Stephanie Swint says

A couple of things up front. I love Wesley Chu's writing and adore his Tao Series. I was more than a little excited to get this. I preordered the audio version assuming Mikael Naramore was narrating it as he did the Tao Series. I didn't check in my bouncing anticipation. – So, this is where I say the experience was not what I expected. I did like it – once I got over the fact it was narrated by Kevin T. Collins. He's not bad, but he was not what I was anticipating. That, combined with the fact I listened to the first two chapters at 1.25 speed by accident, didn't help the situation. The first two chapters did not impress me. I had new characters. I grew to love Grace, The Mother of Time, but I was disgusted with her decadent and crass introduction. I need to reiterate, I did grow to like 'Time Salvager', but I stopped listening after the first three chapters. I had already read one book recently where I had pushed on when I was not in the mood for it. It did not help that situation and only led to me being unhappy and grumpy about it. I wasn't going to make the same mistake with this book. I waited.

So, it was with much lower expectations, I started to listen to it a couple of weeks later – at the correct speed and no unfair expectations for Collins or Chu. It was much better. *Time Salvager* is basically a Space Opera about a time-traveling, drunk, bounty hunter named James Griffin Mars. He's not very old but he's precocious in becoming a weathered old grouch. He's also not really a bounty hunter. He's a respectable chronman who travels to the past, with very specific and important rules, to steal power generators and technology moments before it's to be destroyed. – All in the pursuit to save humanity. It's a losing battle. The future is not bright and the worst thing about his job is coming back to his present time. Most Chronmen don't last very long. They either die during a job or fly off in a blazing suicide. Very few can buy out of their contracts and many try to hide in the past. That creates time ripples, however, so the Auditors must come back for you, kill you, and anything and everything you screwed up to fix the timeline. It's not a happy situation.

When James and his best friend (only friend) and handler get news of a job that can shave years off their

contracts they jump – as much as a man like James jumps at anything. It's shady, for the Valta Corporation, and his Handler has to keep him sober enough to get through the psychological review for this certain death job. This job destroys everything in James life. He will break the time laws he holds sacred, become a traitor to Chronocom, lose his mind, and maybe find a chance for redemption.

Space Opera is not my first love, but I adore time-travel and science fiction. I say this to give you some context to my opinion. Chu created a dystopia. It is dark, but Chu is Chu, so he still laced in humor and characters I grew to love despite their flaws. What isn't obvious is the book is about relationships, trust, loyalty, and people allowing themselves to feel emotion – any emotion. When the future is so dark you stay drunk on really bad whiskey so you can get to the past to drink amazing vintage bottom shelf whiskey this is a challenge.

Chu wrote a good story. I enjoyed it but he indulged in creating his own futuristic lingo and curses. I understand why people do it. I agree that people in the future will say different things than we do and to use current slang will date it, but I hate it. I hate when anybody does it. It's not just Chu. The rest of his writing is fine. He uses more profanity, both modern and made up, compared his other books but it was only noticeable in the first couple of chapters. It is something to be aware of, however, if it bothers you.

I will definitely be reading the second book that is planned. The story has good bones. I will also listen to it. I was not initially impressed with Collins narration but it grew on me. He established a rhythm and distinguished Chu's characters. In the end he won me over.

Neil Hepworth says

The short review:

An excellent premise with loads of potential squandered in shallow characters, cringe-worthy dialogue, cliches galore, and clunky writing. This is a bad book. You, on the other hand, might like it. I see lots of glowing reviews on the interweb. So if you don't want me to pick apart a book that you like, then stop reading. However, if you want my complete list of gripes, then here is...

The longer, more brutal review and other thoughts:

Get out the cliché checklist. Here we go...

Earth and her oceans destroyed by megacorporation misconduct? Check.

Megacorporation and tech giant that abuses a poor and/or primitive tribal peoples? Check.

Disillusioned member of the megacorporation having a change of heart at a convenient point in the plot so that the protagonist can escape, but at least he feels good about himself now that he has a clean conscience? Check.

Megacorporation harbors secrets that aren't really all that secret? Check.

Gruff main character who is a loner and a drinker but discovers his heart of gold when he meets a girl? Check.

Primitive tribal people, who are abused by the megacorporation, take in the hero and show him how the

world can be a better place if the people just work together, care for the land, and care for one another? (paging Avatar and Dances with Wolves.) Check.

Scientist who is able to quickly figure out problems that no one else can? Check. (Well, okay...only kinda...but it's still close enough for me to put it on the list.)

Two female characters who fight with each other because they're both looking for the affections of the main character, but then come to an understanding and become close? Check.

Scene after scene where a main character escapes but *just barely*? Check.

That one member of the primitive tribe who, knowing he's committing suicide, attacks a technologically superior villain so that a main character can escape - the scene is supposed to be emotional (but it's not)? Check.

That one scene where the villain monologues while hunting a main character who is hiding in the shadow? (paging Darth Vader.) Check.

A main character who "sees dead people" from his past, but they kinda help him make good decisions, and then, at the very end, he comes to peace with them and so his visions literally wave at him - and he waves back!?!? (paging Luke Skywalker.) Check.

Conclusion:

It's clichéd!

A few other critiques that just add to the mess:

The f-bombs are frequent and awkward, used without any thought, and are particularly jarring because the other swear words are made-up swears like Gaia, abyss, and space-it!

So many chapters in the story lead to a climax that is *skipped* in favor of starting the *next chapter* with a "Hey, remember that one event from the last chapter that we solved while you turned the page? Yeah, that was awesome - good thing we didn't die, huh?" Why would you cut *away* from action that could both advance the plot *and* flesh out some characters? Also the scenes could be like, you know, exciting and tension filled?

Seriously, the dialogue is really clunky: "No James, open your eyes and let people in. Like you let me in." (page 295)

Also, this gem: "So you pretend to be an old hobbling man to get what you want? That's sick." (page 351). *REALLY?* Impersonating an old man is SICK? The torture, the mass murder, the general ass-hattery...but *this* is sick?

And finally, DEAR LORD an EVIL megacorporation who is EVIL to everyone and EVERYTHING it touches! Get a new villain, please!

Final thoughts:

I was really looking forward to this book. I pre-ordered it, but then went out and purchased it from Barnes and Noble anyway because it wasn't shipping fast enough. I thoroughly enjoyed The Lives of Tao and thought that Chu would be perfect to write a science fiction story like *Time Salvager*. Boy was I wrong. But

the thing that hurts the most is that Chu's premise is so good: a future where time travelers go back in time to salvage resources and other art/goods from the past to bring to the present because the present is so screwed up. And, to top it off, you've got a main character who pretty well hates his job because each time he goes back he realizes what a dump his actual life is and that everyone he sees in the past is dead. It's a great idea! I mean, think of the possibilities that presents - think of the depth of character it could lead to. But it doesn't. At every turn *Time Salvager* takes the easy and cliched path.

P.S.:

Once again, I'm left wondering what I would think of this novel if I were not a constant reader of science fiction, or if I were a younger, less experienced reader. Perhaps if this novel were one of my first exposures to science fiction, I'd really like it. But I'm just getting tired of having to read science fiction with that particular hat on my head - for once, I want to read a science fiction novel, and as an experienced reader, be blown away by new ideas and great writing. Such novels are very far and few between. Sigh.

Kara-karina says

Don't you just love when some of your most anticipated books of the year turn out to be worth the wait? I was very happy with *Time Salvager*, ladies and gents.

You might have noticed that I've been on sci-fi binge for the last couple of weeks. I took a break from this genre a few months ago, and had a craving. *Time Salvager* fit the bill.

I would describe this book as time travel dystopia. Very little happens in space, mostly the action concentrates on Earth in a very bleak distant future. To my delight Wesley Chu's writing reminded me of Max Barry's *Jennifer Government* and *Lexicon*. There is a unique concept. It's super gritty, harsh and heavy on evil corporations conspiracies. Needless to say, I loved it!

James Griffin-Mars is a cynical, highly depressed chronman, one of the oldest in his profession, and he loathes his job so very much he wonders if each new job will be his last as he turns his ship to the sun and just let it burn. What he does is salvages pieces of precious equipment and resources from the past timestreams for interplanetary corporations, because in the last few centuries the civilisation went to hell and lost the majority of its technological advances.

Then he lands a very lucrative job which will allow him to retire within a year and live like a king on a luxurious planet. All he needs is to salvage precious equipment from a sinking research facility in the past within a very short time frame.

However, it all goes wrong from the very beginning. He meets a brilliant scientist committed to saving the environment from the plague, which decimated the Earth of his time; his information about the project is incorrect, and what's even worse, he detects a presence of another chronman at the same facility.

Too many questions and not enough time. Suspecting the worst sort of conspiracy, James goes rogue and saves the scientist, breaking the most important rule of his organisation: don't bring people back from the past.

Now both hide on polluted, abandoned Earth and try to find a way to cure it from the plague, while an army of chronmen and corporate security ruthlessly search for them all over the place.

Time Salvager is action-packed and intense, full of fresh, innovative ideas and has great, dramatic world-building. However, you might have noticed that I didn't give it higher rating. There were issues.

First of all, the romantic involvement between James and Elise was neither here nor there. I had an impression that the author felt it necessary to include one, but it did nothing for the plot development, and was very unconvincing.

Secondly, the ending let me down. I expected some sort of a wrap up, but everything ended very suddenly, leaving me dissatisfied. I invested myself in this book, and I felt slightly cheated.

Otherwise, I can't recommend it highly enough. Fascinating characters, great background and non-stop action with juicy time travel tidbits. Read it!

Rinn says

I received a copy of this book for free from Netgalley, in exchange for an honest review. Also posted on my blog, Rinn Reads.

How do I review Time Salvager? Well I know there's one thing I can say: this book swept me away, completely and utterly.

The basic premise is that, by the 26th century, the Earth is toxic, a wasteland. Thanks to humanity, it has been pretty much destroyed. Within this future is a company called ChronoCom, who employs 'Chronmen'. These Chronmen travel back in time in order to retrieve important things – technology, documents, natural resources – but never people. That is, until the protagonist James decides to rescue a scientist from an exploding research base, bringing her from the 21st century to the 26th. That's when things get messy.

Elise, the scientist that James brings back with him, is ripped from a time where mankind is finally fighting its wrongs – with peace, medicine, etc – and placed in one that feels like it could almost be the past, not the future. The Earth she knows and loves has been ravaged, and is now covered in pollution and smog. I really liked Elise, she was intelligent and quickly adjusted to this new time period. She was a wonderful contrast to James. And speaking of James, it was nice to have a flawed protagonist. No-one is perfect.

From the very first page, I was gripped. I'm a big fan of time travel in books, film and television, especially

when it involves travelling BACK in time, rather than just forward. Sometimes it's hard to pull off. Sometimes the author feels the need to overexplain. Chu doesn't explain one bit how time travel works in this universe, and to me, that didn't matter. Everything felt so established: ChronoCom, the Time Laws, James' slow spiral downwards, that I didn't really feel a need to know how the time travel worked. It just did.

This was a book that made me want to do nothing but sit down and read it for long periods of time, and it's been a while since I've felt like that, thanks to my studies. The last few chapters were incredibly tense, and the ending was very open, allowing the reader to make their mind up about what happened.

Time Salvager feels like the sort of science fiction I've been yearning for. To me, it is on par with greats such as Hyperion and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?. It's clever, it's fast, it's action-packed, but it also carries a message. And most of all: it is DEFINITELY worth your time.

Dan Schwent says

When chronman James Griffin-Mars breaks the first Time Law, he becomes the target of the very agency he's worked with for years. Can he flee across time to escape them and help the woman he loves save the Earth?

I got this from NetGalley.

I was reading an interview with Wesley Chu around the time his second Tao book came out and he mentioned Time Salvager. What's not to like about people from the far future plundering dead timelines for supplies in order to save the Earth?

Things get Timey-wimey pretty quickly in Time Salvager: Time ripples, time lag, preserving the chronostream. I like the way the Chu-man handles time travel. Much like the Tao books, Time Salvager is a thriller wrapped in a nice sci-fi wrapper.

James Griffin-Mars is a complicated lead. Honestly, he's pretty unlikeable at first. On the other hand, I get the feeling that a lot of people would be that way if they were largely above the law and had crazily powerful weaponry at their fingertips. His foil, Levin, is nearly as complicated, a rigid, duty-bound man bent on bringing James in at all costs. Complicating things is Elise, the woman James brought back with him from his last authorized jump, a woman with the knowledge to save the future from the Earth-plague.

There were enough unanswered questions for me to not mind that this is likely the first book in a series. I look forward to more adventures involving the chronmen. Wesley Chu is one smooth Wookie. Four out of five stars.

Lisa says

Review from Tenacious Reader: <http://www.tenaciousreader.com/2015/0...>

4.5/5 stars

Time Salvager has all the strengths of the Tao series (action, humor, etc. etc.), but with a completely fresh world and setting. I found the entire world and plot to be very original and captivating. In a future (and not so accommodating) earth, not only have humans mastered the art and science of time travel, but they are also running short on some critical resources. The solution is to send key teams of highly trained operatives (chronmen) back in time to retrieve what they need. In order to not disrupt the natural order of time, they salvage these resources from just before some disaster strikes that would destroy them.

This aspect of it reminded me of Jo Walton's Thessaly series, but instead of procuring art, they are preserving and cultivating resources that would normally have been destroyed. But where Walton's books are slow and full of art and philosophy, this book is full of fast paced action, adrenaline, and a filthy earth that has been through some devastating events between now and then.

Needless to say, sending men back in time just as disaster strikes is a dangerous thing, and chronmen don't have a very impressive life span. James is starting to break, he's been doing this for long time by chronmen standards. He is haunted by deaths of people long dead, people he has seen die during his salvages. It's a hard thing to step into a disaster zone and know even if you could stop it, you can't because time is a fickle thing and who knows what changes he could trigger by altering anything. History is written, it is their job to preserve that. He has just one final mission. Surely he can do that, right? Well.... we like stories, so of course something can and will go wrong.

There is only one law that is a bigger offense to break than altering history itself. And that is bringing back people from the past. But in a moment of panic (or clarity, depending on how you look at it), James ends his final mission with a passenger. A woman who should have died in the explosion that occurred at his last salvage site. This quickly put him (and her) on the run, and exposes a whole set of fun politics and agendas within the corporate world that enforces time travel laws.

Listening to this as an audiobook was actually a great decision. I have no doubt I would have loved the print version as I did with Chu's other books. But I have always felt those books would make great audiobooks as well. Kevin T. Collins gave a wonderful performance, bringing life to Chu's words. This is one of the books that after listening to it, I almost feel more like I watched it. This is a wonderful credit to both Chu's ability to allow the reader to so clearly visualize what is going on (without any excess of words), and Collins ability to do those words justice with just the right amount of personality and emphasis.

Chu once again gives a world full of excitement and action, and of course, there is also a brilliant sense of humor that shines through at all the right parts.

Charlie - A Reading Machine says

Though there were moments I consider great I never quite felt settled into this one. It starts as Science Fiction with an obvious emphasis on time travel, and then becomes a discussion on Capitalism and corporate espionage leading to a layer of moralising about the treatment of the poor by the rich. I got the same feeling finishing as I do when a movie ends with the main character waking up from a dream, disgruntled and left wanting, with too many questions left unanswered and a suspicion the Author has taken a very easy out.

I loved the premise that time travelling in the future is restricted to salvaging just enough from the past to keep the future going. I loved the horrible head space that James Griffin-Mars has to inhabit as he shifts back and forth constantly, always knowing that the places he is visiting are like heaven compared to the state of

the world in his present day. I even loved the cover so the only reason, I can find for this brilliant idea falling somewhat flat is the execution. Spoilers ahead.

The first thing to bug me was the First Law of Time, “Don’t bring someone back from the past”. It only seems to exist to serve the beginning of the story and start the conflict as it’s quickly and easily proven that bringing someone forward in time has no bloody affect at all.

James, our protagonist, has followed the rules on every jump, but on this last one, the one that could buy him out of his contract, he says ‘Stuff it’ and saves a girl he has insta-love with and brings her forward in time. Now there could be a nice moral conundrum raised here as bringing someone forward in time should, according to future science, kill her slowly and painfully so James’s decision is not straightforward and selfless. However instead of this being explored we learn the science behind this life threatening condition is actually complete crap based on corporate propaganda so he is off the hook. Then I’m thinking, ‘well why are these corporate guys so desperate to get hold off this women when they have known all along they can go back and get whoever they want’ but this too is left unanswered.

The two major female characters are both brilliant and stupid at the same time. Scientists and theorists who could save the world yet are written as catty and shrewish to each other and condescending to everyone else, and so enamoured with their own brilliance that they are literally unable, or unwilling, to follow directions based on common sense from the only person they know who is currently a time travelling navy seal in an exo-suit and I’m not talking genius level stuff here. Several times either of the ladies is asked to hang for a second for the sake of security before she gets the sudden urge to go walkabout and find a nice vulnerable spot to relax. It’s even highlighted during the main climax of the book where a battle is raging, buildings are being destroyed and James saves Elise from getting her head blown off.

“Stay back” Then he jumped down into the hole. Yellow and orange bursts of light filled the air, followed by several more loud crashes.

As always with James’s instructions, Elise ignored them and crawled to the hole.

Or this lovely exchange.

“Hush, please, High Scion, or you’ll give me away”

“Don’t hush me, boy”

Mother of Time, who made stupid rules, whose life I saved says what?? Yes it is incredibly important you run tests but while I am out here saving the world and literally killing myself jumping back and forth to get you equipment and food to assist you in doing that, do me a favour and shut the hell up so I don’t get killed. It was incredible how quickly I went from liking the character of Grace Priestly to having little to no time for her bullshit and despite others having a grudging respect for her genius, her main objective in life after traveling forward in time and being given the chance to save the world seems to be to treat everyone around her like intellectual peasants. The sort of person whose mind would be downloaded onto a computer to preserve her intelligence but who everyone would take great joy in just being able to turn off. Eat me.

What was perhaps most infuriating was that almost every time one of these characters disregarded a perfectly good suggestion in favour of something stupid and dangerous they wound up stumbling upon a solution or saving the day, leaving our Protagonist looking inept and tactically moronic.

Levin, the unknowing corporate stooge, was actually my favourite character and possibly completely inspired by Javert from Les Miserables, as his every action and deed follows that of Javert’s right down to

his sacrifice at the end. He is a proud man, proud of his commitment to the Laws of Time and proud of his position as an Auditor who upholds them. His fall is the hardest and most interesting when he realises that ChronoCom's neutrality and autonomy are an illusion, as law after law is stretched or broken to bolster corporate profits at the orders of those that truly pull the strings. I loved his internal struggle and of all the characters I felt he had the most depth and complexity, and potential to be further explored but sadly he was not.

Time Salvager is a mixture of clichés that needed more re-imagining to be successful instead of the Avatar/Star Wars mash up it seems to be. The evil corporation, the future man saving the primitive tribes, hallucinations masquerading as wisdom, all of it is familiar and has been done and sadly the special ingredient that brings it all together was missing. There is not actually a great deal of time travel with most of it being the 'I'm off to the shops' variety and it barely has an ending with the set up for the next book deemed enough to bring us back from more. After reading the blurb I could immediately understand why the film options have already been taken up but after reading the book I'm wondering how wise that decision will turn out.

This review and more like it can be found at www.areadingmachine.com

Scott says

Michael Bay is planning to direct the film of this book. Yes, *Pearl Harbor*, *Transformers*, explosions-as-narrative, scantily-clad-girls-and-big-robots Michael Bay. This is indicative of the level of subtlety displayed by *Time Salvagers*, a novel that isn't solving humanity's most pressing questions, or exploring the boundaries of narrative fiction.

Of course, subtlety isn't everything, and if you're looking for a straightforward and entertaining read *Time Salvagers* could be your ticket, providing you're prepared to look past some clunky writing and some flux-capacitor level clichés.

The basic concept is one I like- the future is a wrecked, resource-scarce dystopia far past humanity's technological prime. In order to keep colonies on the Jovian moons, Mars, etc. going Chronmen- trained, heavily armed operators who can travel back in time - range through history, salvaging resources and energy sources from places where their absences won't be missed (the reactor of a sinking battleship, for example, or logs from a forest that is about to burn down). All Chronmen work for a neutral agency that is regularly hired by a fairly stock-standard group of Evil Dystopia Corporations (Could we start calling them EDCs? They are so, so common in SF) and are policed by even more heavily armed auditors, who enforce strict time laws and work to capture or kill agents who attempt to desert their duty and flee into the past. As you can imagine, looting the past for salvage is a stressful, dangerous job made worse by the fact that humanity's history is so much better than the miserable present that the Chronmen return to, and the suicide rate in the trade is massive.

James Griffin-Mars has traveled to hundreds of historic disasters where he has looted useful resources then left the people relying on them to die. He's a burnt out wreck, and is close to suicide, until he breaks the most important time law of all and sets his life on a new and dangerous trajectory, pitting himself against his old

employer. Of course, there is a corporate conspiracy to be uncovered, and a love interest, and a chance to save the earth, which the corporations have turned into a ruined ball of brown muck.

You've seen these plot developments before, and the execution isn't great here. The writing is occasionally clunky, and tends towards exposition- there is a great deal of 'tell' rather than show. The characters are also pretty clichéd- the burnt out, alcoholic operative who rebels against a corrupt system, the pretty, idealistic scientist type that he falls for, and who loves him back for little discernible reason, the stick-up-the-ass by-the-rules enforcer, etc. The narrative very rarely opts for a character that confounds expectations, and often engineers some pretty unlikely outcomes between its cast, such as two very different, rival characters settling their difference in the course of an off-screen walk up some stairs.

Despite all this, the story hums along quickly and I found myself enjoying it, if occasionally skipping over the more dull exposition-y bits or Griffin-Mars's annoying flashbacks to the people he has lost/abandoned throughout his career. Some of the tech is cool- Chronmen are armed with a force shield/projector called an 'exo', that they can use to create weaponized force-tentacles of a strength that can crush a spaceship, and Chu smashes out the battle scenes, constantly putting Griffin-Mars on the edge of death as he cuts through enemies, falling buildings, crashing ships, and sundry other explosion-y scenarios.

Time Salvager reminds me of some golden/silver era sci-fi, such as Robert Sheckley's *The Status Civilisation* in that it follows a simple, linear plot line with no unreliable narrator or other such storytelling baubles. Compared to some of the work that has been done by writers such as Ada Palmer and Iain Banks Chu's novel is pretty vanilla, but if you close your critical eye you can get caught up in a pacey, simple story that moves from A to B with no detours.

This book will make a great Michael Bay film, and if your tastes tend towards his kinetic, broad-strokes style you'll probably love it.

2.5 stars.

Micah says

A quick read and - with its half-baked, videogame premise; reducibly simplistic plot; and multiple chases and fight scenes - ripe for screenplay adaptation. Unfortunately, despite some psychologically plausible and undeniably compelling character work, and an accessible style, *Time Salvager* doesn't work.

Not as a novel.

Not as a reading experience.

Not even as an exercise in IP development.

Its just another shitty dystopian YA book, disappointing, even by the standards of the category.

Its prose is elementary, without any recognizable stylistic elements beyond a flat, thoughtless directness.

Its plotting is worse: a haphazard botching of attempted novelistic digressions to Syd Field structure that reads as unguided and repetitive.

The mystery it's built around is neither effectively posed nor solved. In fact, the book's plot never resolves. It simply pauses at an arbitrary point -no better, worse, or different than a half dozen other like points in the story - ending with a handful of tossed off character developments (the most interesting of which is for a secondary antagonist with little relation to the main action), an obligatory sequel hook, and a mercenary shrug.

Even the action scenes (which could be expected to shine in an SF-thriller) are uninspired, echoing superhero-movie cliché and failing to generate excitement, suspense, or really any visceral reaction at all.

Were it not for its characters, its marriage of gritty SF high-concepts to a grade-level writing, and my fascination with all things even tangentially related to Michael Bay, I'd rate this as a failure. Instead: much like a pretty-face movie star who only begins to learn how to act after a decade of steadily headlining movies, SF&F community rising star Wesley Chu is, on his fourth novel (the first of his I've managed to finish), beginning to show some promise as an author.

Rob says

Executive Summary: Enjoyable, but not as much as the Tao books. I was also a bit disappointed to find out it's the start of a new series.

Full Review

Last year year I discovered Mr. Chu when he did an interview on the Sword & Laser podcast.

I picked up his first book, *The Lives of Tao* quickly consumed it, and immediately moved onto the sequel. I really loved that series and can't wait for the follow on series.

I was disappointed with Tor's decision to release this book around the same time as several other SFF books I was eagerly awaiting, making fitting it in a challenge. June or August would have been better for me personally. I'm sure that sort of thing will vary from person to person, but I only know one other person who read this book so far.

However, I was eager to support him with his first "big" publisher release, and see how well he could write in a different world. My results were a bit mixed.

Most of my issues are expectations. With a book called *Time Salvager* and a synopsis saying how the protagonist: "*James is a chronman, undertaking missions into Earth's past to recover resources and treasure without altering the timeline*" I expected there to be far more time travel than there was. To be fair, there is a decent amount by the end, it was just not what I expected.

I do think Mr. Chu does a good job with the Time Travel. Then again, I'm not a hard sci-fi person who gets caught up in thinking out the consequences/side effects of time travel. Thankfully I don't have to, as many of those things are addressed in the book.

I also didn't realize this was the first book of a series. I guess I should have either assumed so (stand alone books are a dying breed lately) or maybe I just missed that the first time I read a synopsis. When you're nearing the end of a book you think to be stand alone, wondering how the author is going to wrap things up, and it just sort of ends, that's extremely jarring.

After reading his Tao series, I also expected his characters to be a lot more likeable. I came around on some of them in the end, but I despised most of them for a large portion of the book. That's likely by intention, but I have a much harder time reading books with characters I don't like. James character developed as the book went on, making him more likeable. Meanwhile Levin didn't really change at all, he simply was made more likeable by his proximity to another character far more despicable.

The thing is, I always enjoyed reading this book when I picked it up. The writing is excellent, the action is good, and the world building is interesting. There is far less humor in it than his Tao books. That's probably appropriate given the world he's built, but the humor was one of the best parts of those books for me.

For some reason though, I just never was in a rush to pick it back up, which is part of why it took me so long to read it. I suspect if I had different expectations going in, or on a reread I'll like this one a bit more.

I do plan to pick up the sequel. Things end in a pretty awful place. I want to know what happens next. It's always hard to stop books in a series. The unresolved issues aren't nearly as bad as The Deaths of Tao, but I immediately had to go look up if/when there was a sequel coming.

Overall, a decent book, but I'm looking forward to the next book in his Quasing universe more than I am to the sequel to this one.
