



Dreamships

Melissa Scott

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Dreamships is the story of a freelance space pilot and her crew, who are hired by a rich corporate owner to track down her crazy brother--who just may have created the first sentient Artificial Intelligence. Social texture and a tough, cyberpunk attitude make this an exceptionally intense read.

Dreamships Details

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Author : Melissa Scott

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From Reader Review Dreamships for online ebook

Ian says

Judging by the gazeteer extract which precedes the opening of *Dreamships*, and which gives details of the world of Persephone, this novel is set in the same universe as Scott's *The Kindly Ones* (1987), which also features a register entry on the world of its story. That, however, is all the two novels have in common as, while an interstellar civilisation is mentioned, the events of *Dreamships* take place on only two worlds.

Reverdy Jian is a pilot, contracted by the company she works for to fly a private starship from Persephone to Refuge and back again. The client, Medelia Mitexi, is looking for her brother, a gifted construct (sophisticated computer programs) designer who had a severe breakdown some years previously. Mitexi's starship, however, is experimental – Jian and her crew only discover how experimental when they board it to begin their journey. The ship's construct is borderline, if not actual, AI. And this is a problem because there is an ongoing campaign on Persephone by an organisation called Dreampeace to give AIs full rights. This is unpopular with most of the world's residents as it would mean AIs have more rights than they do. (The obvious answer would, of course, be to campaign for more rights for humans as well as rights for AIs, rather than deny rights for AIs... but this is a US science fiction novel.)

During the journey to Refuge, Jian – and her two crew members Imre and Red – learn more about Manfred, the ship's construct. Jian is soon convinced it is an AI. Which puts her in a quandary – she's not a supporter of Dreampeace, on the contrary she opposes its aims, but she has been persuaded that Manfred doesn't deserve to be treated like a computer program. Matters are only made worse when on the return journey from Refuge, Mitexi's brother commits suicide in his cabin. This death gets the Persephone authorities involved and that, plus Dreampeace's activism, requires Jian and her crew to sneak back into the city (Persephone's only habited city is entirely underground).

Dreamships was Scott's first novel to be released in hardback – as the ARC backcover blurb has it: “after a rapid string of successes in paperback, Melissa Scott ... escalates into hardcover...” So it's a bit of shame this novel isn't as strong as the other two by her I've read. Much is made of the underground city, and the first few chapters are little more than travelogue, with Jian walking from one place to the other and so introducing the reader to her world. Jian is a strong and well-drawn protagonist, which unfortunately cannot be said of the rest of the cast (and Red, who is presented as mysterious for no good reason, seems to have been parachuted in from a Samuel Delany novel – not in itself a bad thing, of course).

Nor do the politics driving the plot make a great deal of sense. To some extent, this likely a consequence of American science fiction's predilection for libertarian futures, a complete misrepresentation, if not a total romanticisation, of the pioneering days of the nation's history. Even in settings where such a political situation would be unsustainable, such as those deeply reliant on life-sustaining technology, US sf novels continue to present neoliberal, libertarian, unegalitarian societies – which promptly forces the plot to jump through a series of increasingly implausible economic and political hoops in order to reach the desired conclusion. *Dreamships* frequently falls prey to this, trying to display a gritty realistic future which often comes across as more like the worst excesses of the present. This is not helped by the story's continually shifting focus – is it about Jian? Dreamscape? the Mitexis? Or Manfred?

The Kindly Ones suffered from a lack of narrative cohesion, as if it were several stories poorly welded together, and so to does *Dreamships* suffer from the same flaw. It benefits in having a likeable protagonist, an interesting world, and some good ideas... but it doesn't quite hang together with sufficient rigour – and nor

does it make a virtue of its lack of rigour. I still like Scott's novel and I'll continue to read them, but I've yet to find one that really makes good on her evident promise.

Althea Ann says

I should have read this book before "Dreaming Metal" (the sequel).

Some of the things I expected to become clear (that weren't so clear in the second book) did - for example, why so many people in the books are deaf (random mutation, small population), and the origin and exact stances of the many political groups. Other things were not really explained (why Red was in jail, anything having to do with his & Imre's very odd relationship.)

The main character here is Reverdy Jian, a starship pilot and part of a team with Imre and Red. Their agent is approached by a wealthy woman who wishes to hire them for a job - but she's a little mysterious and cagey about the exact nature of the venture, which will definitely involve both testing an experimental ship's computer and searching for her missing brother - who is variously rumored to be a brilliant programmer, crazy, and/or dead.

Not wanting to get into anything more than they can handle, the team goes behind their new employer's back to try to get more information about what's actually going on. Slowly, but suspensefully, they uncover a complex web of crime, underground programming secrets, big companies that will do a lot to get their hands on those secrets, and questions about the nature of the Spelvin constructs - computer personalities without which starships would be impossible to fly."

Clint says

This was a surprising find. Got it at a library book sale, didn't expect much. It's a "small" story, with few settings and characters, and a relatively short plot. But the author packs a lot of descriptive detail into the story which really fills out the 'world' it takes place in. The characters are good, believable, and likeable in their own ways. I would definitely read another book by Melissa Scott, but it would be great if it was a little longer and the story had a bit bigger scope to it.

Rachel says

Hooo goodness. I sure WANTED to like this book. I will say, it's Cyber As Fuck, which is a point in its favor! It's also about a woman character, people with disabilities and different races, and it made me want to eat the hell out of some delicious salty flavored noodles and ride super fast trains on space stations.

But... it was just so doggone disappointing! It's REALLY descriptive. Like, a lot of description. And the describing of things. So much. With the more descriptions.

The plot seems promising, but is frequently interrupted (each time it gets going) by description. And then, it goes....nowhere, really. It's an endless nongasm, each time you start to get into it it just peters back out.

Stevelvis says

DREAMSHIPS and DREAMING METAL by MELISSA SCOTT -- Two books written years apart, both examining the technology and social, legal, and moral implications of Artificial Intelligence in a futuristic space setting.

eggdropsoap says

A book about machine intelligence on the surface only; in substance it is really about how class divisions inherently undermine human rights.

Full of immersive worldbuilding and detail, but it feels like the plot was an afterthought, as if it was merely a vehicle for touring around the well-thought-out places, politics, and people. It felt like a living, breathing world, but the story didn't feel alive.

I feel conflicted rating this. The worldbuilding is excellent and engrossing, but the book itself as-a-book is not a compelling whole. Jian's story was just enough to want *more*, but not in the sense that what we were given was so great that it leaves you wanting more — instead in the sense of getting an inadequate glimpse of something and wishing there had been more initial substance.

It feels like this would have been more appropriate as a setting guidebook for a roleplaying game (though undoubtedly that would have been less financially successful).

I would recommend this to anyone who valued depth in political and social details, or who would find the theme of the struggle for human rights being mediated by/interfered with class warfare compelling. The nature of AI and consciousness was potentially raised as a theme but never addressed, despite it being a practical issue for the characters, so it doesn't really contribute to the literature on the nature of the mind and our relationship to (the idea of) machine intelligence — the concept of AI is really just a foil for the political and human rights issues that are the real thematic core of the narrative.

John Snead says

I think this is her best work - it's an exploration of politics, oppression, and a complex and fascinating look at artificial intelligence.

Adam O'Grady says

This is one of the most realistic, absorbing sci-fi universes I have ever dived into so I've got to dedicate a bit to it:

What got me hooked most of all was how it manages to stay clear of one of the most common pitfalls of

catapulting modern Western society forward a few thousand years and instead builds it's own rich cultures meshing in an underground city. There is a strong class system and racial tensions, there are ethical arguments surrounding burgeoning artificial intelligences contrasted against the deprivation of rights that many of the local populace suffers under. Greetings, formalities, cuisine, family groupings, and entertainment are all thought out in great detail.

The technology is a close second in terms of world-building coolness; Melissa Scott has done so well in creating futuristic wetware, software, etc that doesn't shy away from showing it's own pitfalls. Characters are occasionally blinded when they forget to turn down the blindness on their overlays when they walk into a data-filled environment and jumping into someone else's customised VR system will leave you floundering like if you tried to use a colleague's weird trackball and Dvorak keyboard in real life.

The characters are also really well created and diverse without falling into stereotypes. The lack of sexualisation of Jian while still not denying her sexuality in her thoughts is refreshing to read. No characters are presented as entirely good or evil, they all have quirks that make them at times intolerable and loveable and most of all: human.

Overall, this is an amazing book, read it.

Elaine taylor says

A good solid sci-fi book. I love this author whether she is writing techie sci-fi or space opera. Her examination of the schisms between various sectors of society is always enjoyable and feels like a good prediction of the future.

Kim says

Though the book was a little hard to understand the surroundings first, the further into it you got, the more you learned about the world and sooner or later I didn't have that problem that I initially had. The story itself was fascinating and well written, but I had one serious problem that I didn't quite figure out until much farther in the book. At first it was that I didn't really like them. I mean it wasn't as if any were horribly awful or annoying, but none of them appealed to me. I also didn't understand the relationship of the two guys; mostly, why was the shy guy going out with the jerk. Then the AI came in and after a while it hit me, the characters felt rather fake to me, I mean, I was starting to feel that the AI was the most real of the group. There was something wrong with how they were made, like they were built rather than created I guess. It wasn't a bad book through and through, but as someone who puts quite a lot of focus on characters, I just felt a little unsatisfied when I got to the end.

Jan says

Conflict between AI and the serf (coolie) for recognition in the corporate world is the underlying theme of the book. Set in a world of caste conflicts, Jian Reverdy and Imre Vaughn, as starship pilots, undertake a mission to retrieve the creator of a super AI. It's engaging and offers a view of a future that is far from a utopia but an alternative that reminds of descriptions of Calcutta and Shang-Hai.

penny shima glanz says

If one were to take a mash-up of my undergraduate degree (Computer Science:Artificial Intelligence, also Psycholinguistics wannabe) and crossed it with my graduate degree (Information & Archive Management) and mixed in my random interests you might come up with this book. I randomly picked it off the shelf at the used bookstore and am delighted to have found it. I enjoyed reading it and will look into Scott's other writings.

a hooded figure from your friendly neighbourhood dog park says

not quite what I expected and one character death seemed like a letdown, but I loved the heroine and the setting was refreshingly different from anything else. Doesn't read like a book from the 90s, feels pretty modern! especially the casual bisexuality and stuff.

Denise says

Hired by a rich businesswoman to fly her ship to the planet Refuge to retrieve her crazy but brilliant brother, freelance pilot Jian and her crew inadvertently become involved with what appears to be the first true AI ever created - a deeply controversial issue that lands them in the middle of rival factions, riots and potentially in the line of fire of those willing to kill to get their hands on it.

A thoughtful exploration of the AI theme in combination with excellent worldbuilding and diverse, intriguing characters make this a wonderfully absorbing read - not that I'd have expected anything less from this author.

Chris says

An excellent and complex world-build with deep intersectionalities of gender, labor, heritage, and ability. A quick ending with a hook to sequel "Dreaming Metal" left me missing Reverdy, Red, and Crazy Imre.
