



Hammerfall

C.J. Cherryh

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One of the most renowned figures in science fiction, C. J. Cherryh has been enthralling audiences for nearly thirty years with rich and complex novels. Now at the peak of her career, this three-time Hugo Award Winner launches her most ambitious work in decades, *Hammerfall*, part of a far-ranging series, *The Gene Wars*, set in an entirely new universe scarred by the most vicious of future weaponry, nanotechnology. In this brilliant novel -- possibly Cherryh's masterwork -- the fate of billions has come down to a confrontation between two profoundly alien cultures on a single desert planet.

"The mad shall be searched out and given to the Ila's messengers. No man shall conceal madness in his wife, or his son, or his daughter, or his father. Every one must be delivered up."

-- The Book of the Ila's Au'itMarak has suffered the madness his entire life. He is a prince and warrior, strong and shrewd and expert in the ways of the desert covering his planet. In the service of his father, he has dedicated his life to overthrowing the Ila, the mysterious eternal dictator of his world. For years he has successfully hidden the visions that plague him -- voices pulling him eastward, calling *Marak, Marak, Marak*, amid mind-twisting visions of a silver tower. But when his secret is discovered, Marak is betrayed by his own father and forced to march in an endless caravan with the rest of his world's madmen to the Ila's city of Oburan.

Instead of death, Marak finds in Oburan his destiny, and the promise of life -- if he can survive what is surely a suicidal mission. The Ila wants him to discover the source of the voices and visions that afflict the mad. Despite the dangers of the hostile desert, tensions within the caravan, and his own excruciating doubts, Marak miraculously reaches his goal -- only to be given another, even more impossible mission by the strange people in the towers.

According to these beings who look like him yet act differently than anyone he has ever known, Marak has a slim chance to save his world's people from the wrath of the Ila's enemies. But to do so, he must convince them all -- warring tribes, villagers, priests, young and old, as well as the Ila herself -- to follow him on an epic trek across the burning desert before the hammer of the Ila's foes falls from the heavens above.

Written with deceptive simplicity and lyricism, this riveting, fast-paced epic of war, love, and survival in a brave new world marks a major achievement from the masterful C.J. Cherryh.

Hammerfall Details

Date : Published May 14th 2004 by HarperCollins e-books (first published 2001)

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Author : C.J. Cherryh

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From Reader Review Hammerfall for online ebook

Jacob says

I adore C.J. Cherryh's Faded Sun Trilogy for its sparseness and portrayal of a plausible alien warrior culture. Hammerfall has many similarities, but is a much different work. It's like Walking Drum and Dune rolled into one story. In the book, Marak Trin Tain is a desert raider, and would be revolutionary, who finds himself in an unlikely alliance with his former nemesis as his madness barely allows him to function in the world. Both he and the God-Queen Illa are searching for the source of this madness and Marak discovers it with her material assistance. Some of the mystery is taken away when we discover the madness is simply nano-technology being employed on the world's citizens, but the ensuing struggle of a world full of people crossing the desert to safety (the nano-technology was essentially an early warning indicator of planet-wide destruction), keeps the reader going. This book isn't for everyone. It is no fast-paced, action-packed space opera. But if you like well-fleshed out worlds, lean desert warriors, and constant, unresolvable tension then this is your book. Not quite the literary quality of Dune, and admittedly I slowed down in the last half of the book, but still well worth the read. Solid 4 stars.

Mary JL says

I'm back! Some health issues--and a volunteer project had delayed reviews. You didn't think you were going to get rid of me THAT easily, did you?:)

Marak had always known he was mad. since his sixth years he had heard voices in his head! "Marak! Marak! Marak!" and the compulsion to go east.

As the son of a chief his mother protected him and his father pretended to ignore it. Then, the secret came out. Marak's father disowned him; surrendered him to the Illa's men.

After a long walk across the desert, a prisoner along with other mad ones, Marak is brought before the powerful Illa, the ruler of the world. To his surprise, Marak is not to die.

The Illa strikes a bargain with him. She wishes to know what is causing this epidemic of madness. Marak will use his warrior skills and go east to see why the voices always urge the mad to go east. In return, the Illa will protect his mother and sister (his father threw them out also). for the sake of his mother and sister, Marak agrees to seek the source of the madness---and heads east, where no caravan has ever gone.

This is a good beginning of a new world built by C. J. Cherryh. I rate it a solid three stars. Not as outstanding as some of her series, but well worth your time.

The characterization is four stars--Marak, Hati and Norit are really well drawn, as well as many of the secondary characters. The world is well designed. The pace drags a bit in spots. For example, Marak has to make a desert crossing three times. Cherryh tries to vary the description a little, but the details are the same--desperate for water, stop at noon, travel at night, trouble with the beasts, etc etc. get a bit repetitious after the second time. The ending also seemed a bit rushed in the last chapter. We skip through a lot of events--Marak has grandchildren? We missed some years in between here. Possibly left out on purpose because of a

planned next book?

Nevertheless, a three star by C. J. Cherryh is worth a four star for many other authors. Interesting characters and a new world for her will create a enjoyable experience. Recommended for all SF fans---fantasy fans would still enjoy it also!

Thoraiya says

I expected to love this book. The first 130-odd pages flew by in what seemed an instant. Then it got repetetive. Expected revelations weren't. Paragraphs started to seem too similar to what I'd already read. Characters' relationships didn't change. The urgency was lost. I was sad. If you've never read Cherryh before, I would recommend starting with Cyteen or the Faded Sun trilogy for SF lovers, or the Fortress trilogy for fantasy lovers.

Elise Weber says

Cherryh is a fantastic writer but this is not one of her best works. It started out well enough and drew me immediately into the mystery of the "mad", but once the answer to the riddle was delivered, the story fell apart. Despite pages and pages of desert danger it was really boring. I found myself skipping pages and pages of the book to get to the part that actually advanced the story line. Sadly these parts were limited to about 25% of the book.

I think she also missed opportunity to flesh out characters and relationships. In most cases she simply threw people into the story and told us how great they were instead of taking the time to show us. Considering the amount of filler in the book, it could have been put to better use.

Lindsay Stares says

Premise: Marak Trin is a madman. Like many, he tried to hide it - did successfully hide it for years. But finally the visions and the voices were too much, and when the Ila's men came rounding up the mad, his father the rebel leader surrendered him to the soldiers, and made a kind of peace with the Ila. All the mad are being brought across the desert to the holy city, for the Ila herself to judge. The Ila knows an opportunity when she sees one, and Marak will have a chance to solve the riddle of the visions. He has to try, if he wants to rescue his mother, himself, and possibly all the people living on the Lakht.

Like most of Cherryh's work that I've read, this started a little slow, but the story was so intriguing that I didn't mind.

It's an especially strong entry in the sub-genre of books which don't start out looking like science fiction, but get there in the end. For the first part of the book, it's simply an intriguing story of a group of oppressed people in a desert country who are just trying to make their way in the world. Eventually it becomes clear (no surprise, given the series' title) that the people of the Lahkt are about to be caught up in a war between races with incredible powers of bioengineering. Marak and his companions never fully understand what is going on, it's so far removed from their daily life. They can only guess as best they can at the motives of people

who seem to them to be gods.

The portrait of the Ila's created society eventually explains many of its more illogical aspects. The balance between explanation and mystery is well done.

I really liked the character of Marak: divorced from everything he'd known or been taught, he finds within himself an ability to grasp the ineffable and a determination to protect others that he'd hardly suspected. Hati, a fierce tribeswoman among the mad, is also a fascinating character.

The descriptions of travel across the desert were full of delicate detail and seemed realistic. By the time the book switches gears into a race against time, I understood the magnitude of what the characters were up against.

Overall, a solid, engrossing read.

Emotonal Reads says

This author lost me here, I was looking for Science fiction, but after that orgy in the desert, no thanks. What did any of the things that has happened sexually has to do with SCI FI?

Why is that the black woman always a barbarian, uncooth and demands to have another woman in bed with them. I mean really, I was truly enjoying this book until that episode in the desert. I thought it was going to be the strong woman having her mans back once they got together, but spoils it with what was a menage. I stopped giving a damn because they all turned out not only nuts but the women whores, the men perverted freaks. what's worst she made it seem as though the dessert (black woman) forced the man and other woman to have sex with her in a tent with a lot of other people doing who knows. I read sci fi to get away from that sort of thing, it's not science and it ain't fiction.

After that I stopped caring about what happens to any of them, I stopped liking or even respecting both the male and female characters.

I enjoyed her foreigner series and was surprised this was one of hers.

I will be more careful what I read from this author in the future.

bkwurm says

I found this a little disappointing, given the quality of the author's other books. While it started off well, with the intriguing mystery of the call that pulled the various disparate travellers across the desert, the explanations that were offered midway through the story were less than satisfactory.

Given the technological advances available to the visitors who presumably were able to ward off the planet wide catastrophes, why was it necessary to compel the planetary population to migrate across the forbidding desert? And the descriptions of the difficulties of desert travel start to pall after a while.

Elisa Berry says

Found her through Sargent's sci-fi collections. Cherryh is one of the few female hard/military sci-fi writers (see Downbelow Station). This one is not though and may even be considered more fantasy: on a desert planet, an unlikely group of people plagued with voices and visions of similar ilk, heading east to seek the source of their madness.

Cherryh's prose is unique, something I have found on the back of nearly every book of hers I pick up as well as reader reviews here and other book sites. It is lovely, clipped writing--though I wonder if she is successful at transporting her vision to the reader. Sometimes it falls kind of flat, like a wet newspaper flung one your welcome mat that you have to peel out of the plastic and sully yourself with if you want the good bits inside.

The beginning chapters of the story are the best, the idea is a good one, however by the end we are in our third trek across this small desert planet and know pretty much exactly how things are going to wind up and there are no surprises at the end. It all becomes pretty predictable. I did enjoy the book--for much of it I read voraciously, but I am left not caring too much about the characters and I am not driven to go and immediately grab the sequel, Forge of Heaven. I might get to it one day.

Saphana says

Bedouins travelling on what is -obviously- camels repeatedly through the same desert doesn't need 478 pages. Not even, if they do it 3 times. SciFi? Not so much.

Everybody who reads this book will be absolutely certain, Marak is not mad. From the very start. So, why insist, he's battling insanity?

Some persons, who -obviously- got to this world on some kind of starship and manipulate the world via nanotech force the entire native population to a month-long trek through the desert? Why?

The Ila. To the main character "it is known where she came from". Oh, thank you very much ... why not tell us, the readers, too?

I'm not following up with "The Forge of Heaven". Giving up. Right here.

Claudia Putnam says

I have enjoyed Cherryh in the past, but maybe I was more flexible back then. I am finding her less satisfying lately. I don't understand why these societies of hers must have, for example, slaves. Why can't the people who arrive in these feudal-ish places, desperate to save the world from destruction, take the short-cut of sending, say, sir questing person on some kind of flying machine with his message, instead of sending him all the way back the way he just came via camel-ish beast, whereupon he must return yet again, the way he just came, forcing us to endure a third time, a description of the same landscape, blah blah... I dunno.

It started out with an interesting-seeming premise, but it got awfully dilated, as I hope I have indicated.

Rick Decorie says

Kept my attention throughout.

Carolyn F. says

This is the second sci-fi book I read where the journey (in this book journeys) went on way too long. Oh, the sand, and the water problems, and the vermin, and the wind, and the sand, and the water problems, and the vermin, and the wind, and so on. I know this book has been out for awhile but maybe just saying that the same thing happened for 30 days instead of giving us a blow-by-blow would have made this book better. The dialogue/action parts (except for the journeys) was good but the monotonousness brought this book down a star.

Deirdre says

It's been a while since I've read any sci-fi, and this is certainly some good, old-fashioned, 'hard' sci-fi. Shades of Isaac Asimov and Frank Herbert. I thought it was mostly well-done. The plot ain't thrilling - there are more trips across the desert than some might find necessary in one book - but what makes for me is Marak's development as a leader over the course of these trips and the politics at play. Super interesting to me. And I did get caught up into the drama of 'will they make it??' I also liked the portrayal of how science/technology looks to people who don't have it - as one of my friends says, after a certain point science and magic are virtually indistinguishable, and to Marak and his world, they really are.

I thought the depiction of sex and gender was confusing, because there were some great feminist moments and some really un-feminist moments throughout the novel. Maybe this dates the book. There are many many strong, vividly portrayed female characters - they outnumber the strong male characters, actually - but also Marak's relationship with the women closest to him isn't always that of equals. (view spoiler) So I'll reserve judgement until I read another one of her books.

Robert Laird says

For those that don't read sf, they might find the first 5-10 pages of most sf novels hard to deal with because most sf authors make assumptions about the reader. And, subsequently, most sf readers know to "hang in there" because soon enough it will start to make sense. Cherryh probably takes this assumption about the reader and extends it double or triple.

It really took a lot of "hang in there" to get to the point where I felt like I knew what was going on. Having finished the story, there is still a lot of vagueness in certain areas, but overall, I like the story. And while I never could say I liked "the point-of-view" -- which consisted 100% of the world as seen through the primary character, Marak -- it was put to fairly good use, albeit confusing.

Most of the confusion came into play because Marak's world was so odd and different from our own. But there were many times Cherryh could have done a bit more exposition so that the reader better understood what was going on around Marak. My biggest peeve was "vermin." Only once was there a mention of what form this vermin might take -- a beetle -- but that was just for a moment, and never revisited. Only in the last few pages did she expound on details that the previous 99% of the story had you guessing. So, in that, she didn't trust her readers.

There was also this pounding "Marak, Marak, Marak..." throughout the story and, well, we GOT it! It may have been Cherryh's point to make it as tedious to us as it was to Marak, but it got old... real quick.

On the positive side, if we ignore the irritating issues I've discussed, the story was excellent and the characters all very well developed, as you'd expect. The world was fairly one-dimensional -- populated only by people, vermin and besha (camels) -- but that might have been part of the the point of the story. (To say more about that would spoil it.) So, overall, I did like it and could recommend it, but would temper it by saying, only for hard-core sf fans.

Gregg Wingo says

Cherryh's Gene Wars series is made up of "Hammerfall" and "Forge of Heaven". It is a universe updated due to scientific changes since the creation of her Alliance-Union construct, however, it is still very indebted to the original concepts of Stationer culture. What has changed is gene engineering and alien contact.

"Hammerfall" is basically a cross between Lawrence of Arabia, Dune, and the Exodus. The author explores a desert based culture with a deus ex machina embedded in the genetic substrate. A harsh and isolated culture dominated by its environment thrown into turmoil by extraplanetary agents. It is a sparse but vivid world that one cannot question its veracity while immersed in the story.

"Forge of Heaven" takes the series into the realm of Robinson's "Red Mars" and Herbert's "God-Emperor of Dune" but only on a superficial level. In reality, it is a good old fashion Stationer action story. It explores multiple levels of society encapsulated in the Concord Station orbiting the planetary setting of "Hammerfall". While the first novel is an experiment, "Forge" is the well-known ground of the author's success. What she adds to her body of work is the impact of a thoroughly wired world and a cosmetic genetically enhancement society. The sequel delivers the goods.

Both books produce the excitement and action Cherryh fans have come to know and love from this veteran SF author. You won't be disappointed.
