



Young Flandry

Poul Anderson

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It is the twilight of the Terran Empire. The warriors who made it great are long gone now, and the Traders of the Polesotechnic League who made it possible are the dimly-remembered stuff of legend. Alien enemies prowl its outer precincts, and Sector Governors conspire for the Throne of Man. On Terra herself, those who occupy the labyrinthine corridors of power busy themselves with trivialities and internal politics, as outside the final darkness gathers. In this scene of terminal disarray one man stands like a giant: Dominic Flandry, Agent of the Terran Empire. In three full-length novels, he will rise from young ensign to lieutenant commander as he outthinks rivals and thwarts adversaries, blazing a trail across the galaxy in defense of an Empire which barely appreciates him and against alien enemies who appreciate him all too well.

Young Flandry Details

Date : Published December 29th 2009 by Baen Books

ISBN : 9781439133279

Author : Poul Anderson

Format : Paperback 526 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Space, Space Opera, Fiction

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From Reader Review Young Flandry for online ebook

Jay says

I've been a Dominic Flandry fan for years, and was eagerly awaiting this volume since the regathering of Poul Anderson's Technic Civilization stories was first announced. In this book we are introduced to Flandry as a young ensign fresh from the academy, who finds himself drawn into a monumental Merseian plot to destroy the entire Imperial Terran fleet in the Betelgeuse sector. Speaking of the Merseians--while they've been mentioned in passing in the Van Rijn volumes as a minor race that has been rescued, and is being mentored, by the Terrans, now we see them a couple of centuries on as a dynamic, motivated race expanding their sphere of influence and inevitably coming into contact with the tired, stagnant Terran Empire. But they are not merely alien boogeymen. Anderson treats them with great respect, even admiration, and shows that they are not mindless conquerors and bloodthirsty aliens but thoughtful beings with traditions, ambitions, fears, and emotions of their own. Not human, but always internally consistent.

Anyway, young Flandry gets his first taste of adventure in this volume, and begins his climb up the ranks of the Terran Intelligence service while setting the pattern for the decadent, noble, flawed, dashing, and ever loyal behavior that is to become his hallmark.

UPDATE: I see that Instapundit has ordered this book too. Love his comment: "If I recall correctly, Dominic Flandry lives in a decadent society where a once-dominant civilization is gradually collapsing as its ruling class shows a lack of cultural self-confidence and a focus on short-term personal gain as opposed to the long-term interests of society. It's nice to read this sort of escapist fiction. . . ."

Chris Warack says

James Bond in the future. This book collects three novels about the early life of Poul Anderson's blaster-wielding spy of the late Technic Civilization, Dominic Flandry. The writing is very sexist as befits many authors from the time when it was written. At this point in history, though, that facet cripples Anderson's story telling, redeemed only in being able to chuckle at how bad those stereotypes really were. The plots were decent but the characters... oh my goodness. We've come a long way baby...

Tom says

Poul Anderson is always good

Jon says

Good read, terrible cover. Collects three novels of Flandry's early, in which he saves an unworthy Empire, gets and loses a woman, all among heaps of intrigue, action, and the occasional infodump.

Phoenix says

Domenic Have I Known

Kudos for Hank Davis and Baen Books for republishing this topnotch SF series and bundling them at a reasonable price. Dominic Flandry ranks among science fiction's most loveable rogues along with Harry Harrison's Slippery Jim de Griz and Heinlein's Lazarus Long. Likewise the tensions portrayed in Anderson's declining Polesotechnic empire compare well against the civilizations of Asimov's Foundation or Dickson's Dorsai stories. The 3 books in this collection, Ensign Flandry, A Circus of Hells and The Rebel Worlds, though chronologically first were written between 1966 and 1970 long after the initial novella, Tiger By The Tail (1951).

In the first, Flandry, a newly minted Ensign, is drawn into an intrigue of the Merseian empire involving Starkad, a remote world on the fringe of the Terran Empire whose middle aged land and sea based civilizations have been tempted into an escalating war. From Starkad the action shifts to the Merseian home world where Flandry is taken under the tutelage of Intelligence chief Max Abrams and the two work to uncover the Merseians interest in what should be an insignificant outpost. Flandry escapes not only with the secret, but also with Donna Persis, the beautiful consort of shrewd but outwardly foppish consort Lord Hawkesbury, who values "peace" with the Merseians above all else, and beyond reason.

A Circus of Hells occurs two years later. Flandry is assigned to Irumclaw on the fringe of the Terran empire as an intelligence agent. A local profiteer, Leon Ammon, hires to take a side trip on routine scout mission to locate the lost human mining world Wayland, left in the hands of a central computer. He sends beautiful call girl Djana along with to keep an eye on him. They crash land on the planet, which proves to be an interesting world with nearly unsurvivable conditions where the computer, in order to remain sane, has created robotic creatures to fight against each other. Having confirmed that the world is salvageable they are able to repair the ship and head back to base. However Djana has been compromised by the Merseians and Flandry's scout boat is overtaken and they are held prisoner on Talwin, a planet with an eccentric axis and an equally eccentric set of intelligent races.

In the third book, The Rebel Worlds, Flandry is sent on a mission to investigate the actions of a Snelund, a fast rising star from Venus and a confidant of the somewhat weak and incompetent Emperor Jossip. Snelund has been enslaving the non-human worlds and generally acting in a cruel and oppressive manner, bad enough to instigate a rebellion by one of his generals, Hugh McCormac. However in a Flandry novel nothing is ever what it quite seems and Snelund's plan was to cause the rebellion in the first place, in order to prepare for greater things, pitting Flandry against both sides.

As a teen I read some of these, but not all, but I remember being suitable impressed with the character whose concern for the long term fate humanity enables him to overlook the foibles of Empire. Anderson's take on politics and diplomacy is incisive and entertaining. The author also excels at his descriptions of extraterrestrial ecologies and peoples. Particularly noteworthy would be the 3-part Heesh life forms of Dido, the rhino-like noga who formed the feet, the ape like ruka who acted as hands and the bird like krippo that fly and form the eyes of what joined to be a single creature. Additionally each of the books complements Flandry with strong female characters, Kathryn McCormac in The Rebel Worlds IMHO being the most noteworthy. A worthwhile read or reread and highly recommended.

Robert Defrank says

It's James Bond...IN SPACE!!!

Actually, it's a lot more than that: for one, the Flandry stories and novels were written at about the same time as the Bond fiction. For another, Dominic Flandry is a far more likable character, dealing with a far more ominous situation.

But Dominic Flandry deserves to be as recognized as the British superspy, and the likes of Harry Dresden today if the succeeding Dominic Flandry books equals the quality of *Young Flandry*, the novels that comprise the geneses of his career, from brash and callow ensign in the Terran Empire's fleet, to his recruitment into the intelligence division, to his first command.

Like Bond, Flandry is a secret warrior determined to preserve his civilization, engaging in daring exploits and seducing and being seduced by beautiful women of all types (including alien types – yay for green chicks and cat girls!) but there always an aura of tragedy around our hero. The Terran Empire is on the decline, it's glory days are past and the light of civilization it brought to the galaxy is guttering. Barbarians of all stripes, from ambitious alien powers, pirates, criminals and terrorists nip at the fringes and tear off bigger chunks when they can, and the politicians are beaurocrats are intent only on enriching themselves.

But though the Terran Empire is far from perfect, it is also far better than the chaos of the Long Night that will come with the empire's fall.

So, the three books of *Young Flandry* themselves:

Book One, *Ensign Flandry*: Flandry distinguishes himself during a tight spot while serving on an alien planet where the land-natives cat people engage in warfare with the sea-dwellers, the Terrans aiding one side and the hostile Merseian Empire aiding the other. Flandry meets the intelligence spymaster who will become his mentor, and they stumble into an enemy plot, but his greatest obstacle is a Terran diplomat who naively believes all can be worked out and is all too eager to concede to the Merseians.

Book Two, *Circus of Hells*: Flandry learns of the existence of a lost factory-planet from ancient times. While ostentatiously on leave, Flandry seeks out the lost planet without the knowledge of his superiors, seeing an opportunity to enrich himself, and he finds an automated factory gone mad and creating mechanical monstrosities. And that's just the beginning.

Book Three, *the Rebel Worlds*: An Imperial admiral has gone rogue, and with his fleet he has raised a flag of rebellion. Flandry in his first command arrives and finds the rebellion is justified, in response to the cruel and corrupt sector governor's exploitation and genocidal policies, as well as the governor's vile attempt to have the admiral arrested and executed on false charges, that he might seize the admiral's beautiful wife for his own. But the governor is politically connected and seemingly untouchable, and Flandry is ordered to side with the governor and put down the heroic freedom fighters, because justified or not, their rebellion could easily spark a civil war.

The matter is further complicated when Flandry rescues the rebel admiral's wife from the governor and begins to fall deeply in love with her.

The novels boast incredible worldbuilding, intriguing alien societies and biology, and believable conventions

concerning travel and combat in space, as well as mysterious and fantastic elements, such as ancient civilizations and otherworldly and psychic powers.

But all that seems to fade in the background at times, to the character of Dominic Flandry himself. A unique person who's choice observations and turns of phrase make him a delight to read.

A chaotic good hero in the service of order.

A man who can wax sentimental on the status of his cause, yet find joy in each fleeting moment, whether carousing or in the arms of a beautiful woman.

Ruthlessly practical, yet sentimental and ready and willing to take deadly personal risks on behalf of those in need. An oathbreaker and liar of convenience, yet who holds to an unflinching code of honor. A lover of casual dalliances, who is capable of complete, soul-deep commitment when he finds true love. But such a life as his means tragedy is the only outcome.

A man of formidable intellect, courage, skill, charisma and luck, who remains the underdog, for the forces of history and human nature are against him and Flandry knows better than anyone that his hard-won victories are mere stopgaps, delaying the Long Night.

He may win every battle, but he will lose the war.

The only fault I can find with the first two Young Flandry books is the introduction of some potentially interesting villains that don't go anywhere. James Bond in space needs his flamboyant villains.

So in short, highly recommended. Start reading now.

P.S. and if I could, I'd give it a sixth star for the cover alone!

Sars says

Dominic Flandry is frequently compared to James Bond. Having struggled through one of Ian Fleming's books, I'd concur. Both should have skipped the book-stage and gone straight to the big screen. Have they made a film of this? I'd watch it. But, sadly, I do not like Anderson's writing style.

James Brigham says

Finally finished this years long held library book. Damn good stories. Exciting and sexy Sci-Fi espionage of the James Bond ilk that's heavily infused with complex questions about the nature of humanity, civilization, and history. Anderson writes compelling characters and Flandry is very memorable as a result. Am eager to read more stories from this setting.

Rob says

...A tired old empire doomed to go under and a young hero fighting to maintain it. Besides the parallel with James Bond I wonder if there is a connection with Asimov's Foundation series. The first book in this series was published in 1951, the same year as Anderson's first Flandry story, although short stories that eventually lead to the novel were published as early as 1942. I guess I am going to have to read Asimov some time to find out. I have mixed feelings about this book, in part I quite enjoyed it but Flandry's Wein, Weib und Gesang attitude does become annoying at times...

[Full Random Comments review](#)

Nick says

James Bond meets classic space opera swashbuckling. Poul Anderson adds some nice supporting elements to each of the novels in this collection that elevates the material above mere pulp.

Jason says

This omnibus contains the first three Dominic Flandry novels, which are the beginning of the second half of the larger Technic Civilization series. It also contains the worst science fiction cover of all time. I was embarrassed to be seen reading this at work. Anyway, onto the novels:

Ensign Flandry: An extremely promising beginning. Having made my way through the Technic Civilization saga from the start, I can say with confidence that this is one of the better novels in the series. At first, I was missing Van Rijn, and the absurdity and gravitas that he always brought to the proceedings. But a quarter of the way through, one begins to get one's bearings. We find ourselves in the midst of a proxy war on some nowheresville backwoods planet. The growing Merseian Empire have, for reasons unknown, begun to arm a sentient ocean-species against their land neighbours, and so the dying Terran Empire, only partially having any idea why they're doing it, decide to arm the sentient land-species of the planet against the ocean species. They don't really know why they are there, we come to understand, nor do they know what they have gotten themselves into. The MacGuffin is a great hook: why have the Merseians begun this conflict? Why are they arming this species in the middle of nowhere, and setting it to fight against another species in the middle of nowhere? The planet offers no strategic value, no resource value. What do they hope to gain by dragging the Terran Empire into a war over a nothing planet? This tasty mystery becomes the focus of the rest of the novel.

And what a surprising novel it turned out to be! It was certainly more weighty than I anticipated. In one scene, Flandry tours an underwater civilization that his own people have sworn to destroy. In another scene, he is forced to use a person he cares deeply about for the good of the Empire. These sorts of moral crossroads form the spine of the novel, and they receive unusually serious treatment for a 1960's space opera. Essentially, though, this is a spy novel, like John Le Carre in space, but with the traditional roles reversed. Instead of the big bad government of Earth using and manipulating the poor unknowing spy, here we have the spy fooling and betraying his own government, in a Mission Impossible-style plot with real stakes, real intrigue, and some real complexities. The thematic approach to all this material is, of course, determined by Anderson's libertarian ideology, his belief that governments are too big and slow and stupid to do anything

effectively, and so we are never in doubt as to the moral rightness of the people who risk their lives (or lifelong imprisonment) to save the very Empire that's trying to stop them. Along the way, we have everything you might expect from a spy novel: tense cloak-and-dagger action, ambiguous loyalties, the compromising of morals necessary to keep an Empire safe. And it's all done with such beautiful control over tone, narrative structure, and pacing. Near the climax of the novel, there is a scene where an agent must get the information he has illegally retrieved to another agent, but he's been caught. He's being shot at, he's bleeding, he's crawling across the floor, the fate of the Terran Empire may lie in his hands, and suddenly I realized how tense I was, and how emotionally engaged. When the chapter ended, I had to take a breather. Everything is like that in this book, just a little better than you expect.

There are also some wonderful character touches. At the fringes of the novel, there is a cyborg double-agent (or is he a triple-agent?) whose role in the plot I will not reveal, but only say that it is deeply interesting, and even moving. Hauksberg is another compelling character, a Chamberlain of the future who is willing to accept any lie from the enemy as long as he can tell himself he has achieved peace in his time. As for Flandry, his characterization is admittedly pretty standard fare, though absolutely competent, and the man is somewhat more thoughtful and philosophical than I was led to expect from his reputation as a "James Bond" type. In the end, the solution to the mystery is entirely satisfying, and the final moments are balanced between feelings of resignation and hope. This is a well-made novel, with somewhat more seriousness and moral weight than we usually find in these sorts of things.

A Circus of Hells: From one of the best novels in Anderson's Technic Civilization saga, we come to one of the worst. This sequel is a dud, from start to finish, an interminable slog, and a surprisingly shoddy affair from a writer that usually, at least, has a competent handle of the basics.

Let's start with the characterization. Flandry must have let his success on Starkad get to his head, because he's now an insufferable prig. Gone is the earnest and conflicted philosopher of the first book. Anderson has rewritten him here as an aloof and arrogant scumbag, a man who casually demands of his employer that he be supplied with a prostitute for his upcoming mission, to attend to his needs. Having received this prostitute, he spends the rest of the novel treating her abysmally - having sex with her, yes, but also snapping at her, ordering her about, insulting her, humiliating her, and mocking her. If his characterization is juvenile and unpleasant, hers is utterly woeful - she weeps and begs and pleads, continually asking Flandry to hold her. No matter how much Flandry scolds her and infantilizes her, she keeps falling into his arms and crying, "Oh Nicky! Oh, Nicky! Save us!" He even calls her a slut at one point. In another scene, after he rescues her from something, he says, "I shall expect you to show your gratitude in the ways you know best." Gah! This whole relationship is just so icky, so unnecessary, so poorly thought-out, it makes the whole novel sink into shrillness before the plot even gets started.

Hah! Did I just say plot? Sorry, I meant incoherent banality. What we have here is a Frankenstein monster of a book, stitched together out of bits and pieces of ideas for stories, none of them good. It feels, frankly, like Anderson was just making it up as he went along. First, there's a "find the treasure and get the reward" plot. This soon morphs into a standard "guy-and-his-whiny-girlfriend-walking-through-the-desert" plot, and it isn't Anderson's fault, to be fair, that these scenes reminded me of the movie Spaceballs. In any case, Flandry and his prostitute eventually arrive at an automated city where some robotic bugs are playing a massive game of chess. Okay, one thinks, the mystery deepens...is this novel about an artificial intelligence? Or an enemy machine? No and no, because on the next page, our heroes are whisked off this planet and captured by the Merseians, and those bugs, and that planet, and indeed the entire mission that began the book and sent them there in the first place are quite literally never mentioned again. Never. Not once. The first half of the book is abandoned, like an unwanted baby left on a doorstep. Suddenly, we're in a different story, this one about a joint human/Merseian expedition to explore some alien natives. At this juncture, the book, with a straight

face, jarringly takes on an anthropological and scientific tone, as if, despite the offensive and lightweight stupidity of the earlier pages, Anderson secretly wished all along this were a hard sf novel. It begins to expound, for pages and pages on end, on planetary fauna and flora, on geological activity, on weather patterns, on native cultural practices. These descriptions, long and tedious as you can imagine, couldn't be of less interest to the reader. Flandry is a prisoner during all this, threatened with mindwipe, or possibly death – why should the lives of these natives mean anything to him, or to us? Why is Flandry actually exploring them? Is it because, for a few pages there, Anderson tries his hand at a “white-guy-saves-the-natives” plot? Anyway, no matter, because soon enough, these natives are left behind just as quickly as the chess-playing bugs were, and we're off like a flash to the next whim of Anderson's aimless narrative.

And that whim is a doozy: Flandry's prostitute, it turns out, is some kind of Jedi. So says the wizened old Merseian who becomes her new father figure. (She goes from an oppressive boyfriend/client to a kindly father figure – how nice.) She has some kind of power within her, like Rey from *The Force Awakens*, and for a couple of chapters, she spends time being trained in the ways of the psychic prostitute. Again jarringly, these pages are filled with experimental narrative devices, ellipses, short paragraphs, dream imagery, streams-of-consciousness. It's all very serious and artistic. I wondered if someone had glued a few pages from another novel into the middle of this one, as a joke. Anyway, very soon we beam to the next plot, the prostitute's power utterly forgotten, and there's an escape, and some heroics, and I think there's an attempt to make some kind of political story out of all this, but I don't know. Whatever. Near the end, the prostitute begs Flandry to stay with her, because she loves him. He refuses, because he has too many other women to fuck, and she wanders out of the book and, hopefully, out of Anderson's canon entirely. What are we supposed to think of all this? Is Flandry a loveable rogue? Is he a tragic lonely figure? Is he a stereotypical and clichéd plot mechanism? Take your pick.

Offensive attitudes aside, these jagged and clunky shifts in tone and plot are devastating to the novel's functioning. None of it works. We're in a space ship listening to some asshole berate his prostitute as she cries in his arms, and then we're suddenly in a hard sf novel that describes, for three pages, the hydrogen dissipation in a supernova. Then, we're on an anthropological expedition to learn from the natives, and then we're in something like a Zelazny novel, with symbolic dream imagery and temporal dislocation, as our Jedi prostitute gets her training. Then it's an action plot. Anderson clearly has no idea what story he wants to tell, and the only thing that holds any of it together are a pair of characters that are completely unsympathetic, implausible, and unworkable.

The Rebel Worlds: More than either of the two previous Flandry books, *The Rebel Worlds* is suffused with thoughts of doom. Flandry muses on the fall of the Empire and the coming of the Long Night. The new Emperor is weak and feckless. The Merseians are knocking at their doorstep. And a new General, appointed by the Emperor himself, has been indulging in acts of terror in his far off little corner of the Empire. Anderson makes explicit the depravities this General is guilty of - slavery, extortion, mass executions, and bodies on crosses lining the roadway rotting in the sun. The discovery of these bodies is probably the best scene in the book. The quandary is, the General sits in the higher echelons of the very Empire that Flandry has sworn to defend. And defend it, he must do - for Flandry's mission this time is to stop a rebellion against the General, a rebellion led by an Admiral of the Navy. Flandry is sent to capture the traitorous Admiral, but through a series of circumstances, he ends up traveling there with the Admiral's wife, a woman who believes firmly in her husband's cause, and hence is this series, after a serious misstep, returned to exactly where it belongs – the place where morals and politics intersect. The question evoked by this situation is a clever one. Obviously, this despot needs to be stopped. But can open rebellion ever be tolerated, even if ostensibly for a good cause? Flandry, dark and philosophical musings in tow, is ushered over to that corner of the galaxy to sort all this out.

Along the way, he experiences some welcome disasters, faces some challenges, has that cocky smirk wiped several times off his face, and yet...and yet...while this is without question an improvement on Circus of Hells, it is never as engaging or as tightly-plotted as Ensign Flandry, not by a mile. It meanders. It wastes time. It doesn't get to the heart of things. In a nice scene, Flandry fails at his first command and crash lands on an alien planet; we are introduced to an interesting race made of three symbiotic partners. But none of that is integrated thematically or narratively. It's just there. The book describes them for a while. Then it moves on. This flaw is less fatal here than it was in Circus of Hells, but Anderson still hasn't solved the problem that plagued him in that previous novel, the problem of unity. The narrative is not well-constructed. It includes inessential things and fails to spend enough time on essential things. The story feels like a stone skipping along a lake, semi-randomly, just hitting the surface lightly and quickly, but rarely plunging into it.

Worst of all, there is an entirely superfluous love story that is both adolescent and implausible, and serves mainly to take up space that would have been better dedicated to the issues suggested by the premise. Here, I think, is the real problem, and I only realized this after this third novel: Dominic Flandry is nothing but a cipher. He has no real personality. He functions as a mover of plot. This particular plot requires him to fall in love with the wrong woman, so he does. And because Anderson imagined this as a tragic love story of sorts, he has that wrong woman sort of fall in love with him back. But it's empty. They are in love because they have to be to establish the conflict. When the plot requires him to be a prig, he is. When it requires him to mope philosophically about the end of the Empire, he does. In the final scene, Flandry's solution to the dilemma is wonderful, something Van Rijn himself might have conceived, and the whole chapter consists of Flandry expounding eloquently and succinctly why he made the decision he did, and how it's the right decision for the human race. But where did all this wit and political astuteness suddenly come from? Just a few pages earlier, he was refusing to help a woman unless she agreed to have sex with him. The point is, Flandry is inconsistent in characterization, in maturity, in attitude, even in intelligence. He is either being an ass (on his bad days) or being the mouthpiece for Anderson's political philosophy (on his good days.) He is simply not a well-conceived character, and here, in a novel that should have been better given its premise, that flaw becomes especially overt. And the plot of this novel isn't fluid or full enough to distract us from the failures of characterization.

So, I'm torn about this series. Ensign Flandry is a gem. Circus of Hells is a washout. The last one is somewhere in between, a sufficiently entertaining if slapdash adventure with a few good but undeveloped ideas and an intriguing solution to its central problem. After the heights established by Ensign Flandry, it is impossible not to read both these two sequels as a disappointment. If you want to read only the best stuff, I would find an edition of Ensign Flandry on its own.

Anthony Faber says

The first 3 Flandry novels. Good for what it is, but I've outgrown this stuff.
