

The Ragged Astronauts (review)

Written by Administrator

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My Florida room looks out across green native foliage. Beneath its wide windows is the grande shelf, three decks straining with books, the "I might want to read this again" books. Many of them I've read in college or before. Many of them are yellowing. But they are (or were, to that younger self I was) great books.

The Ragged Astronauts comes from a time before many *Avatar* / *Potter* fans were born, 1986. Back then, youth still cared about the environment (to the point they didn't throw their plastic bottles all over it). We were still jazzed about the moon landings and the shuttles were coming on line. It was the final burst of eco-interest and the wain of the great age of science fiction.

In other words, you young kids don't know shit.

But the review; yes, the book deals with a strange planet, "Land", whirling around another planet, "Overland" in such a close orbit that the two share atmospheres. The problem facing Land is that their run-away destruction of the environment (namely, the brakka trees, which they over-harvest to get at their power crystals), an act which has turned nature against them. Suddenly plagues and worse are sweeping humankind (well, Landkind) and they must escape their doomed planet. And they have nowhere to go but... up.

Airships are constructed for the high, high ascent, and Toller Maraquine, our *hot-headed but working on it* her o, pilots the first ship to test the feasibility. The writing for this is... agoraphobic. Imagine being in a balloon miles and miles *and miles* in the sky, slowly turning over at midpoint. And imagining what would happen if, just one side of the zero gee zone, someone tumbled out (ugh - the image stayed with me for 25 years, and was freshly and horrifyingly replayed this time around). And even though the test flight is not fully successful, it becomes moot. The plague is spreading, civilization is falling apart, and the evacuation fleet lifts in a panic.

I'll say this - the end of our own world is generally grimly entertaining, the end of someone else's not so much. But here, we really can smell the smoke as civilization burns, as the ships launch in blind panic, as there are accidents (and worse) as they climb into the heavens.

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Great stuff. And first of a set.

Sadly, the old cover fell off in midread. But it was worth it.

Find it in the library and have a look.