



Necropath

Eric Brown

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Science fiction meets crime noir, as Jeff Vaughan, jaded telepath, employed by the spaceport authorities on Bengal Station, discovers a sinister cult that worships a mysterious alien god. We follow Vaughan as he attempts to solve the murders and save himself from the psychopath out to kill him. This is Eric Brown's triumphant return to hard SF.

Necropath Details

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Danielle Parker says

Book Review: 'Necropath' by Eric Brown

Solaris, 2008

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Have you ever wondered what it would really be like if we had telepathy? Unfortunately I can now recall neither the author nor the title, but a short story I read long ago dealt with that question. The lone telepath loathed all the human sewers he was forced to drink from. All the minds he met seemed nasty and dirty. He longed for another of his kind, a fellow telepath who might understand his pain and loneliness.

Then he met her. And they couldn't stand each other. They, too, were human sewers. When they saw each other in mutual reflections, they hated even more. And the persons they hated the most were themselves.

I guess it all depends on where you start from. If you're a person who hates yourself, you'll hate everyone else, too. The first person you have to love is you. It takes self-contempt to really sink to the bottom. If

you're struggling in the muck of your own guilt and shame, the universe takes on the blackest hues of all. Jeff Vaughan is a telepath earning a living as an investigative agent at the Bengal Spaceport. When the story opens, he's so deep in the muck of self-hate he's not seeing any glimmers of light. He's stopped pretending to be part of humanity. When people talk social niceties to him, he doesn't bother to answer. He hates any cheery or optimistic soul. He sneers at everything and everyone. He's a bitter cynic who doses himself with drugs to ease his pain. When a young beggar tries to get close to him, he bites like a wounded dog?not her, but himself.

Isolation from humanity is his secondary goal. He wants to get away from himself first. But we all know that's not so easy.

Two events drag Vaughan out of his self-imposed exile in loneliness, self-hate and drugs. First, the young beggar dies. Now Vaughan has a new lash for his back. Then he finds a terrified young stowaway aboard a ship from the colony Verkerk's World. He can't help a sympathetic vibe. The girl disappears. But Vaughan can't forget.

There's contraband of some kind aboard the ship too, something deliberately shielded from a telepath like Vaughan. Which means it's alive: but what could it be?

Vaughan's attempts to solve the mystery, assisted by Chandra, a police officer whose good-soul vibes grate Vaughan's bitter heart, lead to a trail of death. All the clues end in assassinations or, even more puzzling, suicides. Not even a telepath can read dead minds... not without paying a price Vaughan's too familiar with. Vaughan's slow upward journey is the draw of this grim book. I won't say much about the mystery itself, except that there's a famous science fiction short story about those who answer the call of a hungry alien religion and make the pilgrimage to mountain. That same chilling short story more or less summarizes this same plot, much more succinctly. Do these acolytes find the ultimate redemption, or are they just victims of a superior Venus flytrap?

Some stories decline the corruption and fall of their protagonists (no, stop thinking of Tom Jones in that lusty BBC film!). While the downward arc can be either comic or tragic, Eric Brown's story goes the other direction. Jeff Vaughan doesn't have much direction left to him but up. We wish him well!

Albert Elrod says

Poor world building, with oddly disjointed locations. Some elements of the story are disturbing, and I didn't appreciate the descriptions of Su's encounters during her "job." The main mystery wasn't very well presented, and none of the revelations were exactly shocking.

That said, I liked Vaughan, and his relationships with Tiger and Chandra. By the end of the book I was pretty tired of the telepathic shields. They exist solely to reign in Vaughan's power as a telepath, but that plot device loses efficacy when every baddy has one. Seriously. I also don't understand why this "necropathic" ability is in the story at all.

Simon says

Recent Reads: Necropath. Eric Brown returns to Bengal Station with a detective mystery. Who is smuggling children from an obscure colony world, and how does it tie in to a religious drug cult? Telepath Vaughn's past guilt drags him in; in more ways than one. Complications ensue.

Unwisely says

This book felt very ... 90's to me. Sort of the feel of William Gibson or Snow Crash-era Neal Stephenson. The overcrowded, definitely diverse techo-future, that apart from maybe Firefly has sort of gone away in favor of werewolves and vampires. (Which anyone who reads my reviews know I enjoy plenty of.)

That said, the story didn't grab me like any of the books it feels like. There were a lot of things going one here, some of which seem really promising, but somehow the book just didn't quite gel for me. (view spoiler)

Overall the book wasn't enough to put me off the author (who I'd never heard of before), but I'm probably not going to seek out more of this series.

Jason says

5 Stars

Necropath by Eric Brown is a novel tailor made to my likes. It is a science fiction novel and hard boiled detective novel mashed into one. The science fiction is of the light nature as there is very little technical data discussed or utilized. The novel is well written and fast paced. Jeff Vaughan is a competent main character as you can easily identify with his feelings and motives, even if he is not a likable guy.

I had one grudge with this book and that is the title...Necropath, how can you dangle such a cool combination of words and meanings and then spend only the smallest amount of time covering it in the book....book boo! Even though Vaughan has this amazing extra telepathic ability he never really uses it in this story, and only tells us the briefest back story on why.

"It came to him that the tragedy of their deaths was not so much the termination of what they had been, but the ultimate and irrevocable termination of all that they would have become. That was the terrible tragedy."

I love the combination of detective PINCH story and future space. It makes for a thrilling action ride. Brown makes this novel more complete by making us care about both sisters as well as Jeff. Tiger is an amazing young lady and Su is so much more. I loved the chapters that had Su as the center and the pain and hardship that she would endure.

This is a fantastic book one in a series that I will definitely move on to the next novel.

Alex Murphy says

I enjoyed this book, setting it at a spaceport in South East Asia with all the cultures from the region flowing through it, gave it a different feel than many other sci-fi settings of either a western feel or a basic science-fiction one, it felt a bit like the LA setting of Blade Runner in a way. The plot and characters were decent, yet the main character Vaughan being a telepath seemed a bit unnecessary as while important for the character, seemed to have not much sway over the main story.

My main gripe is that while I enjoyed the set-up, the ending seemed very rushed and this kind of ruined it. At the end a lot of back-story elements that had been brewing from the start were half revealed and looked interesting just to be closed down, and probably will only be half answered in his following books as one of the characters dies, before giving any real closure. Otherwise a fine sci-fi story, enough to interest me in the sequels, despite the rushed ending and alien tentacle sex with human women (why tentacles?).

Dirk Grobbelaar says

[He] sensed their minds, a tangle of thoughts and memories that impinged upon his consciousness in waves of words and images, too weak and impressionistic at this distance to cause him distress.

Right off the bat, in the first few pages of *Necropath* I came across some very nice descriptive passages that somehow seemed to encapsulate a lot of what I enjoy about Science Fiction and the sense of wonder it can evoke.

To the west, over India, constellations rose in the indigo expanse of the hot night sky. Many of the stars harboured inhabited worlds, planets settled from Earth or occupied by sentient alien species—but they appeared tonight as they had for aeons: bright points of light scintillating in the interstellar darkness.

Here's the thing: I believe that we can, and **should** read books that touch us on different levels. Some books have a lot of intellectual value, while others just strum some primal chord. And it **is** true that not all people enjoy the same thing, which is what makes reviewing books such a potentially tricky business.

A hundred metres across the deck, the Pride of Xerxes was secure in its berth, the captive of a hundred magnetic grabs and grapples—a monstrous praying mantis fashioned from grey steel, its company colours excoriated by passage through the void. To complete the image of a captured insect, a dozen engineers swarmed over its carapace like tiny predators.

But (and this is important): despite all the mention of stars and spaceships, this isn't actually a space travelly kind of novel at all. This is a future noir novel (with a touch of horror) that has more in common with *Blade Runner* than *Star Wars*. Oh, there are aliens, and they are central to the story, but other than one quick outing to a distant planet, most of the action takes place on Earth. And, more specifically, on **Bengal Station**.

Bengal Station was a cultural amalgam of Calcutta and Bangkok: on the upper-deck the latest polycarbon architecture designed in India and Thailand created a state-of-the art skyline, while overhead fliers mach'd along colour-coded air corridors.

The nineteen levels below were enclosed, each shelf a claustrophobic hive-city of corridors, walkways, and roads between cramped, two-storey structures, inhabited by citizens who never saw the light of day for years on end.

So, *Necropath*: it is a distressing and uneasy read containing themes like child prostitution, human trafficking, gender based violence, racial stereotyping, social stratification, false religion and exploitation (to name but a few). It also contains some sex scenes that make *Ringworld*'s *rishathra* pale in comparison (yes, with *Aliens* – so cringe away if you must). Finally, there's a good old **Lovecraftian** theme here, what with mysterious alien gods and sinister cults.

"Your god is evil."

In the end I quite enjoyed it! It's edgy and gritty, and violent when you want it to be. That's **Noir** for you. And of course, I **especially** liked the cynical (telepathic) lead character...

"Tell me, what are you doing here if you're not mourning?"

"I've come to sneer," he said.

All in all a rewarding experience.

Karl says

In "Necropath" by Eric Brown our POV character is Jeff Vaughan a telepath working for a security company in Bengal Station, an interstellar port. His job is to detect illegal smuggling that is always going on.

One of the biggest problems Vaughan must deal with is a potent new drug called Rhapsody which is quickly taking over the entire planet.

As Vaughan's investigations begin to uncover the sinister nature of those distributing the drug he discovers the Church of the Adoration of the Chosen One, a cult intent on spreading its message across the universe.

This is a great novel combining mystery/detection with some great science fiction.

Recommended.

This was an ARC copy.

Mark Zieg says

Necropath was, while simplistic and unchallenging, a fun little detective thriller set in a believably grim, dystopian future. If you were a fan of Babylon-5 and its cynically world-weary security chief Garibaldi, you'd feel right at home digging for clues among the back-alleys and criminal lowlife of Bengal Station's impoverished lower decks.

As much of the novel occurs in brothels and bars, with addicts and alcoholics mutually exploiting defenseless refugees in a Dickensian cycle of debt-slavery, I found myself cringing in anticipation of a remorselessly dismal read. Instead, I was surprised and impressed at the nuanced balance the author struck while describing the unapologetically awful conditions in which his characters lived, never allowing the darkness to completely eclipse hope and succor. Without entirely painting over the many evils man will persist in inflicting upon man, he nonetheless created a palpable and true reminder that flowers may bloom from the unlikeliest of muck.

Sadly, the book's two sequels did not build on this success, instead (in my opinion) first subverting, then systematically betraying every good point from the first book. If Necropath would have made a potentially excellent 3-episode arc in B5, Xenopath could have been compressed into a single (and weak) episode of Doctor Who or Star Trek -- in fact, the same trite plot concoction has been used, repeatedly, on every sci-fi series ever filmed, and is generally understood to represent a point where the writers are running out of fresh ideas. This nonetheless excels Cosmopath, whose clumsy script would hopefully have been left on the cutting-room floor.

In conclusion, Necropath is passable train-fare if you like your sci-fi with a dash of curry; but get off before the tale twists downhill and completely derails.

Lianne Burwell says

I had trouble rating this book. As a science fiction story, I give it a four. The world created was interesting and I found the characters compelling. As a mystery, it was about a two. At best. The plot was simplistic, and the b-plot just wasn't fleshed out enough to be believable.

I did find the pigdin of the street kids overdone, to the point of making me uncomfortable. And the cover is

highly misleading. It took about a third of the book to realize that Bengal station was on Earth, not a space station, but I blame the publisher for that.

I may read the others in the series, but this one stood on its own well enough that I may not. We'll see.

Jason says

Because I'm slightly obsessive, I researched a lot of different sites where people can write a review about books. I did this because the reviews here about Necropath were somewhat negative. I found that overall, most people at these other sites, Amazon, Chapters, etc, do not like this book much either.

I am confused as to why this is.

Necropath is a good book. It is not only good, it's close to great. What keeps it from being great are a few flaws here and there, but otherwise, Necropath has all the ingredients that make the reading experience such a pleasure to my eyes. It has flawed, complicated characters, it has a solid and very interesting plot. It is also a hard-boiled, noir-like detective story within a science fiction setting.

Either people are just too picky, or they're confused. I don't know, but I recommend this book to anyone who enjoys any of the things I described in the paragraph above. Maybe try reading it with an open mind

That70sheidi says

My gut instinct told me to just put down the book about a chapter or two into this, but no no, I had to keep going, feeling bad that I'd started and cast aside too many books lately. This is definitely not worth the read, no matter how cool the title sounds. Also, I most certainly do not give a flying hoot what else happens on the Bengal Station to continue the "trilogy."

It's hard to put into words why I didn't like the book, but I think it might just come down to the lack of finesse in the writing, the incredibly unlikeable protagonist, and the never-ending feeling of being dirty just from reading about these people's horrible lives. And, as a spoiler, (view spoiler) This aspect of the book was, in my opinion, not very well written and only added to the creep factor.

In sum, there was not enough of a payoff in the plot twists at the end for the length of the story. It was just not a good book.

Thomas says

Brown, Eric. Necropath. Bengal Station No. 1. Solaris, 2008.

Necropath is a dark noir mystery with a grieving, drug-addicted telepathic detective. Detective Jeff Vaughan

uses electronically enhanced telepathic powers to sniff out undocumented aliens being smuggled into Bengal Station on interstellar “void ships.” The strength of the novel is in the development of Vaughn’s relationship with two young women whom he sees as substitutes for the woman he lost. His mind reading ability makes him a lonely, asocial man. Unfortunately, the world-building here has a lot of holes. For example, the story is set in a far future with a large interstellar culture but much of the technology and social structure seem out of sync with the setting. Would we really bring Interstellar cargo ships straight into our gravity well rather than stopping them at an orbital way station? 3.5 stars.

Mark says

Necropath is Eric Brown’s new SF novel from Solaris Books, billed as his triumphant return to hard SF. I’m not sure how to take that, but regardless of the sub-genre of his last book (Kethani), Necropath is certainly triumphant and well worth investing your time in!

Jeff Vaughan is a telepath working for a security company in Bengal Station, an interstellar port based near India and Thailand. A man with a dark and disturbing past, he thinks very little of his fellow humans due to his ability to read minds.

His work on the station has lead him to suspect his boss, Weiss, of importing something that he wants nobody to know of. Being transferred when certain ships land have raised his suspicions about this, and with the help of a contact in the station police force, Chandra, he puts an investigation into action that will reveal some terrible things.

Tiger, one of Vaughan’s only friends - if you could even call her that - has overdosed on a new and mysterious drug: Rhapsody. Looking further into the source of this he stumbles upon a larger, more sinister plan by the Church of the Adoration of the Chosen One, a cult originating from another world and slowly planning their conversion of Earth with promises of paradise and euphoria.

With connections deepening and time running out, Vaughan and Chandra travel off planet in the hope of solving the increasing questions that are coming up wherever they turn. But this is not the only problem facing Vaughan - a figure from the past he tries to ignore is tracking him and won’t be giving up easily. With all the events coming to a head, will Vaughan discover the secrets that are being kept from him? And will we discover his?

As I said earlier on, Necropath is a magnificent novel, one that keeps you turning pages and guessing right until the last page. Eric Brown has certainly delivered a thrilling ride in a very realistic and interesting setting. With the station set where it is there is a strong flavour of both Thai and Indian cultures coming through which adds another layer of depth to the novel, giving that extra sense of realism and an environment that I don’t often find myself reading about.

As far as the characters go, I found Vaughan to be a particularly intriguing and very interesting. His life has centred on his telepathic ability, and although we only find out his whole story towards the end the insights we get in the meantime are very realistic. His ability to see the innermost details of a persons mind have turned him sour to humanity, a position that I can sympathise with throughout. Even the attempts by Chandra, a close colleague, to get closer are mostly met with a stone wall. Necropath may have many other elements, but it is Vaughan’s story and path that are the highlight.

I also enjoyed the sections where we follow Sukura, Tiger's sister, as she struggles through her life as a working girl in the hope that she will one day be able to be reunited with Tiger. We follow her life as a working girl in Thailand where she can only get custom from aliens because of a horrific scar running down her face. It's through these encounters that we meet some of the aliens that populate the Necropath universe and discover more about them. I'd particularly like to see some more on the aliens, after all, Bengal station does receive craft from all over explored space.

Overall the story flowed at a nice pace and there wasn't any unnecessary diversions which helped keep the story all the more interesting. It was clear from the first couple of chapters that it was going to be an enjoyable read and all the plot thread were tied up quite nicely at the end (which didn't feel rushed at all). I'll be looking forward to the upcoming sequels due over the next couple of years and can't wait to get back with some of these characters and see where the story takes them next.

Very highly recommended.

Michael says

An interesting book. I wasn't sure what to expect when I started reading and the graphic on the front of the book did me absolutely no favors either. See, there are very few chapters that actually focus on another world. The station is actually in India, and much of the book deals with that and focuses on that. The story also has a ton to do with religion and spiritual beliefs.

Vaughn, the main character goes through a tremendous arch in the story but in the end, he loses something that makes him unique. I won't spoil it further, but somewhere between the religion, the idea of spirituality, and some uncomfortable passages does lie a decent book. The problem is that you really have to read through 400+ pages to get there. I'm somewhat interested to read the next book or two in the series but I'm sitting here wondering if it is worth seeking them out.
