



The Sky Road

Ken MacLeod

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Centuries after the catastrophic Deliverance, humanity is again reaching into space. And Clovis, a young scholar working in the spaceship-construction yard, could make the difference between success and failure. For his mysterious new lover, Merrial, has seduced him into the idea of extrapolating the ship's future from the dark archives of the past.

A past in which, centuries before, Myra Godwin faced the end of a different space age--her rockets redundant, her people rebellious, and her borders defenseless against the Sino-Soviet Union. As Myra appealed to the crumbling West for help, she found history turning on her own strange past--and on the terrible decisions she faces now.

The Sky Road is a fireworks display, a bravura performance, and the most amazing novel yet by one of the powerful new voices in science fiction.

The Sky Road Details

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From Reader Review The Sky Road for online ebook

Anatoly says

Stuff happened.

Justin Clack says

He did his cause a disservice by annoying serious readers. Since when is a novel a great place to blatantly outline any philosophy, or general view. Better to have written compelling characters wrapped up in an enthralling plot, and have us deduce what he felt is the sounder system. The brilliant bits of space opera are forever marred by the yokel politics.

Tom Nixon says

The Sky Road is one of my favorite books. It may not scrape the top of my all-time list, if assembling such a list would be possible but it ranks right up there. First of all, it's Ken Macleod. Talk about a great writer- I just posted a review of The Cassini Division that pretty much detailed some of the many reasons why he's awesome. I'm not going to bother repeating myself again here. (Just to say again: for serious sci-fi fans, this guy is a MUST read at some point... for people who just like interesting, well-written books- he's worth checking out.)

But back to the book: What Macleod did with his original 'Fall Revolution' series of 'The Star Fraction' (review forthcoming) 'The Stone Canal' (also forthcoming) and 'The Cassini Division' was to add a fourth novel, 'The Sky Road' which posits an alternate future based on one of the protagonists making a slightly different choice in 'The Stone Canal.' (I know I'm reading this books in a random, truly effed up order and for that I apologize. It's my own personal summer reading festival and I'm just grabbing and going!) That concept alone is kind of cool to me. Change one little thing and spin off a whole other book from it? Very 'Sound of Thunder.' I like it.

And the resulting book is excellent as well: roughly half is set in the far future, where a young scholar by the name of Clovis is working on humanity's first space ship in centuries when he meets his mysterious new lover Merrial who convinces him that in order to protect the ship, they need to seek answers in the past... where we find the other half of the book- Myra Godwin is facing the collapse of civilization as we know it, her rockets are redundant, her borders defenceless and the West is too decadent and weak to help her as she confronts the terrible decisions she has to make. Decisions that Clovis and Merrial must work to uncover centuries later as Merrial's mysterious people 'the tinkers' know what Myra left behind in her files... (DUM-DUM-DUM!!!!!!)

No more spoilers... you'll just have to read it for yourselves. I liked the structure of this novel. Alternating chapters between Myra's past and Clovis and Merrial's future keeps each side of the plot clear and easy to understand. Plus, it makes understanding the connections between them easier as well. But to me, the past makes for a much more compelling read than the future in this book. Myra Godwin is a tough, strong, powerful woman haunted by her past and forced into making a terrible decision- but it's the world that

Macleod builds around her that I find to be all too believable somehow. Almost post-apocalyptic with the United States balkanized and torn asunder, Europe weak and powerless and a Sino-Soviet Union plowing eastward with nobody powerful enough to stop it. And Macleod leaves Myra's fate unknown at the end of the novel, despite the fact that she's hailed in Clovis and Merrial's time as 'The Deliverer'

Overall: Another great read from Ken Macleod... (just as a side note- I find that while it's helpful to read his Fall Revolution series in 'order' it's not necessarily a requirement. 'The Sky Road' stands alone just fine by itself as well as within the larger story of the series.) Characters are well drawn and compelling, the story is one that pulls you in and keeps the pages turning. Excellent stuff!

Jeff Youngstrom says

My review from January 1, 2006

Tani says

Definitively not my cup of tea. But you can't say I didn't try!

Roberto says

This whole series is way better than it has any right to be, considering you could describe it as "Trostkyists in space!".

This, the final book, is my favourite along with the 1st one, but they are all good.

Peter Dunn says

I read this some months ago but I am just getting around to adding it. This is by far the best of this series. The political and ideological themes are more subtle than the first three, and are far better for it, and the characters are much richer and more believable. I thought was going to be annoyed at it being an alternative future to that presented in the first three books in the series but actually it worked rather well.

Lis Carey says

This is the second MacLeod book that I've read; the first was The Cassini Division. I picked up Cassini in hardcover almost immediately because so many people were raving about it, and it left me completely cold. A perfectly adequate book, as to plot, world-building, writing, etc., but absolutely nothing about it engaged me sufficiently to really overcome the fact that the protagonist is the villain of the piece, and she's not all that interesting a villain. I preferred to see her be defeated, but I never worked up any great concern even for that.

It was only the New Mars section that really seemed to me to reward the effort of bothering to read it.

Given this reaction, it will probably surprise no one that I did not rush out to buy *The Sky Road*. I ignored it for months, and eventually picked it up at the library in a burst of idle curiosity about why MacLeod inspires such enthusiasm.

I can't say that I'm a convert, but I do rather wish I'd read *The Sky Road* first. Not only did I find it far more engaging and enjoyable than *The Cassini Division*; I think I'd have enjoyed *The Cassini Division* more if I'd read this first.

I'm a little hazy on MacLeod's future chronology, so I can't really say whether this book is set before or after *Cassini*, although my money would be on "before". A few centuries after the Deliverance, humanity is once again building a spaceship, its first attempt to return to space since the Deliverer turned all the satellites and habitats in Earth orbit and at the Lagrange sites into so much space junk in her attempt to remove one particular danger. A young scholar who hopes to research the life of the Deliverer is approached by a tinker who, after seducing him, tells him of her fears that near-Earth space may be filled with space junk, and recruits him to help get access to the Deliverer's files, which might answer the question. The scholar, Clovis, agrees, and he and the tinker, Merral, head off to Glasgow to do a little not-quite-illegal research.

Over the next few days, his life and his worldview get pretty thoroughly smashed to bits. Nothing is as he believed it to be, including Merral, and including himself.

I found Merral, Clovis, and their world and their problems a lot more interesting and worth my reading time than Ellen May and hers. If that's not quite the ringing endorsement that those who better appreciate MacLeod's work would make, at least I'm more likely now to pick up another of his books, and see if his virtues as a writer become further clarified for me.

prcardi says

Storyline: 2/5

Characters: 3/5

Writing Style: 3/5

World: 2/5

An odd inclusion to the Fall Revolution series, *The Sky Road* offers a more capable MacLeod, much more in control of pacing and buildup. It also was the least original of the four installments, lacking the verve and technological, science fiction ambitions of the rest.

What was really enjoyable here was the incremental revelation of the post apocalyptic future. The hints and glimpses were tantalizing, keeping the reader engaged and contemplating how and when it fits together with the events of *The Star Fraction*, *The Stone Canal*, and *The Cassini Division*. Those others were already a tangle of storylines, perspectives, and timelines - overlapping, crosscutting, prequeling, and sequeling. In this way this fourth book is a puzzle piece which one gets to examine and place. MacLeod's descriptions and the envisioned world makes for a promising experience of discovery.

(view spoiler)

However initially intriguing, as the pieces fall into place and the picture comes into view, one cannot keep cynicism at bay. The Cassini Division had given plausible explanations for how that radically different future had come about, but the few justifications here did more harm than if the causes had been left unlinked with their consequences. The more MacLeod revealed, the less I was enamored with those fun connections we were supposed to be making. The path from A to B to C (or if following the circumlocution of the series - A to T to D to W to G to M to F - or something like that) was less believable and made less sense the more I read.

Neither was technological development a major embellishment for this one. The weapons in *The Star Fraction* were a source of glee for science fiction action enthusiasts, but the present world offers no such indulgences and, frankly, also seems incompatible with the life and times of Moh Kohn. There are some fun glimpses of alternative technologies but these get pushed to late in the book and are but quick peeks.

What does seem to be on MacLeod's mind was more inner workings of Trotskyism in the future. In *The Star Fraction*, I had to try hard to enjoin MacLeod in his enthusiasm for the minor and many intricacies of Communist schisms. That was more work than it was worth in book one, and I would have been happy to have moved on to something else. Books two and three, however, feature a lot of the same ideas and arguments - with additional nuance undoubtedly - but still with the series' incessant carping over options and beliefs that are never successfully conveyed as meaningful. Those middle two compensated though by being more technologically centered with ambitious plots. For this fourth volume, MacLeod returns to the form of the first, removes the punk element from his writings on the cyber, tones down the cool in the gadgets, and makes the biography of a Communist leader his focal point. I found it too redundant. We had already seen some of his points and insights on the struggle over whether or not to compromise one's principles - theoretical and ideological purity versus pragmatism and present lived lives. Those were thoughtful debates written from a perspective I hadn't encountered in science fiction before, but I had gotten enough with the first books in the series. I found it an odd choice to do it all over again. There's probably some nuance - some difference in the compromise - that I overlooked. Some nuance that is important in leftists debates, but I'll charge MacLeod again with failing to communicate the import of these differences to his readers. Despite my many misgivings, I enjoyed the telling for the majority of the book. It was only as MacLeod's positions for his final moves and points that I realized that nothing better was to come and skepticism won out over credulity.

P.S. I would not recommend this as a stand-alone title. It wouldn't be entirely incomprehensible, but it assumes you have a knowledge of the past political events and relationships.

Isis says

As with MacLeod's *The Execution Channel* I often felt as though I was just missing the greater significance of things, but I think this is a slightly more accessible book. I love creative possible future histories, and now that communism and socialism have more or less faded into political non-currency, this particular view was refreshing. The clever juxtaposition of Luddism and technology brought a great touch of humor.

It took me a while to get used to the format of alternating first-person and third-person chapters, but once I realized what the underlying structure was, it made sense.

Chris Martin says

I was in a continual state of confusion while reading *The Sky Road*, unsure of how it connected to the previous books. Events didn't quite match up. Afterwards I discovered from online reviews that it was an "alternate future" to events that happened after *The Star Fraction*. I thought this was pretty clever after realizing this. Part of me wishes I was warned of it so I could have relaxed and read it as it's own story, without thinking I was developing Alzheimer's.

I liked Myra's back story, about the events that happened after *The Star Fraction*. The cameos from characters in the previous books was neat. I just didn't buy the relationship between Clovis and Merrial, which seemed forced. I did find their story intriguing, though. Altogether I liked it - A good addition to the earlier books.

Mike says

A solid ending to the series (4th book in a series of four). MacLeod mixes SF with "future politics" in a way that remains interesting.

Joe says

Any and all of the Fall Revolution books are hard to read. That's not to say they aren't awesomely great books, because without fail they are. What I mean is that you will be challenged by Macleod politically. His story structure is very hard to accept at first but in the end is very rewarding.

Samuel Tyler says

The future can be a lot of things, but an odd Scottish fantasy/communism mashup? Not for me. 'The Sky Road' is book four of a popular series by Ken Macleod, but I for one just did not get pulled in. The world itself is very intriguing and different from most science fiction futures out there, but it is painted rather opaquely. You are given hints, rather than full explanations, as to what the relationships are between Scotland and the rest of the world. For those that read books one through to three, this may not be an issue, but I picked it up thinking it was a standalone book based in the Fall Revolution series and was lost. A book that wants to be part of a series, but also unto itself, needs to cater for both markets; Macleod seems to have missed explaining things to new readers.

The steep learning curve has happened to me before in novels and does not always end up being fatal, but for 'The Sky Road' it was just one of the issues. It was a little annoying that Macleod spent little time explaining what was happening in the wider universe, but seems to spend an inordinate amount of time having his characters look at a hill or loch. Things could still have been saved if there had been a compelling story or characters. Unfortunately, this was not the case as Clovis colha Gree is a bit of a wet blanket and not the most interesting of people to follow.

With a universe that was hard to understand, whilst still being allowing too much time to examine extraneous minutia, 'The Sky Road' ended up being a book that I actively stopped liking towards the end. Fans of the earlier books are sure to get something from this novel, but I could not recommend it to new readers.

David says

This is one of those books that has both a "back story" and "current story" parts - but presents them as alternating chapters. I don't care for that style.

The back story takes place in the mid-21st century as modern capitalism and its associated economics and politics are convulsing. As things develops, it becomes necessary to make choices on which of the bad choices is least bad.

Several centuries later, we see people living a comparatively simpler life, with society divided between regular working people and those in the scientific / technical / intellectual areas. we have a story of several people each of who have different reasons to want to learn more about that earlier period.

The underlying concept is not a cheerful look at the prospects of society.

Priya says

MacLeod also has a way with words, similar to but possibly not as witty as, his Scots counterpart Banks. MacLeod's world is also more dystopian, more dour, and more overtly political. If we were talking of cities, Banks's world would possibly be London or Edinburgh, while MacLeod would be Manchester or Glasgow. Oh, I should mention that this is part of a series and, unless you've read the earlier books, you are likely to be confused about where all this is coming from/heading. This particular one is about a couple of people at different times and deals with themes including meaning-making, understanding climactic events, alternative interpretations and the pursuit of knowledge (and its implications)

It's also jolly good fun (and a quick read!).

Laura Dragon says

Clovis colha Gree is a historian. A scholar spending the summer term as a labourer in the space ship yard because he didn't quite manage to secure sponsorship for his continuing studies at the University. The staff of the ship yard work hard during the day and play just as hard at night, and it is in the town square, looking for a dance and a drink and perhaps a warm embrace for the night that Clovis first encounters the mysterious Merrial.

Merrial is a rare beauty, but more surprising than her looks is her easy confidence and her manner with Clovis, behaving more as if she had known him her entire life than as if they were strangers who had just met.

Clovis' friends are uneasy with his new acquaintance, and he soon learns why. Merrial is a tinker. An engineer. A member of an insular caste of people who work in a field in which the common folk fear to tread. Tolerated and, from a distance respected, because they are the children of the Deliverer, protected by her pronouncement: "When you take the cities, spare the scientists and engineers. Whatever they may have done in the past, you need them for the future," the tinkers do not often associate with the village locals, and Clovis is about to enter a new world and a new way of looking at it through his association with Merrial.

Cut to a time pre-Delivery when one time revolutionary and current state leader Myra Godwin is preparing to attend the funeral of her ex-husband while simultaneously searching for a way to protect her small and failing workers' republic from the advancing hordes.

Ken MacLeod's *The Sky Road* swings effortlessly back and forth between the adventures of Clovis and Merrial, trying to assure the success of their future by uncovering the truth of their past, and that of Myra, struggling to atone for the sins of her own past and trying desperately to hang on to the remnants of her crumbling dream.

Just who are the tinkers? And who is the Deliverer? Why has her true story been hidden from the children of the future, and, if the future cannot remember the truth of the past, is it doomed to repeat it?

MacLeod has created two distinct and integral worlds in his visions of pre and post socio-technological collapse Earth. Both are fascinating paintings of alternative societies as well as dire warnings of our own possible futures. We have an exciting and dangerous path ahead of us, and *The Sky Road* asks some poignant questions concerning that path.

Part science fiction, part political intrigue and part social commentary, *The Sky Road* is an intelligent read, fascinating in scope and poetic in language.

Aaron Anderson says

My least favorite of any of them. The Myra back history was pretty interesting, since you know her slightly from before, and some of the details... The future society just seemed weird. I also didn't really see how this could be a sequel to *The Stone Canal*. Who supposedly met Jay-Dub and Meg when they came out in this version of the future? It just doesn't connect very much with the earlier works. The future half of the book, that is.

Christopher Jones says

Jesus...it's hard for me to review this book, but I'll try my best.

When you look at the cover, it's tempting to think that the story will be about "men reaching into the skies" for the first time, like what the blurb seems to imply.

This is a science fiction book where the science fiction takes a back seat to the politics, and dear God is there a lot. I can't say I care much for it.

The gist of the book is alternating chapters between the past (during the Sino-Soviet war) and the present (in which mankind recover)

The past centers around Myra, the leader of Kazakhstan or something, trying to defend her country against an invasion by the Sino-Soviets. It sounds cool. Sure it does. But it isn't.

Because Myra's chapters center around people blabbing about the situation, mostly in terms of politics. We have Myra trying to cut a deal with one organization or country or another, and that's what moves the plot along. Some people loved it apparently. I really didn't.

In the mean time, there's this whole conflict going on with the Sino-Soviet expansion (one of two main antagonists) and we only get to see a fraction of it. It kinda sucks to be honest. Since MacLeod deals in hard science fiction, it would be nice for that to be the focus of the story. A serious war going on with realistic technology.

In the present we have Clovis. Clovis' story seems unnecessary, as he's living in the aftermath of a world after the Deliverance (apocalypse basically). From the rocket ship (the Sea Eagle) on the cover, the title, and the blurb, you might think the story is about the trials and tribulations of the first challenge of space exploration--getting the ship, intact and functional, into space in the first place.

But no. The present chapters are about Clovis discovering things from the past. And there's just as much talking and politics here as there is in the past, and it was just boring. I was bored for much of it.

I first read this book when I was much younger, and I didn't know until later (after I'd read it) that it was a sequel of the Fall Revolution books, and actually the last in the series. The author writes in his first book that all the books are standalone and can be read in any particular order. I'm hoping the others are more interesting than this.

Rena says

Whoops. It turns out this is the last book in a series and I read it first. I enjoyed it, but I think I will not read the first books, since I already know how the story ends. Not a bad book though I would most likely recommend reading them in order so the maybe the beginning will not seem as confusing as it did for me. You can still understand everything going on without reading the first ones, but it is probably better to read them in order.
