



Sliding Scales

Alan Dean Foster

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The ninth novel in the New York Times bestselling Pip & Flinx series by one of science fiction's most popular and prodigious storytellers. The daring pair have braved countless dangers to emerge victorious. But now Flinx attempts something that may be impossible for the heretofore undefeated hero. His mission: to take a vacation.

Sliding Scales Details

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From Reader Review Sliding Scales for online ebook

Cheryl says

If you think for once Flinx is actually going to take a little vacation time, you've never actually understood his unique character at all. Thinking he might just go take some time to relax and enjoy life for a short time period would truly give him some relief from his worries over how to save not just Humanx kind, but also the rest of the galaxy along with all the different sentient beings extant. This would entail going somewhere off the beaten path where no one would bother him or even think to look for him and The Teacher has just the planet, Jast, with its slow moving Vssey population and odd and unusual wildlife. After all what could happen on a planet populated by such slowly hopping mushroom like sentient beings and wild animals and plants that only move by means of floating through the air after filling their air sacs with gas?

Andy says

[The Teacher. The Aan completely ignore the ship that the "human spy"

Thomas says

Pip and Flinx take a vacation from their quest, on a new planet, with a new alien race, and they find that every society has hippies. Foster never fails to display a fantastic imagination. Check it out.

Brent Ecenbarger says

Sliding Scales reminded me of the Terry Goodkind novel *Faith of the Fallen* in that it takes the series protagonist and forces him to live in the society of his enemy. Once there, his innate goodness and natural skill earns him the appreciation and respect of his enemies, and also gives him a new appreciation for those he had considered his enemies prior to his adventure. I'm sure it's a story that's been told in countless other series and media (Enemy Mine also comes to mind), but it's a fun concept for exploring different cultures and coming to shared understandings instead of maintaining black and white versions of good and evil.

At the beginning of *Sliding Scales*, Flinx is burned out mentally from the weight of the universe being on his shoulders as well as the fate of his companion Clarity Held at the end of *Flinx's Folly*. His ship's A.I. suggests that he needs a vacation, and using its vast intellect suggests that this should take place on a world that is habitable (so he doesn't stress out about survival) but not overly developed (so he does not need to stress out about local law enforcement) and finds a planet that meets those requirements called Jast.

Jast is in the area of space that both the Humanx Commonwealth as well as the Aann Empire have had contact with but not exclusive control. True to all Foster worlds, Jast is unique and imaginative, with lifeforms that we would consider evolved from fungi, all either hopping around on one appendage with mini-tentacles or floating around via gas sacs, with predators and prey all moving at a snail's pace. These aliens (called the Vssey) are very deliberate thinkers, taking time to formulate reactions and currently weighing the

pros and cons of possibly being integrated into the Aann Empire. Against this backdrop, there have also been two terrorist attacks on the world that the Aann are trying to figure out who was responsible for.

****Spoilers follow****

Shortly after arriving, Flinx is pushed off a Cliff by an ambitious Aann named Takuuna who decides to use the visiting human as an opportunity to craft a story that will lead to his military advancement. The result is a headwound and amnesia, affecting both who he is and what he is doing there. Flinx becomes involved with a Tier (group) of Aann who would rather focus on art than conquest, and shows abilities in that area that leads them to adopt them as one of their own. All the while Takuuna is also trying to cover up his actions and continue to advance up the military ladder by any means necessary, which is complicated when he realizes Flinx is still alive.

****End of spoilers****

There are two parallel stories in *Sliding Scales*, the story of Flinx and the story of Takuuna. I'd give the Flinx story a 4, which provided some of my favorite moments with the Aann aliens and advanced his own views and abilities to travel within the series in an interesting manner. Not as successful was the story of Takuuna, who was basically a cartoon villain constantly threatening/killing others to put himself in the best light to succeed. Although he felt true to how many of the Aann characters have been portrayed in this series, the Aann as a whole haven't been very compelling to read about until they were developed beyond angry, militaristic creatures out for blood.

I'd give the Takuuna storyline a 2, so I'll average the book out to a 3 overall. *Sliding Scales* helped develop the universe that Flinx lives in, and moved his character as well as his abilities forward in an interesting way (if this were an RPG, he'd leave this level with a master key for a whole new class of dungeons by the end of it). I also appreciated that it didn't spend any time on the giant cosmic menace that has me not looking forward to the next book (based on its title), *Running From the Deity*.

Mrklingon says

Interesting and memorable story about....losing memory.

With his memory lost, Flinx is almost peripheral to this story, but in a good way. Interesting exploration of Aann culture, as well as a fascinating ecology of the planet Jast.

Paul E. Morph says

[his girlfriend died from the severe injuries she sustained (hide spoiler)]

Bradley says

I was just thinking to myself what could we possibly do to Flinx that hasn't been done before and I started to draw a little blank. Fortunately, we've got STANDBY PLOT FIXES. Amnesia!

Oh, wait.

Well, fortunately, it's not even a tenth as bad as it may seem. Truly. I mean, Flinx does have a HONKER of a brain tumor and getting it knocked about is sure to scramble SOMETHING. In this case, I simply didn't mind in the slightest. It's because of the setting. Our favorite evil lizards and our poor Flinx have been getting on swimmingly. More or less.

Stranded on a somewhat neutral slithery tentacular alien world being inducted into the lizard political machine, the memory-less Flinx gets taken in by an artist colony.

Yeah! Isn't that cool! And you'll never guess who the artists are.

This one is still a great adventure, but alien exploration and subtle commentary on art as well as a reflection for ADF are quite apparent and delightful... or at least to me. :) I never expected to like the lizards more than that charming elderly couple a few novels back, but I am well mistaken. :)

It was also rather cool to see another side of Flinx, freed from the weight of his cares for once.

Bryan457 says

Flinx takes a vacation from all his problems. He chooses an odd planet that is under Aann influence, gets caught in a plot to bring the planet under full Aann control, and loses his memory. We learn a lot about the alien Aann culture. Flinx uses his mental talents a bit at the end.

I wanted for Flinx to develop and use his psionic talents. The series is now something like 13 books and his mental talents are still unreliable and pretty much useless; this was a very, very, very big disappointment to me for the series as a whole.

John says

Sliding Scales is the third to the last book in the Pip & Flinx SF adventure series and it shows. Foster, the author is obviously getting tired of Flinx as a protagonist, because in this book he makes his star character almost incidental to the plot.

The story in broad strokes is this: Flinx decides to take a vacation on the world of Jast, a place that has seen few humans. More importantly, the Jastians find themselves in the Aann sphere of influence, though they themselves are pacific. When he arrives, because he is human, and because the AAnn have more experience dealing with humans, Flinx is handed off to an Aann who is quite certain that Flinx is a spy, or ought to be one anyway and if he isn't he ought to be portrayed as a spy. If he is found to be one, a certain AAnn named Takuuna will find his career advanced. Much to the AAnn's dismay, Flinx shows no tendency toward inciting insurgency among the Jast, so Takuuna takes matters into his own hands and attempts to murder Flinx. Alas for all concerned, including the reader, Flinx does not die, but merely loses all of his memory and gets pretty banged up in the process.

Wandering through the semi-desert which makes up most of Jast's landmass, he meets up with a community

of AAnn who are artists, and are as liberal-minded as your standard artist community stereotype. They take Flinx in, nurse him back to health, and then, in contravention of all cultural prejudices and expectations, makes him part of their community--officially, which means some kind of weird adoption ceremony.

But the real story is with Takuuna, the ambitious AAnn who goes through all sorts of efforts to advance himself through lies and deceit. The remainder of the story is about how Flinx retrieves his memory and his life, and how Takuuna the corrupt AAnn gets his comeuppance.

As this story was written around 2004, there are also fine strands of protests against heightened security measures taken during state emergencies, and even a few glittering back-door criticisms of some of the security practices established in this country after 9/11, but for the most part this is a story about Takuuna, with a bit of Pip and Flinx thrown in so that Foster can claim that this is a story written about the intrepid pair.

One notable good thing that occurs in this book is that the AAnn lose their cartoon-like character that Foster gave them in earlier novels. As a result, the reader is acquainted with a large dosage of AAnn culture in a rather pleasant way. We learn a bit about their mating habits, and a bit about how they interact as individuals, their art, politics and their daily interactions. AAnn, as stated by the female AAnn protagonist, are not monsters.

Because this book follows a trend that I noticed in a couple of other Pip and Flinx novels, that is, writing a story that is more about other characters than Pip and Flinx, and because it is, essentially, a boring story with little to recommend it to us simian types, I gave it a three-star rating. The only reason I am continuing to read these novels is that I am very interested in finishing the series, after which, I will probably take a long hiatus from the writings of Alan Dean Foster.

Kevin says

Flinx gets amnesia and joins an artist colony on a planet populated by the reptilian AAnn and a race resembling the dancing mushrooms from "Fantasia." What's not to like? I doubt this contributes much to the overall story arc -- or does it? I won't know until the end. Four more books to go. Five if you count Bloodhype.

Robert Scott says

One of the more confusing yet more interesting novels I've read in this series. Philip Flinx has gone to the planet Jast to rest. Instead as he is being guided by an AAnn administrator he is knocked over a steep canyon wall and left for dead. He has hit his head and lost his memory. He is rescued by an isolated group of artists that do not fit into the normal AAnn society. The pressure, lessons, and dangers increase as time goes on. The local sentients are the Vssey with a domelike form and no legs, arms, or feet.

Abby says

This was a neat book!

In this one, Pip and Flinx end up going to a Aan colony world. As always, Flinx ends up on the bad side of one of the residents.

In his flight away from the person (Lizard?), Flinx trips and falls into a canyon. When he comes to, only Pip is around. In spite of having total amnesia, he knows enough to know that he has to keep going.

He stumbles upon an Aan art colony. There are Aan there who take him in. There's an Aan there that adopts him into her family line. Now Flinx has Aan status-letters following his name!

He lives in the Aan Art Colony until his memory returns. Unfortunately, his memory returns after the Aan who adopted him gets killed.

Eventually, he manages to get hold of "The Teacher" and get off of this Aan Colony world before anyone else gets killed over him.

He then decides that it's time to go find Clarity.

Ruan Peat says

When you think there is nothing new he finds a new way to see the world, and you find folk you would never believe helping and supporting him, mean while he tries to remember what the problem was in the first place, nice change of pace and with a great underlining thread of danger.

Cary Spratt says

Let me start by stating that I have not read any other Pip & Flinx books. I think I acquired this one in a box of books from a garage sale, and I decided I ought to read it before sending it on its way.

This is mostly a stand-alone story with only brief references at the beginning to presumably the previous books in the series. Flinx goes on vacation, then gets injured & develops amnesia, so for the majority of the story even he doesn't know anything about his history. It's an "okay" story but not exceptional, and seems to be written for youth/young adult readers. I feel no inclination to read any of the preceding novels, and don't plan to keep this one on my shelf.

Mrklington says

Alan Dean Foster's Pip series (and the Humanx consortium) is a great, untapped Space Opera - every story has twists and turns, and the Pip-verse is full of rich detail that rivals Star Wars/Star Trek or the Barrayaran saga. I'm both surprised and glad these have not made it to film - I'd rather enjoy Foster's imagination without seeing it adapted into oblivion.
