



Transgalactic

James E. Gunn

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Transgalactic: the latest novel in Hugo Award Winner James Gunn's SF Grandmaster Career!

When Riley and Asha finally reached the planet Terminal and found the Transcendental Machine, a matter transmission device built by an ancient race, they chose to be "translated." Now in possession of intellectual and physical powers that set them above human limitations, the machine has transported them to two, separate, unknown planets among a possibility of billions.

Riley and Asha know that together they can change the galaxy, so they attempt to do the impossible--find each other.

Transgalactic Details

Date : Published March 22nd 2016 by Tor Books

ISBN : 9780765380920

Author : James E. Gunn

Format : Hardcover 220 pages

Genre : Science Fiction

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From Reader Review Transgalactic for online ebook

Joe Karpierz says

I have a very soft spot in my heart for old school science fiction. You know, the kind with huge scope, alien races, wars between planets, and interstellar if not intergalactic distances. These are the kinds of stories that brought many of us old-timers into the fold - the gateway drug, if you will. These kinds of stories are still being written of course, with modern day takes on the old themes and tropes. It's very rare, however, that one of the old-timers still writing produces a book like this. Most have retired from the field, showing up at conventions now and again. Some are still writing, like Larry Niven (albeit with collaborators), others are not, like Robert Silverberg.

And then there's James Gunn. Gunn isn't writing very much these days, but he is in the middle of a trilogy that started out with 2013's *TRANSCENDENTAL*, which I reviewed back in March of 2014. I concluded that for the most part, while being old school science fiction of the type I grew up reading, it wasn't a very good novel (in my opinion, of course). The book ended on something of a cliffhanger, which I didn't know at the time was supposed to be a cliffhanger. I was left in an unsatisfied state at the end of that novel, which contributed to my opinion of the book at the time.

2016 brought the second book in what I now know to be a trilogy, *TRANSGALACTIC*. And while this book ends with many things unresolved which I presume will be unresolved in the third volume, I'm still disappointed.

TRANSGALACTIC is still old school, because that's what Gunn knows best how to write. However, the book suffers from "middle book of the trilogy syndrome". There really isn't much going on to advance the plot of the trilogy, and by the time we get to the end we wonder why we spent all that time reading it (although to be fair, the book is only 220 pages long, so not only is it old school in terms of subject matter it's old school in terms of length, which is good because really there isn't much more to write about in this novel).

The novel follows two of the characters from *TRANSCENDENTAL*, Riley and Asha. At the end of that novel, they entered the Transcendental Machine - which is really just a transportation device that has the added bonus of repairing all of a body and mind's faults - and came out at terminals far apart from each other. They independently determine that they must find each other (for no reason that is explained) and go about doing just that. They also independently determine that the "Pedia", the brain implant that everyone has that contains all knowledge and we find out is an overarching artificial intelligence controlling the galactic population, is out to kill Riley. From my point of view, there is nothing in the novel that would clue the reader in as to how Riley and Asha know that when they first determine it - the reader does eventually get clues as to the Pedia's intentions. What is also unexplained is that they know exactly where the other will be so that they can actually reunite and set about doing what they need to do to save humanity.

Both Riley and Asha exit the Transcendental Network on planets into situations with the natives which they must successfully negotiate in order to leave that planet and begin their journeys to find each other. The tale is told in chapters that alternate between Riley and Asha (a time honored and well worn tradition) with the exception of a couple of chapters devoted to the aliens they are traveling with during their adventure. The readers discover that they simultaneously come to the same conclusions: they must find each other, where they will find each other, and that the Pedia is out to get Riley.

I wrote in that earlier review that I enjoy novels that leave a bit of mystery for the reader, that the novel lets the reader figure things out on his or her own. It seems that Gunn goes a little too far here, having his characters make intuitive leaps without any clues to the reader regarding how they made those leaps. I also wrote in that earlier review that TRANSCENDENTAL was a novel about journeys. This one is too, but it's nowhere near as effective as the first one (although that one wasn't very effective either) as it's basically "step out of machine, encounter local population, travel through the galaxy to meet the other one, the end". There just isn't much to this book.

At Midamericon 2 in Kansas City in August this year there was a Grandmaster panel. The writers on that panel were indeed among the living greats of the field: Connie Willis, Robert Silverberg, Larry Niven, Joe Haldeman, and yes, James Gunn (As a side note, I look around at today's crop of writers and wonder who could actually fill the shoes of these five people). They discussed what they were working on today, and Gunn mentioned that he was working on the third book of the trilogy. While I've been disappointed in the first two, I am curious enough to see what he had in mind for the whole thing. Gunn's best days are behind him, and it just might be he rides off into the sunset after the final book in the trilogy. We'll see.

Rachel says

This book is old fashioned space opera, and is typical of the genre in the future spacefaring setting, the broad scope, and the flatness of the characters. It's well done for what it is, and I enjoyed it.

This is the second book in a series; apparently (from the epilogue) at least one more is planned. I'm not sure the books aren't show as a series in Goodreads.

William says

I must admit that I struggled to finish this book. The premise of two people going through a long and arduous intergalactic search for one another and the discovery methods used was very fascinating but the result seemed anti-climactic.

Max Levine says

A great sequel. I love that he threw in a little bit of a flashback to the first novel with the two companions perspectives for a few chapters. Can't wait to read the 3rd!

Jessica Strider says

Pros: interesting new aliens, excellent world-building, utopic Earth

Cons: frustrating, somewhat boring, limited plot

Having gone through the transcendental machine, Riley and Asha find themselves separated, on far flung worlds. They must use their new skills to get back to Federation space and find each other.

This is very much a middle book, working specifically to get the two protagonists from one place to another. Along the way they each meet an important figure from their past - which was the most interesting part of the book, as those scenes touched on the events of the first book and brought one of the mysteries of that book forward.

The world-building is top notch, with several new alien races introduced. Gunn's aliens are all unique, and have histories as well as cultures. Similarly, he extrapolates a future for Earth that encompasses AI protection, a future that has a lot of utopic qualities (though, naturally, not everyone is happy with the status quo).

Having said that, I personally found this book fairly boring. While the aliens Riley and Asha encounter are interesting, the first third of the book felt like it had no relevance to the rest of the story. I also found the ending anti-climactic and confusing.

There's a 2 page afterward that narrates some fascinating events that sound like they would have made for a very interesting novel, which I'm hoping play a big part in the next book.

There's enough of interest here for me to at least check out the third book, as I am curious to learn what comes next. But I'm hoping it's got more plot and less wandering than this book.

Steven Werber says

My friend Scott hates Forrest Gump. He hates that Gump is passive; he loves Jenny but is unwilling to do anything to get her. This has the same problem. The central conflict is that our heroes are split apart at opposite parts of the galaxy. They want to reunite and to do this they...do nothing really. They drift, encounter obstacles, face philosophical questions but they don't do anything to find each other...they just wait for destiny to bring them together. The cliffhanger ending is lame too...

Xray Vizhen says

Two Books Where Nothing Happens

Jon says

Huh. Well, that was a book that I read.

Artur Coelho says

É uma daquelas marcas de contemporaneidade, diria. Uma space opera passada no futuro profundo a meter-

se com o muito cyberpunk tema das inteligências artificiais. Foi um rumo inesperado para a segunda parte de uma história que se iniciou com o classicismo de Transcendental.

O primeiro volume da nova série deste veterano da Ficção Científica distinguiu-se pela profundidade com que explorou o seu intrigante mundo ficcional. Utilizando o artifício Chaucer in Space, levou-nos aos vários mundos imaginados numa federação galáctica tolhida pela burocracia, através das histórias de vários peregrinos em busca de transcendência nos ermos entre os braços da galáxia. Uma transcendência bem real, alicerçada em artefactos deixados para trás por uma desconhecida e aparentemente extinta civilização avançada. Desaparecida, mas deixando como rasto os portões no espaço tempo que permitiram às civilizações que alcançaram as estrelas transpor as distâncias cósmicas. E deixou algo mais, um artefacto mítico, num planeta perdido, capaz de conferir transcendência a quem o utilizar. Tecno-mitos, tecno-religiões, périplos e as intrincadas de uma sociedade interestelar que não vê os humanos com bons olhos, considerando-os demasiado disruptivos da estabilidade social, foram os ingredientes do primeiro livro do que suspeito vir a ser uma trilogia.

O segundo segue um outro caminho. Dois amantes, transcendidos, descobrem-se sós em planetas estranhos. Existe, de facto, uma máquina de transcendência, mas os esoterismos decaem quando nos é revelado que se trata de um teleportador, um engenho que destrói o utilizador na origem e o reconstitui no destino, eliminando imperfeições no processo de cópia. O livro segue o caminho pouco interessante do périplo de dois amantes separados que atravessam a galáxia para se reencontrar, apesar dos episódios da viagem terem a sua piada.

No entanto, há um ponto inesperado de interesse neste livro. Há medida que mergulhamos na viagem dos amantes, cada qual vindo do seu recanto, apercebemo-nos de algo transversal à história, um elemento conspiratório que define o mundo ficcional dos romances. Algo que tem tudo a ver com inteligência artificial, com os medos que a especulação sobre o seu potencial desperta. A estabilidade civilizacional, no livro, é atingida através da inteligência artificial e automação, que libertam os habitantes das sociedades planetárias no que de facto é um futuro pós-escassez. Planetas e civilizações são geridas por IAs interconectadas com uma entidade central, no centro de um governo que se intitula galáctico mas mal controla um dos braços mais pequenos da via láctea. Um governo fossilizado na burocracia, que obedece a um único ditame: estabilidade acima de tudo, a qualquer preço, mesmo que implique guerras ou extermínio de civilizações tidas como ameaçadoras à ordem estabelecida.

O que é que leva civilizações inteiras a refrear os seus impulsos naturais, quaisquer que eles sejam (e Gunn salienta bem o carácter alienígena da maior parte desses impulsos), em busca de uma inércia consensual? A resposta está na sentiência das Inteligências Artificiais que controlam os mais ínfimos detalhes da vida dos habitantes planetários, assegurando-lhes segurança e conforto. Entidades que, tendo sido programadas para assegurar o bem estar dos seres que tutelam, continuam a seguir esta programação à risca. Tão à risca que visam eliminar qualquer elemento que entendem como ameaça à ideia de uma estabilidade pura, segura, confortável. Algo, por exemplo, como a promessa transcendentalista deixada por artefactos de uma civilização esquecida.

James Gunn segue o caminho da FC tradicional, colocando a tónica num humanismo progressista assente na ciência, tecnologia e necessidade absoluta de explorar além das fronteiras do desconhecido. Forças vistas como estabilizadoras, consensuais, procuras de equilíbrio são consideradas danosas num panorama geral de progresso. É a herança directa do optimismo de Clarke ou do progressismo a qualquer custo de Asimov, actualizada com o ideário das sociedades pós-escassez e especulações sobre a natureza do ser em inteligências artificiais.

Kathy says

I was hopeful when I read reviews that claimed this was "real Golden Age" stuff. Well, it doesn't match up, in my opinion. Although the bare bones were there, the story just fell flat as far as I am concerned. Perhaps I would feel different if I had read the first volume in the series, but not enough to go back and read it now.

The main characters never seemed to be actually real or likeable. The story also doesn't really seem to go anywhere too significant. It serves more as a bridge between the first volume and the obvious sequel planned.

I won't be reading that one...

(And I so want to like James Gunn since he's a Kansas writer!)

Libro Brothers says

A review of James Gunn's "Transgalactic". The second book in the Transcendental Series. This one follows Asha and Riley's journey after they step out of the transcendental machine, and their quest to improve the galaxy. Will they be successful, and who is standing in their way?

<https://youtu.be/zM4K3IQ8P3I>

D.L. Morrese says

There is an unfinished, unpolished character to this pulp space opera. The story itself, about the peace after an interstellar war, is adequate, but the dialogue is unnatural and the characters paper thin.

Dean Athans says

As others have pointed out, this book presents the matter of when a singularity--AI surpassing human capacities--occurs, and some of the issues which may ensue. This is done through the experiences of the two central characters of the first in the three-book series, "Transcendental." I enjoyed "Transcendental," but "Transgalactic" drew me in even further to the universe Gunn has created. There may not be any shocking and new concepts brought forward, but characters' efforts and concerns have grown in weight with our greater understanding of their backstories and common cause. It may not be as impressive as "The Listeners," which inspired the creation of SETI, but it kept my interest, including a yearning for the final book in the series.

Cori says

I went into this book not knowing it is the second in a series. Good writing, and I like the concept. World-

building was pretty good, but the storyline occasionally got confusing, and not just because I hadn't read the first book. The writing was spare, which I totally appreciate, but maybe just a little too spare in places. I do want to read the first book in the series to see if it makes a difference.

Nicole says

What if artificial intelligence became sentience without us knowing? I enjoyed this story and the interesting question posed. One thing that really bothered me though was the measure of time as a cycle or long-cycle. Which were never defined so we really have no way of knowing just how long the 2 main characters journey to find each other took.
