



Orbitsville

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Fleeing Elizabeth Lindstrom's anger at the death of her son, Vance Garamond, a flickerwing commander, leaves the solar system far behind. Pursued by Earth's space fleet, Garamond finds a vast, alien-built spherical structure which might just change the destiny of the human race.

Orbitsville Details

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Author : Bob Shaw

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From Reader Review *Orbitsville* for online ebook

Dirk Grobbelaar says

[He] was a man who had looked on many worlds in his lifetime, yet his face was the face of a man in shock.

You'll be forgiven if *Orbitsville* reminds you a lot of *Ringworld*. Both deal with megastructures around a star. **Around** a star, just in case you missed that part; these things are **huge**. Where the *Ringworld* is, obviously, a ring, *Orbitsville* is in actual fact a **Dyson Sphere** (you can go look it up). That's to say, it's completely enclosed, like one of those hollow Christmas decorations. Now imagine the sun as a pinhead exactly in the middle, to get an idea of scale.

'As far as I can tell...' [He] swallowed painfully. 'As far as I can tell, the object out there... the thing we have discovered is a spaceship over three hundred million kilometres in diameter!'

Before everybody is up in arms: these aren't spoilers I'm chucking around here. You only need to read a few of the synopses on the novel and you'll already be aware of all this. There just happens to be an actual story with actual plot events surrounding this artifact. The problem, as with *Ringworld* and other similar novels, is that the **Big Dumb Object** inevitably upstages everything else, turning plot and characterisation into a footnote of something much, **much** bigger. And that is probably where *Orbitsville*'s shortcomings start shining through.

On the question of whether it was a natural or an artificial object he would venture no professional opinion.

That's not to say *Orbitsville* is a bad book; it's everything but. I still prefer *Ringworld*, but I really enjoyed reading this novel. It's **big idea Science Fiction** on **Sense of Wonder overdrive**. There was a time when good ol' *sensawunda* was considered de rigueur in the genre. That, and a cracking yarn could sell books! I just love the way novels like these can bend my mind.

As a tale of exploration, *Orbitsville* isn't as successful as I would have liked. Inevitably, there are precious few answers provided to the enigma that is O, and due to the sheer size of everything only a miniscule part of the artefact is actually "explored".

The novel sits somewhere between the adventure tales of the Golden Age of Science Fiction and the more edgy and harder modern stories. However, it doesn't sit *quite* as comfortable as, say again, *Ringworld*, in my opinion. The story in *Orbitsville* gets wrapped up very abruptly, after a rather winding build-up, and not to my complete satisfaction. However, this **is** a bona fide classic and recommended for lovers of Artifacts in Science Fiction. There are two sequels, as far as I know.

[He] found that trying to comprehend its size produced an almost physical pain between his temples. The object was big enough by astronomical standards, so large that with Sol positioned at its centre the Earth's orbit would be within the shell, assuming that the outer surface was a shell. It was so huge that, from distances which would have reduced Sol to nothing more than a bright star, it was clearly visible to the unaided eye as a disc of blackness against the star clouds of the galactic lens.

Now that's what I'm talking about!

Amber Scaife says

A starship captain finds himself in big trouble with a maniacal dictator on Earth, and so flees with his wife and child to what he assumes is the vast emptiness of space. But he and his crew find something - a really, really big something.

The story was interesting enough, but as with most full-on sci-fi, I lost interest in the science-y details of spaceflight and such.

Ippino says

Un romanzo con delle premesse affascinanti, ma con un'esecuzione zoppicante.

L'idea di fondo è buona: una sfera artificiale ricopre una stella lontana, creando sulla sua superficie interna un ecosistema completo e, soprattutto, immenso.

La scoperta di questo sistema innesca una corsa all'oro analoga a quella del West.

Sembrerebbe una tavola apparecchiata per un'infinità di avventure, ma purtroppo Shaw si ferma prima, utilizzando questo scenario solo per narrarci una storia di vendetta personale, e mancando di approfondire le cose che invece incuriosiscono di più il lettore, ovvero: chi ha costruito la sfera e perché?

Anche gli incontri con razze aliene, che inevitabilmente popolano questo mondo (non è uno spoiler: non penserete mica di essere soli nell'universo, no?) sono gestiti in modo superficiale, senza ripercussioni sulla trama.

Nonostante questo, e complice anche la brevità del romanzo, si lascia leggere e lascia moderatamente curioso il lettore circa gli interrogativi di cui sopra, che immagino verranno trattati nei due volumi successivi.

Alcuni lo hanno paragonato, giustamente, a Ringworld di Larry Niven; il paragone ovviamente ci sta, anche se i romanzi procedono su binari diversi. A me onestamente ha ricordato di più il "Mondo del Fiume" di Farmer, nel modo in cui si sviluppa la trama.

David says

Vance Garamond (yes, a hero named after a science fantasy legend and a font) is a captain in the space fleet of a rather corrupt future earth. By pure chance he commits an unforgivable 'crime' against a deranged dictator. So he takes his wife and son aboard his starship and sets off to escape injustice by heading out of the known galaxy. His guide? A mysterious inscription found on Saganian, planet that was once home to intelligent life. What could the strange image mean? The answer is remarkable, so say the least. It's a discovery that makes Garamond a hero, but that doesn't guarantee the safety of his family...

This is tremendous fun, and - rather like Ship of Strangers - a love letter from Shaw to the old pulp sf 'galaxy busting' school of adventure. It's a bit like E.E. Doc Smith with updated super-science and more convincing characters.

Rob Markley says

Great Scifi from an excellent author

Tony Ellis says

The sci-fi term is 'Big Dumb Object': a gigantic artificial alien habitation floating in space, the mystery and exploration of which provides the impetus for your 1970s paperback novel with its Chris Foss cover. As the term implies, there's rarely a convincing explanation as to why anyone would actually build such an expensive and elaborate folly in the first place. It's simply there to furnish the author with a convenient source for his novel's Sense of Wonder (science fiction has a lot of terms in capital letters). Orbitsville is interesting for turning this customary arrangement inside out. The Big Dumb Object in question has a purpose, it's just not a very exciting place to visit.

In the somewhat sterile future of space captain Vance Garamond, the control of strictly limited living-space underwrites an entire despotic world government. His discovery of a Dyson Sphere with practically infinite terrain has the potential to change everything. It's just a shame that's all Bob Shaw wants to explore. He actually goes out of his way to depict a world that's empty and unexciting: the few alien races encountered are boring, the whole place is mostly just grass plains. They don't call it 'the big O' for nothing. Or rather, that's precisely why they do: O = nothing.

With that gigantic mega-caveat to one side, Orbitsville is an enjoyable British SF novel of its time. It gets off to an incredibly gripping start, and events thereafter unfolded at a brisk enough pace, and with enough surprises, to keep me pleasantly engaged to the end. But if you're looking for a fascinating alien world to explore, as I was, there are much bigger, dumber objects out there.

Andy Love says

Though the concept of Orbitsville (a Dyson sphere, hundreds of millions of miles across, surrounding a star) is a very interesting one, the novel spends far too much time on the unpleasant (and somewhat unbelievable) billionaire who is out for revenge against the discoverer of Orbitsville than on the sphere itself. The book intentionally evokes a sense of tedium while inside the sphere - because it is stultifying uniform inside, but the fact the tedium is intentional doesn't make the scenes of seemingly endless travel inside the sphere more enjoyable.

Bill says

Mind expansion time, kiddies. Man discovers a big sphere. How big? Well, pretty big. Like big enough to contain an entire solar system. It's the size of five billion Earths.
I got dizzy a couple of times reading it.

Kalmay says

Good old science fiction, interesting place that sphere!

the gift says

third review: no, this is not beautiful writing to read again- just happened to be on the shelf while i was watching sports, not something to read seriously, just fun, so...

second review: i read this again, not that it is better but somehow my enjoyment has changed... this is of the subgenre of sf known as the Big Dumb Object, and no these ideas do not get bigger: a dyson sphere, that is a sphere the diameter of earth's orbit, trapping a sun in the middle, atmosphere, gravity, night/day, seasons shadow bands, leaves an inner surface of five billion earths! at the time written that is one earth/person. i like this better than ringworld where it is a simple band on the orbit, i like this book more because it focuses more on what happens to human concerns when faced by this immensity...

as with the first reading, i somehow saw this as a musical comedy- a slapstick farce generated against measuring humans to this absurdly endless living space. maybe the idea is more fantasy than sf. but the idea! the absurdity! only sf can come up with such plausible or at least possible big dumb objects. i could complain certain literary-type virtues are missing or undeveloped: you know, complex characters, compelling and rational plot etc. this does not matter. i smile just thinking about this immense sphere that changes- everything! i had to put it in favourites (once) though many people might question its inclusion... for sheer conceptual power this is a great book...

Manny says

This a whale of a science-fiction novel, ample in scope, awash with imagination, and chock-full of ideas. The hero, an intrepid space explorer, finds a Dyson Sphere around a star. That means that the whole star has been enclosed in a huge spherical envelope - *Ringworld*, eat your heart out! What's its surface area? Let me do the math. Hm, the sphere's radius is about the same as the distance between the Earth and the Sun... $4\pi r^2$ squared... I make it about $2.7 \times 10^{17} \text{ km}^2$. Wow!

The rest of this review is available elsewhere (the location cannot be given for Goodreads policy reasons)

Mike says

Not sure what to make of Orbitville. There are bits of the plot I like and the large scale engineering appeals, but some of the other parts miss the mark for me.

It was written in the 70s and some of the attitudes in it are dated, especially related to child care.

I like the concept of Orbitville. The Dyson sphere is a good thing, but its size isn't really explored. There are worlds of stories available with something that big, but the surface is hardly scratched and it seems more of a backdrop for the events between the character Garamond and his boss Lindstrom.

I also didn't like the ending it was too rushed, not that I like thick books, but pages are spent on the adventure, but all of a sudden it wrapped up and that was it.

Overall I found it to be okay, but nothing more.

Aaron says

More like 3.5 stars. This book has some fascinating ideas, but as a satire of capitalism, it's worse than *The Space Merchants*, and as a Big Dumb Objects story, it's worse than *Ringworld* or *Rendezvous with Rama*. The redeeming quality of the book is the journey across Orbitville at the end, which gives the reader a powerful sense of scale. The protagonist is a generic Captain Kirk type, and the three female characters are all offensive sexist stereotypes.

Glenn Schmelzle says

Orbitville is a fairly small book hinged around a big idea. Well, actually, a big setting. A Dyson Sphere. These things are such a great plot device, and I liked how Shaw's imagination played with it. The scale of it certainly had a significant impact on how characters acted.

I don't want to impose our social standards on characters written 40 years ago, but Vance Garamond was an unapologetic boor, bad qualities for a leader who asks his crew to risk their lives carrying out his agenda. His wife Aileen is way too ditsy and subservient; and though it paints Vance as the heroic husband, she's not very believable.

All in all though, I would read this book again.

Metaphorosis says

reviews.metaphorosis.com

4 stars

Spaceship commander Vance Garamond, fleeing from the imperious president of Starflight, follows an old map and discovers a vast empty Dyson sphere with only one entrance.

I was on NetFlix the other day, and noticed a movie about two worlds floating one above the other. It sounded a lot like Bob Shaw's *Ragged Astronauts*, so I checked it out. Unfortunately, the first five minutes were so awful that I gave up. But perhaps that's why, when my wife asked for a recommendation, I offered *Orbitville* (*The Ragged Astronauts* being a little too out there for her). She didn't like it, so naturally I re-

read it - in the course of putting it back on the shelf.

I first found Bob Shaw through a paperback collection called *Cosmic Kaleidoscope*. I was struck by his ability to write SF stories about people, and not just gadgets - at the time, a relatively uncommon skill. I'd heard of *Orbitsville*, but my suspicion of 'popular' books meant I put off reading it for a while. My mistake.

Orbitsville is one of those rare books deserving the praise it receives. It's a small book, and relatively simple, but it works so well that it just sticks with you. There's no one point where you say "wow, that was cool"; I think that it's just the realism - of a story about a world the size of 5 billion Earths - that works so well. That plus the fact that despite cool technology, the story is about people. Garamond is one of the few characters fleshed out, but he's credible - at no point did I think "Well, *I* wouldn't do that." In fact, Garamond acts as I think/hope I might, despite moments of doubt, self-doubt, and fear.

Shaw is a known author, and this book was a pretty big hit. I've never understood, though, why he didn't make it big. Not all of his books are great, but some of his work is on a par with Arthur C. Clarke, and somewhat similar in style. Definitely under-rated, and I encourage you to check him out. Start with *Orbitsville* or *Cosmic Kaleidoscope*, if you can find it.

A very good book that I recommend to anyone who likes a good SF story about people.
