

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *Ethan of Athos*
AUTHOR Lois McMaster Bujold
PUBLISHER Baen
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COVER ART Alan Gutierrez

This book was written early in the Vorkosigan series and fits chronologically about the same time as *Cetaganda*. It does not however, feature Miles or his family. The protagonist is Dr. Ethan Urquhart, a leading reproductive expert on the planet Athos. This is an extremely important position because Athos has no women. All the men are born from a combination genetic material contributed by a male on Athos who has achieved parental status by earning it thorough community service. The female part of the genetic material comes from ovarian cultures donated 200 years ago when the Founding Fathers settled Athos. The fetuses grow in uterine replicators developed on Beta Colony.

The conflict in this story comes when the cultures are discovered to be losing their viability. Replacements are purchased from Jacksons Whole, a planet known for genetic manipulation, but the cultures are not as advertised and turn out to be worthless. Ethan is chosen to leave Athos, find a replacement and bring them back personally.

Ethan's first stop is Kline Station, which is a nexus to many other worlds. One of the first people he meets is Ellie Quinn, who has received a new face (she was the one Miles left with his grandmother on Beta Colony at the end of *Warrior's Apprentice*) and tries to be helpful. Coming from a lanet of men, Ethan is totally unprepared for a woman like Ellie, even though he "boned up " on women during his trip. From here, he gets involved in a wild romp that leads to him finding out what happened to the original cultures, getting fast-pentaed, beat up, as well as other fun stuff written as only Bujold can.

This book works on so many levels because in between the lines are all sorts of interesting reflections on the relationship of the sexes and how a man form a planet of men, who has been taught into thinking that women are the devil himself, creates many hilarious moments. The ending is also very good in the way it wraps up the issue of the main characters.

I also found it interesting how Bujold doesn't comment good or bad on the necessity of male to male sexual relations on Athos. It isn't important to the story so she doesn't throw it in gratuitously like many authors would have. This is a trait of her writing that's refreshing. She addresses many subjects like this, Miles himself is full of physical characteristics, that could be more crudely handled but she never succumbs to that. This is, in my opinion, the mark of a truly quality writer.

You can certainly skip this book and not miss anything in the overall world of Miles Vorkosigan, but you would miss a chance to read a good story.

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