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Falling Free (Library Edition)



Synopsis

When humanoids are genetically produced for capital gain, what are their human rights? Leo Graf was just your average highly efficient engineer: mind your own business, fix what's wrong, and move on to the next job. Everything neat and according to spec, just the way he liked it. But all that changed on his assignment to the Cay Habitat. Leo was to teach welding to a secretly produced batch of humanoid workers genetically engineered with two additional arms instead of legs to be ideally suited to working in free fall. Could he just stand there and allow the exploitation of hundreds of helpless children merely to enhance the bottom line of a heartless megacorporation? Leo hadn't anticipated a situation where the right thing to do was neither safe nor in the rules. Leo adopted a thousand quaddies. Now all he had to do was teach them to be free. *Falling Free* is the 1988 Nebula Award Winner for Best Novel

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This recording, based on a Nebula Award-winning sf novel, centers on the moral dilemmas created when a bioengineered breed of humanoid workers are considered capital assets. The narration is shared between Michael Hanson and Carol Cowan, who handle the male and female roles, respectively. The narrators attempt to give each character a unique voice, and although they succeed, the subtle nuances of a single reader are absent. Perhaps more disturbing is the lack of messages instructing the listener on such things as when to turn the cassette over and when to insert a new cassette. The packaging is also a problem, as this reviewer cut his finger on two

separate occasions while trying to extract a cassette. Regrettably, not recommended. Ray Vignovich, West Des Moines P.L., Ia. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Superb. . . . Read, or you will be missing something extraordinary. --Chicago Sun-Times Bujold's best work in my opinion. --Science Fiction Chronicle

How the heck did I miss reading any of these in SciFi reading career? I cut my teeth on Tom Swift, first editions I bought with lawn mowing income. This is hands down the best SciFi series of books I've ever read. I bought the first one and simply couldn't stop. The Flying Spaghetti monster only knows how many hours of sleep I missed and how much work time I procrastinated to read these books. I read them in the order the author recommended and they were right on target. Don't put it off, just buy them all now, tell your wife and kids goodbye and read your heart out.

Two hundred years before the birth of Miles Vorkosigan, in a habitat orbiting the planet Rodeo, a genetically engineered people, nicknamed the "Quaddies", have been created as a labor force to work in null gravity, their lower appendages being arms rather than legs as in standard humans, or "downsiders". The quaddies are not human in the eyes of their creators, they are "post-fetal experimental tissue cultures", raised in a controlled environment and taught not only space construction but also how to maintain a largely self-sustaining environment in their orbiting home. Though many of the quaddies are technically adults, their carefully structured upbringing gives them the attitude and dependency of children. The quaddies are a profitable commodity, their bodies engineered so that they do not need time off in gravity as humans do in order to maintain their health. As "property" of GalacTech they are unpaid labor, dependent on their creators for their every need. Leo Graf is a welding engineer, brought to Cay Habitat to teach a select group of quaddies how to build reliable, stable structures in space. Though only in his 40's, Graf feels like an old man compared to the eager young quaddies who attentively hang on his every word and whose ability to function in a no-gravity environment is far superior to his own. From his arrival, Graf is set on edge by the attitudes that project manager Bruce Van Atta and psychologist Dr. Sondra Yei demonstrate towards the quaddies and the more he gets to know them the more their condition grates on his sense of what is right and wrong. Leo Graf can teach these young people how to do quality work that will last a lifetime, but can he teach one

thousand quaddies, one thousand children, what it means to be free? Leo Graf is based on Bujold's father, Robert Charles McMaster, a Professor of welding engineering and the pioneer of the nondestructive technique. *Falling Free* won the Nebula Award for Best Novel in 1998. *Falling Free* touches on relevant social and biomedical topics while creating an instant emotional bond with readers through Leo Graf and a few all-too-human quaddies. Though the story occasionally feels rushed and might have benefited from another 50-100 pages to flesh out story threads (it weighs in at 255 pages in the version I read) it stands as a shining example of why Lois McMaster Bujold has developed such a devoted following. I highly recommend the book. *Falling Free* will get your dander up, a calculated move on Bujold's part to make the reader sympathetic to the quaddies' plight right from the opening chapter. The first time Bruce Van Atta calls the quaddies "chimps", you ache for the magical ability to step into the book so that you can land a punch squarely on his smug jaw. The story isn't meant to be subtle, a move that may have been dictated in part because Bujold wrote it to be published serially in *Analog* magazine, also as a tribute to her father who was a fan of that Astounding-style hard SF. It is clear from the beginning that this story will be about not only what it means to be human but also will address freedoms and rights and fairness and equality. It is a measure of great praise that *Falling Free* never feels preachy or so focused on social issues that it takes away from the story. Instead Lois McMaster Bujold lays her cards on the table early and then gets down to the business of telling an emotionally engaging, action-packed story that not only offers imaginative science fictional ideas but gives the reader a few well-rounded characters to root for. On the surface a few of the early-identified "bad guys" are one-dimensional, but Bujold also plays with that in ways that will surprise the reader. For certain she gives you a character to despise, but she also creates characters with genuine reactions who must wrestle with moral and ethical implications, particularly in the character of Leo Graf. While I would recommend this story to anyone, it must be pointed out that on a couple of occasions the welding conversations get quite technical. It is apparent that Bujold did her research and aimed to do her father proud. However, those scenes fall short of being plot-stoppers in large part because of the way in which Bujold sets the scene. It is difficult to become too lost with the welding and engineering references when you are imagining a room full of quaddies hovering (literally) in an attentive fashion around their teacher, Leo Graf. Graf is a great character for the reader to inhabit and quaddies like Tony and Claire, their infant Andy, and Silver (pictured in Dave Seely's cover image) will steal your heart. You will start rooting for them early and won't stop until the exciting finish. I was tempted at one point late in the book to let

out a cheerful "whoop" I mentioned in the opening that I wish the story had been somewhat longer. There are a few scenes in the story that feel rushed, and one that happens off-screen and then is related in dialogue, that if fleshed out would have easily made this a 10/10 story. From an experiential standpoint, that is exactly what *Falling Free* was for me. I can overlook that minor complaint because I liked these characters so much and found the story to have just the right amount of excitement and romance to keep me up until the wee hours of the morning to discover how it would all end. *Falling Free* comes highly recommended. If you have yet to try Bujold, this is a great starting off point. In researching to write this post I was excited to discover that we learn more about the fate of the quaddies in the Miles story *Diplomatic Immunity*.

"*Falling Free*" is a fun sci fi adventure novel. It involves a lot of various topics. Some of them are: life in a space station, corporate power, zero gravity effects, and genetic manipulation of human beings. Positives: Good plot and story. Good dialogue. Nice pace. Interesting living in space considerations. Negatives: A few more typos than I expected. A bit of a caricature of the "bad guys" Overall a fun read. My rating is B

There is good solid science, plot, and characters. I really hate to provide book reports in reviews. I find it fun to explore the story and I hate to spoil that for potential readers. There is plenty of action and drama in every chapter. Kudos to Bujold for this work. I am reading the Vorkosigan series and this book doesn't seem to fit into that series other than descendants of this book's population pop up in the other story lines. I enjoyed this story much more than the other books, even though they are wonderful works.

Intensely interesting story line, plot twists, and great character development. You're very invested in the future and well being of the characters.

Set 200 years before the Vorkosigan saga begins, this is the story of the beginnings of the Quaddies. They are a bio-genetic engineered race of people, created to live in free fall (the state of no gravity in space) with minimum damage to their bodies. What happens to such a people when there are no laws to give them human status? They are classified as organic matter belonging to the company which created them. What happens when their usefulness to said company becomes obsolete? Bujold creates memorable characters and moral situations. She asks us to think about things not in a knee-jerk way, but in a long-term consequential way. She doesn't preach, she shows.

For me, the technical bits went on too long and with too much detail, but I'm sure other folks love those bits.

Outstanding original science fiction, especially the concept of the "quaddies". Well drawn major characters and a wealth of technical engineering detail portraying survival in space and null gravity. Most authors would have milked the theme for at least a trilogy (or septology), but Bujold has gone on to many more original themes.

It took me a while to oriente myself into the story, maybe because I had not read this author before. The characters were familiar but none were completely developed to a satisfying level. This was also true of both the conflicts and incidents yet despite my desire for more depth I really enjoyed this read and will read more by this author. It was perfect holiday reading after a tough term teaching.

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