



## Brothers of Earth

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## **Brothers of Earth** C.J. Cherryh

The sole survivor of a spaceship battle, Kurt Morgan's survival capsule finds an Earth-type planet in this unknown system. Stranded for life, he must adapt quickly to the strange terrain and even stranger inhabitants or face extinction. But would it be possible for him to learn the ways of this totally alien culture & to entirely adapt his human reactions to their fabulous civilization and complex mores? Kurt didn't know it yet, but before long he would be completely enveloped by this alien race and become the key figure in their great civil wars. And it would take all of Kurt's brave determination and keen resources just to keep himself alive.

## **Brothers of Earth Details**

Date : Published December 1989 by Mandarin (first published 1976)

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Author : C.J. Cherryh

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## From Reader Review Brothers of Earth for online ebook

### Tomislav says

This was C.J.Cherryh's first novel written, although the publisher decided to release her second novel written to the market first. It is considered part of her Alliance/Union universe, but I think that was a later positioning as it does not really relate in an important way to the main body of her work.

This was a quick read, with fairly simple plot and characters, reminiscent to some extent of Andre Norton. The main character is the sole survivor of a space battle, who crashes onto a planet with variously regressed human and human-derived populations. The society he is inserted into is feudalistic and extremely bound by codes of honor. It is an engaging story, but without any of the speculative psychology of Cherryh's later characters.

Stylistically, I was momentarily tripped up by important plot developments that took place off-camera, so to speak. But it is easy to figure out what has happened, and it contributes to the impression of the planetary culture where so much goes unspoken.

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### Xabi1990 says

Ya me explayaré cuando pille un teclado.

Resumo: 5 estrellas TENIENDO EN CUENTA QUE ES DEL 76.

O sea, que me ha gustado mucho sabiendo que es CF clásica con todos sus defectos (personajes flojitos, inocencia en los giros argumentales y todo eso) y virtudes ( mundos, viajes, culturas extrañas, perjuicios extrapola les, amores de risa)

Admito que Cherry era/es uno de mis iconos en CF. Y que no soy imparcial. Pero la mantengo las 5 estrellitas, hale!!

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### Sam (Hissing Potatoes) says

[her suicide from shame at being kidnapped (hide spoiler)]

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### Caermon says

I first read this book when it came out in the '70s and it hasn't lost a thing in the intervening decades. More a tale of people with some science fiction elements thrown in, it was an early inspiration for my own writing.

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## **Indeneri says**

This book has all the hall marks of a Cherryh novel, great writing, great atmosphere. But it piles improbability on improbability until the storm in a tea cup becomes a fully fledged civil war, amongst people with very long and difficult to pronounce names.

It started off well, but then all of a sudden this elite family is willing to let him live off them for the rest of his life. No where do I see any inclination in Kurt Morgan to make himself useful to his hosts. And on top of that he gets married even. All in the first third of the book.

By the end I really couldn't care what happened to any of them.

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## **Paul says**

Wow. I just noticed that this is the 51st book by C.J. Cherryh that I've read. I guess you could say she is one of my favorite authors.

This is an old one, 1976. I liked it, and I can see how some of her later ideas may have developed from this book.

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## **James says**

This was the very first Cherryh book that I read. I had wanted to read *Downbelow Station* for a while but I couldn't get my hands on it. This was the only book available at my local library.

I started to read the book with some trepidation as I had not read much sci-fi at this point being a major fantasy freak. Very quickly I was drawn into the story as Cherryh weaves a rich and colourful world and characters. Having read many of her books since she excels at writing stories which have various races and cultures coming into contact and having to deal with each other. In this case a human crashes on a planet and becomes central to the politics of the native race there.

If you have not read any Cherryh and you can't get your hands on *Pride of Chanur* then I would definitely choose to read this one first.

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## **William Leight says**

This is, according to the introduction, one of Cherryh's very first books, and it shows (though not entirely in a bad way: the other book that Cherryh mentions as among her first is "*Gate of Ivrel*", which is more successful in good part because it is less ambitious). Part of the problem is that the scenario of a lone human in an alien society is one that she would return to often, and with better results than here. The nemet, with their honor-based culture that seems like ancient Rome with a dash of medieval Japan, are similarly more like a rough draft for better-thought-out alien species that would appear in later books, with more intricate and alien belief systems. Otherwise, Djan's presence in the book, a major plot point, just doesn't make much sense: it's never clear how she came to be Methi (Queen, sort of, though it's never quite clear how much

power Djan really wields) or what she is trying to accomplish, other than to make Kurt Morgan, our hero, miserable. Kurt himself is not particularly memorable, and neither is Kta, his nemet friend. And it was, I think, a mistake to make the nemet so humanoid that Kurt and Mim could fall in love: it makes it hard to believe that Kurt really has so much trouble understanding them, and vice versa, which is probably why Cherryh disposes of Mim early.

Still, there are two good, if underdeveloped, ideas here. First, there is the question of how a society with what it fully believes to be a complete description of the universe, a total cosmogony that explains every feature of the natural world and their place in it, responds when presented with walking, talking proof that their description is incomplete. The medieval Catholics, to take one example of such a culture, had centuries to adjust to the slow accumulation of proofs, and even then the church didn't officially accept that, for instance, the earth orbited the sun until 1835 (when Galileo and Copernicus were removed from the church's Index of Forbidden Books). The Indras nemet are given no such time: instead, they have suddenly found aliens — who they were not only unaware of, but should not and indeed, according to their most cherished beliefs, cannot exist — in their midst, claiming to be thinking and feeling beings. It's no surprise that this generates not just philosophical questions but religious uproar and political disturbance, and Cherryh's treatment of these is fairly acute: unfortunately, she doesn't spend much time with this aspect of the story.

The other interesting and underused side of the story is the character of Bel t'Osanef, who requires a bit of background. Nephane, the city where Kurt is taken, turns out to be a colony, in which a small (I think, though the relative proportions are never really made clear) group of Indras nemet, originally from the city/empire (again, it's not entirely clear) of Indresul, rules over the indigenes, known as Sufaki. Bel is one of the few assimilated Sufaki, a member of one of the three Sufaki noble families who are treated as being on the same level as Indras. He is, in fact, Kta's brother-in-law. But he is also very conscious of still being in many ways an outsider to the Indras, even to Kta, and of the more serious slights, not to mention outright discrimination and historical injustices, still suffered by his fellow Sufaki. Cherryh gives him a couple of heartfelt and eloquent speeches about his position: his confrontation with Kta, after Kta returns to Nephane having done exactly what the Sufaki radicals who want to throw the Indras out had always claimed they would do, namely agreeing to surrender the city to the invading forces of Indresul — they have good excuses, mostly having to do with Indresul's superior force, but the betrayal is acute nonetheless — is particularly poignant. Intelligent and highly perceptive, perhaps due to the way that he is caught between two (metaphorical, it has to be said, since this is sci-fi) worlds, Bel is a far more interesting character than either Kta or Kurt. Indeed, in some ways he obviates the need for Kurt, as the divide between Sufaki and Indras is more important, and seems harder to bridge, than the one between human and nemet.

And Cherryh is extremely sharp on the colonizer-colonized dynamics between the Indras and the Sufaki, dynamics that make the relationship between Bel and Kta deeper and more nuanced than that between Kta and Kurt. That Kta and Kurt should have trouble understanding each other is unsurprising, given that Kurt has only just arrived on Kta's planet; that Kurt should work harder to understand Kta than vice versa is also logical, given that Kurt will be spending the rest of his life living among the nemet. That Bel should understand Kta far better than Kta understands Bel, even though the two of them grew up together, is far less obvious, and sheds far more light on the Indras-Sufaki relationship than Kta and Kurt's struggles for mutual understanding do on the differences between humans and nemet. It also changes the way we see Kta, who is no longer merely a stoic hero with an interesting if archaic system of honor. Instead, he becomes a well-meaning but flawed man (or rather, nemet) who is trapped in a worldview that always, even subconsciously, puts Indras above Sufaki. He disapproves of anti-Sufaki slights, but not enough to remonstrate publicly with the sligher; he is glad that the Jim Crow-esque system of anti-Sufaki laws that was in place until a few decades ago was dismantled (in an ironic reversal of a classic sci-fi trope, the nemet of Nephane were brought together by a human invasion), but fails to see that the entrenched advantages produced by centuries

of Indras rule constitute a de facto system of discrimination on their own; and he sees no problem with the way that Nephane continues to largely be ruled by the same Indras families as before. In short, he has what might be described as the classic “1950s white moderate” worldview, combined with the absolute self-belief of a hereditary aristocrat. But Cherryh shies away from forcing him to confront the consequences of this worldview, and indeed from following her whole setup to its logical conclusion. The more we learn about Nephane, the more we sympathize with the Sufaki, so Cherryh makes their religion scary and their leader unlikeable, as well as having some of them rape Mim after they kidnap Kurt, said kidnapping having, it is strongly insinuated, been carried out solely due to their leader Shan t'Tefur's jealousy of Kurt as a male of Djan's species (Shan is Djan's lover). Even so, the reader is hard-pressed to applaud when the final result of Indresul's invasion of Nephane seems to be that Kta has bargained the Methi of Indresul down from a genocide of the Sufaki to merely restoring some version of the old system. But Cherryh doesn't want to think about it that way, so she waves her hands a bunch and has Kurt tell Bel that it's better to live on your knees than die on your feet, which, though perhaps true, is extremely weak tea. The ending leaves you feeling a bit wistful for a different and more interesting book in which Bel, who presumably has some sympathy for an outsider trying to adjust to Indras society, befriends Kurt as well, forcing Kurt, and so the book, to address some of the contradictions of Indresul society more directly. (It would also have a bigger role for Aimu, whose interesting position as Kta's sister and Bel's wife is almost entirely unaddressed.) Cherryh's inability or unwillingness to follow through on the interesting ideas she comes up with is what, in the end, marks this as a first effort.

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## Mark says

C. J. Cherryh's "thing" is constructing well-rounded alien cultures that feel real. This is a form of world building (one of the key elements of a good sci-fi novel), except that, by focusing on culture instead of, say, an alien environment or future technology, Cherryh's novels also, inevitably, focus on character. And having well-rounded characters is a key element that many sci-fi novels lack. Even some of my favorite sci-fi writers from childhood, like Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, wrote amazing novels that sometimes starred cardboard cutouts who served only to move the plot along rather than truly inhabit the story of their lives.

Not so in *Brothers of Earth*. Granted, Kurt Morgan (our stranded human hero) and Kta t'Elas u Nym (his newfound friend and brother) may not rival Hamlet or Raskolnikov as the most nuanced characters in all of literature, but they do live and breathe on the page. They're emotionally consistent, believably reactive to other characters and their environment, and Kurt, at least, grows over the course of the story.

Here's what else I loved about Cherryh's characters: they don't suffer from the irritating sci-fi tropes used by lesser writers. For example, Kurt is not the White Savior who outperforms his Nemet hosts physically, mentally, and in every other way. In fact, it's pretty much the opposite. He's not particularly skilled with Nemet weapons, it takes him time to understand what's going on around him (which makes sense, given his circumstances), and--worst of all--he's indirectly (and sometimes even directly) responsible for much of the grief and tragedy suffered by his alien friends, as a result of his too-human reactions to the various culturally prescribed incidents in which he gets entangled. Although there is a vast political machine moving in a particular direction before Kurt arrives, his involvement is what pushes it to its final outcome.

And yet despite all this, Kurt is an extremely likable character. He's no overblown Charlton Heston-type hero, demanding that those damn, dirty apes get their stinking paws off him. Although certain condescending Nemet irritate him, his reactions are comprehensible and, well, human. He's believable in that way, and thus

an entirely sympathetic character.

Kta is also interesting and likable, because of his deep and honorable friendship with Kurt as well as his alien qualities, which are decidedly nonhuman without being inscrutable. Again, Cherryh's forte is constructing believable alien cultures, and so we begin to understand Kta and his people as completely as any human anthropologist studying the city of Nephane would. My one, minor complaint is that Cherryh has crafted a society in a largely patriarchal mode. The women have roles of prominence in religious matters (and religion does matter a great deal to the people of this world), but the men still run things. (I realize this discounts the prominent role played by Djan, the only other human on the planet, but her leadership, I have to be honest, doesn't make a whole lot of sense and is the one part of this book that baffles me.) Likewise, Kurt's alien bride, Mim, is that "perfect" male fantasy of the meek, beautiful alien girl who devotes herself wholeheartedly to her human husband. I can excuse all this insofar as Cherryh was writing this novel in the early '70s and, as a science fiction writer, was aiming at a very specific (and dominantly male) demographic. Plus it was her first novel (though it was published after her second).

Although there's not a whole lot of "sci" in this sci-fi novel (the Nemetian culture is on par with the ancient Romans, technologically speaking), I enjoyed it immensely. The characters are what made it for me. There were times that I got emotionally caught up in Kurt and Kta's trials and tribulations, and that's rare for me if I'm reading a pulpy, adventure-centric novel like this. So I loved it, and can't wait to read more by Cherryh.

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### **Chris Gager says**

I have adopted/rescued several of this author's books, but so far haven't read any. So, I picked this one up last night. It's from 1976, a classic era in sci-fi (1970's), and is telling the tale of a marooned human space-warrior on a planet a lot like earth, with aliens who seem to be a lot like humans. But ... there are humans around too, including formal enemies (also marooned) of our protagonist. The emphasis so far seems to be on psychology: the state of mind of the protagonist (despairing mostly) and the daunting, strange ways of the alien inhabitants. Good enough so far ... Funny, I was thinking recently about the dearth of female sci-fi writers, particularly in the golden age I referred to (60's and 70') and I just now found out that the author is FEMALE! I assumed a male - of course - WRONG again!

- This seems a lot like Star Trek; heavy on the fiction/drama and light on the science.

- The essential plot stuff here could be taking place on Earth in the 17th-18th-19th centuries. Culture clashing ... S. Pacific, Africa, S.E. Asia, Far East, the Americas etc.

- Ms. Cherryh is sparing with her prose. Some important stuff is implied rather than stated. That and all the political cross-currents are a bit confusing at times.

- "chani" = a tribute to Dune or vice versa?

The action kicked in about when I thought it would (had to!) and things have been fast and furious since then. Not mention very blood and operatic. Good stuff, but still not real sci-fi.

Finished last night with just a bit of skimming as I got worn out by the endless drama-infused dialogue. Seemed to me to be overly ornate and repetitive. My insight ... this book is a mash-up of Isaac Asimov and Mary Renault. The author is known to be a fan of ancient Earth civilizations and undoubtedly put her

knowledge in that sphere to use in creating the nemet world. But ... there's just WAY TOO MUCH description of it, WAY TOO MANY weird character names, and WAY TOO MUCH dialogue, especially towards the end. Not enough emphasis was given to plot details and moving things along. The plot action seemed to double back on itself again and again. By itself the plot is pretty boilerplate sci-fi: lonely human finds himself marooned on an alien(though not all THAT alien) world. Gets involved in local culture and politics and so on. Conflict, both bloody and cultural ensue. Coulda-shoulda been better, but the last 50 pages wore me out and got fed up with it. This book reminded me of my experience in reading "The Urth of the New Sun" by Gene Wolfe, another sci-fi stalwart, in that it began well but ended in tedium. Maybe Ms. C. got to be a better writer as her career advanced?

- 2.5\* rounds down to 2\*. It was gonna be a 3\* until the endgame, which took WAY too long and was confusingly and clumsily executed. By the end I found it to be a let down, for all the trouble the author took(too much) in creating the nemet culture. Maybe the author(and the story) gets better in the following installments(actually only one that I could find) of the Hanan saga. Apparently this is an early work in a very long career.

- Why didn't somebody think about getting the weapons for themselves sooner? Seems like a major deal.

- And one more thing: what does the title of the book have to do with the plot? Nothing at all that I could see. Seems like it was pulled out of a hat full of generic-sounding sci-fi phrases.

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## **Silvio Curtis says**

I would like this book a lot if it didn't make one of the most unforgiveable mistakes of science fiction, humanoid aliens.

Kurt Morgan, the main character, is stranded in the middle of their complex (but thoroughly human-like) culture. The only other true humans on the planet are some earlier castaways from centuries earlier who have turned barbaric in the meantime, and Djan, a more recent arrival who has made herself ruler of the city at which Kurt arrives. In general the book fits the descriptions I've read of early modern adventure novels, with the natives of the planet standing to Kurt and Djan in a relation like that of noble savages to powerful European outsiders. (The other humans would also be savages but not at all noble). In the first part of the book, though, Kurt rather thick-headedly brings disaster down on everyone around him by his ignorance of the ethnic tensions of the city, so that the suspense is about just how bad it will be and how much will be salvaged.

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## **Sable says**

I read this book because I've been meaning to read C.J. Cherryh for some time, and also because I was doing a challenge to read 15 space opera books by the end of the year. However, this book is not space opera. It's a planetary romance. That being said, it's a really good planetary romance, centered on a fascinating alien culture with about 17th century technology that reminded me very much of an Indus Valley sort of culture, with lots of formalities and strange social customs and caste systems and interconnecting (and internally clashing) racial divides. The plot? Picture Avatar if things had gone poorly.



Admittedly it uses some time-honoured sci-fi tropes that the artsy sorts would tell you immediately mean that it must not be taken seriously, but keep in mind it was written in 1976, first of all; and secondly, I say so what? I think people are far too hung up on being original, and they try so hard that they often lose the elements that make a good \*story\*. Cherryh is much more interested in character and story than in making sure that her universe obeys hard science, which is downright refreshing in the midst of the modern obsession.

Above all the strongest part of this book were the incredibly well-realized characters. I loved each and every one of them, despite and maybe because of their flaws, and even the villains are empathetic. Cherryh remembers that old saying that a story is something happening to someone you care about, and she has made me care about these characters. Enough that the ending annoys me somewhat, since it is clear that there will be more books to follow this one. I understand there are sequels; and therefore, quite a lot remained unresolved.

It's a chewy read; the kind of thing you have read in pieces to fully grasp the nuances. You can't just sit down and devour it. To be honest, with time running out in my late-begun reading challenge I selected it in part because it seemed a thinner book than many others I have and I thought it would be a quick read. Don't you believe it. But it was worth it.

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### **Pam Baddeley says**

A re-read of a book first read years ago and which I must have enjoyed as I kept it; unfortunately, I'm not rating it a keeper this time around. I found the pace very slow and the main character interaction unconvincing.

Kurt Morgan is a human who crashlands on a planet where a humanoid race called the nemet live. He is from one side in a long war with another human civilisation, both in the process of destroying themselves. At first, the nemet are hostile to him, and some of them remain so, because they fought a war some generations ago against humans from the enemy side who invaded and tried to take over. The survivors of these humans are now barbarous cannibals and the nemet expect Kurt to be the same, though some of them gradually come to accept him, at least partially. The prime mover among them is K'ta, son of a ruling family of one of the two nemet cities. Despite Kurt's punching him in the face early on in an attempt to escape, K'ta bends over backwards to befriend him and treats it as a debt of honour. Unfortunately for him, this debt brings one after another in a series of disasters that befalls K'ta's family.

Meanwhile, Kurt discovers that the ruler of the city to which he has been taken is a human woman, Djan, one of the enemies he has been fighting all his adult life. They come to a wary truce and she allows K'ta's family to take Kurt in and teach him nemet ways, but later comes to regret it. Kurt falls for a nemet woman in his adoptive household and is the cause of a conflict between the ruling families and other nemet who are from a different religious heritage and who were the original rulers of the city and its surrounding lands. The ruling families came from the other nemet city overseas generations ago, so they are suspected of having divided loyalties. This underlying tension eventually leads to major conflict.

One aspect which I suppose added to the interest of the story at the time of publication is that the nemet are superficially based on the ancient Japanese: at least, they have tea ceremonies, are warriors with revered weapons, worship their ancestors and have a very controlled and non emotional social standard. Kurt struggles greatly with this and is always offending against it because he is too touchy-feely or free with his

gaze.

I found the story unconvincing because I couldn't accept that the nemet would make a human woman, from a race which they regard as animalistic, into an all powerful ruler. I also found K'ta's forbearance with Kurt as excessive given the disasters that befall his family and friends due to Kurt's presence. Kurt's sentimental courtship of a nemet woman doesn't convince either when - off camera - he is also having an affair with Djan. And the latter's relationship with Kurt doesn't convince; there isn't any real connection between them, especially since she is simultaneously having an affair with a nemet from one of the underdog families. In fact the whole thing between Kurt and Djan was so low-key, I didn't realise they were meant to be having an affair until it was mentioned later by the characters. My basic problem with the book as a whole was that I didn't find any of the characters believable in their motivations and there was no real characterisation/emotional realism, as well as the slow pacing. So for me, only a 2 star rating.

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## **Lupercal says**

Way back in the 70's I tried to read some fantasy book by CJC and gave up, considering it peurile. I was 15 and my god was J.G. Ballard.

Much later, after the English New Wave (sadly) waned in influence and SF retreated into its clique, I discovered the Chanur/Hani books and was filled with a new delight over space opera. And after that - a long time after - I found this 1976 novel and read it during an evening of insomnia.

It's good. Not great, but certainly good. The seeds of her wonderful alien/human/various species thing is there, and the book is writ with an economy of style and narrative which I find pleasing. Something which the likes of Peter Hamilton and Dan Simmons seem to have lost sight of.

The ending is rather weak, but this is a respectable SF novel from an author who would shortly go on to greater things.

Recommended 6.5/10

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## **John says**

Reread. One of her earlier works, economically written, a bit stiff (particularly in the dialogue). The alien culture is basically classical Japanese.

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