



The Harvest

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Do you want to live forever? the Travellers asked humanity, and only one in ten thousand said no. Their ship had been in orbit around the earth for a year, but their only communication came one night via an enigmatic dream of immortality. And the next day everything was changed. Most of the world prepared to put away their earthly lives as children put away their toys. And the few who remained fully human began to know fear.

In coastal Buchanan, Oregon, physician Matt Wheeler is one of only ten who said no to eternity. As he watches his friends, his colleagues, even his beloved daughter transform into something more—or less—than human, he finds that his concepts of life and death, good and evil, god and mortal must undergo a similar change if he is to retain his bittersweet hold on life.

Others, however, find such introspection to be self-defeating—perhaps even treasonous. If we've been invaded by aliens, reasons Col. John Tyler, we've got to fight back. Even if they are in human form. And sifting through the remnants of the United States, he finds those who agree with him.

And so, at the end of the world, it is like it was at the beginning. There are those who choose heaven, those who choose earth, and those who choose hell. And as these three groups move toward their fates, humanity finds itself on the brink of a destiny that may forever change the face of the universe itself.

The Harvest Details

Date : Published December 1st 1992 by Bantam Books

ISBN : 9780553091236

Author : Robert Charles Wilson

Format : 394 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Aliens

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From Reader Review The Harvest for online ebook

Lectrice Hérétique says

Je suis définitivement conquise par Wilson ! Le thème de l'immortalité est ici formidablement traité. Les humains ont le choix de rester mortel ou de devenir éternel. Chacun se retrouve face à un dilemme qui les confrontent à eux-mêmes, à ce qu'ils sont vraiment. Ceux qui ont dit non à la vie éternelle estiment ainsi conserver leur Humanité, et considèrent que les "contactés" ne sont plus humains. Ceux qui ont refusé ont tous de bonnes raisons, l'incompréhension, la peur de l'inconnu et du changement, le refus de ce qu'ils sont vraiment, leur vécu... Une histoire magnifique.

Andrew says

The last humans on Earth come to terms with the others leaving; perhaps it's the realistically drawn characters, the pathos of Summer coming to an end, or meditations on mortality amongst the banal, but something really hooked me.

Mars Girl says

This is one of my all-time favorite books of all time. It's the book that I discovered Robert Charles Wilson with and I have an actual paperback copy of this book that I got much later. I've re-read it a few times. I just loved the whole premise of a race coming to earth and offering humanity the choice to evolve. It is really a bittersweet tale with great characterization. How does one let go of ones humanity to move forward? Can everyone move forward? It's a social commentary on change.

Kay Smillie says

I discovered Robert Charles Wilson via Spin and have since read many of his novels, working both forwards and backwards. He rarely disappoints and The Harvest is no exception. Bit of a slow start is my only minor gripe. If you were offered immortality would you say yes or be the one in ten thousand who says no? I reckon I would say no. Anyway, if you are a fan of Robert Charles Wilson, why haven't you read this?

Ray Smillie

Geoff Battle says

Wilson takes an unique approach to contact in The Harvest, although the title is somewhat of a clue. The initial third is laden with suspense as the characters are developed and this is achieved with a modicum of science. In fact it's the lack of any knowledge which makes it unnerving. Once it starts to pick up pace it shrugs off the suspense and tries to offer credible action and develops a more scientific approach. Whilst it

tries to not to play its cards it fails to juggle all of these approaches and loses its way. The characters become unfocused and the story meanders. It's interesting enough to create a desire to see it through, however the latter half is poor in comparison to the moody and tense first half. *The Harvest* is an interesting and unusual piece of science fiction, refusing to use familiar alien contact plot lines and that bravery should be noted.

Stephen Fordyce says

I loved this book. It was awesome. It enthralled me from start to finish which was a surprise to me because no one recommended it to me. I found it on my own. What made it so good was the deep question it posed. Do you say yes to immortality without pain and suffering but it costs you your individuality? There were times that I cheered for the humans who said no but at other times I could see the suffering leave those who said yes. A very well written book.

Maliwan says

The book was very interesting and surprising. Also very different from other sci-fi books that I had read. One of a kind. The idea of human is explained and questioned in this book so well, I start to question myself. It's a book one should definitely read.

Eric says

It's so rare to find a science fiction author that concentrates as much (or more) on his characters than on the science. Wilson is one of the best I've ever read at this.

This story of the slow shutting down of society after a welcome invasion by alien visitors, and the emotional scars this leaves on the few who choose to stay behind, is as heartbreakingly compelling as it is compelling. Wilson is extremely good at asking hard questions and positing believable answers.

This book is one of the best reads I've experienced in a while. The similarities to Stephen King's "The Stand" are unavoidable, but Wilson is so original and memorable, and this book earns an important place in the best of the "last man on Earth" subset of science fiction.

Marissa says

Mini review stands. Wilson's got plot and pacing on lock, and puts just enough science into the backend of his end of the world to make the whole thing, if not plausible, at least workable. It's not his best work (this was written in 94 - he was just getting started!) and though there's a little bit of dated, cringeworthy language ("Oriental" referencing a culture, not a rug, the lack of any female primary protagonists), it's actually pretty un-blatantly cringeworthy.

Actual plot summary: it's sort of *Ingress*-y. First contact is made. Do you choose to trust the aliens and accept their promise of eternal life, or is death what makes us human? After the choice is made, what

happens to those who transition, and those who stay behind? Shocker, it's a world builder.

If you can track it down, I read it in a day. But Wilson's one of my favourite authors - his cadence always feels like something I can burrow in to.

Peter says

Aliens visit the Earth, but at first they're silent, visible in the sky but not engaging. Until finally, in mass dream, they speak to everybody at once with an incredible offer. They will give functional immortality to everyone who wants it. As well as other benefits. The only catch is... once death is no longer a concern to you, or anyone else, you can't help but change your outlook, your priorities... you, in essence. And maybe that means you're no longer going to be what you presently consider human. Still, most people accept the offer. The novel follows a few of the small minority that refuse it, who are left unaffected, except that they're in a world full of people who said "yes." Could this all be a sinister ploy by the aliens and those who accepted the offer are enslaved and need rescuing? And, even if it's not... is it that much better?

This type of book is pretty much Robert Charles Wilson's specialty. A big event that can't help but change the world, and yet the focus is on the personal, how individual, rather normal people react to it, often helpless to change the course of events. In this case, it's also somewhat reminiscent of *Childhood's End*, although different enough that I wouldn't even call it a homage much less a ripoff (although I also wouldn't be terribly surprised if someone told me the author was inspired by the classic work to try this). It's just that a few similar ideas are explored, but with a more modern perspective. Modern to us, but for Wilson, it's one of his older, earlier pieces... and to an extent, it shows. Not that it's bad, but it's less... deft. The characters don't ring quite as true as some of his later work, some lean a little towards stock (but with interesting twists), and the plotting has a few more rough spots.

Two issues in particular stood out to me for the negative. One, there was a fairly obvious question that never seemed to be brought up, or even occur to any of the characters. It does eventually get answered, but it's far too late and feels contrived to provide a surprise to the reader, but not a fair one. I kept waiting and waiting for somebody to bring it up because it would have been one of my first questions and I can't believe it took that long to find out. The other problem is that there seemed to be too much uniformity in how the people who accepted the offer of immortality act. There is some mention of people taking slightly different paths, but just considering the natural variation of human personality, you'd think, given the abilities they have, there would be many more approaches taken. Maybe most people acting similarly allows for a certain creepiness to set into the story, but given the premises it didn't ring true. Even the basic count of how many people refused seemed unlikely to me... I could certainly believe a large majority, but I could see a significant minority refusing for some of the many reasons given by others.

Still, on the whole, I enjoyed the book. Wilson may not have shown himself as capable as he has in other works, but it was still interesting and worth a read. And he avoided several pitfalls that I think others might have fallen into and created a story that was far more conventional and much less interesting. The biggest sin is that I think that if he wrote from the same premise today, I think it might be a great book instead of merely good.

Jack Pramitte says

Sorry Clarke's fans but for me this is *Childhood's End* done right because Wilson is a much better author (than Clarke) when he writes about human condition and feelings.

Jason Bradley Thompson says

[we eventually discover they originated as coral-like creatures before becoming disembodied nano-intelligences (hide spoiler)]

Jeff Sauri says

I read this during Christmas break, my first semester at college. Being completely alone for the first time in my life, on an empty campus, in a new city, was the perfect environment to read this novel and is probably largely responsible for my life long interest in post-apocalyptic fiction. However, this always stood out in my mind because there was no great tragedy. There is a choice. This allowed the story to focus on reforming communities without having to deal with a messy trauma, or desolation of resources. And that is a question that has always interested me, what would we do if we could hit reset on the whole world and decide how to live together from scratch?

Ed says

If you have ever questioned what makes us human, this book is an excellent opportunity to ask the question again. This is a thinking person's sci-fi. The "what if" is far superior to most sci-fi. The end of the book still left me wondering if the main character, and others who made the same choice, actually made the "right choice". It wasn't a clean ending. The best reads make you think. Our human perception can be quite different from person to person. The characters in this novel certainly approach life and humanity in different ways.

Bravo for another great novel from Robert Charles Wilson!

Daryl says

Sometimes a book will sit on my shelf for a long time before I get around to reading it. (Books on my shelf are generally books I haven't read.) I read Wilson's *A Bridge of Years* in 1996, and though I can't remember much about it now, at the time I really liked it, enough so that I picked up *The Harvest* when I saw a copy. That was probably close to 20 years ago. This is a nicely written sci-fi book which concentrates more on the human element and human interaction than the sci-fi elements, which really set up the story and then serve more as the backdrop to what's going on with the characters. And it's an intriguing set-up: a giant alien spacecraft arrives in earth orbit, but doesn't communicate with humans as it sits up there for a year. Then in

one long extended night, everyone dreams essentially the same dream in which they are offered immortality although it means giving up being human. Only about one in 10,000 turn down the aliens' offer, and the novel, of course, tells the story of a group of those who do just that. It's a story that would make for a good TV series, although some of the technology (cassette Walkmans, VCRs) is dated to the early '90s. There are a number of separate stories that get tied together, although not until well into the novel, and most of the characters are pretty interesting. I thought that the ending came a little too quickly (after 430 pages building up) and that ending left things a little too open-ended, but overall I found this a good read, and an author worth keeping an eye out for.
