



Crossfire

Nancy Kress

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Caught in the *Crossfire*

A human colony settles on a distant planet, a colony formed by Jake Holman-- a man trying to escape a dark past. But as this diverse group of thousands comes to terms with their new lives on a new world, they make a startling discovery: primitive humanoid aliens. There are only a few isolated villages, and the evidence seems to indicate they aren't native to the planet--despite the aliens living in thatched huts and possessing only primitive tools.

When a handful of human colonists finally learn the truth, they will face the toughest decision of their lives, a decision that could determine not just the fate of their new home, but the fate of all humanity.

Crossfire Details

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From Reader Review Crossfire for online ebook

Dokusha says

Ein Raumschiff mit Auswanderern fliegt von der Erde zu einem fremden Stern, um dort eine Kolonie zu bilden. Allerdings stellen sie bald fest, daß sie dort nicht allein sind, und die Ereignisse überschlagen sich... Soweit die ultrakurze nicht-spoilernde Zusammenfassung der Geschichte. Die Auswanderer sind ein ziemlich gemischter Haufen, was auch ohne die Außerirdischen schon zu einigen Problemen und Schwierigkeiten führt. Ein Großteil der Story beruht auch tatsächlich auf den verschiedenen Charakteren und ihren Motivationen und Einstellungen, und weniger auf den Interaktionen mit den "Aliens" (streng genommen zählen hier natürlich die Menschen auch dazu...).

Das Grundgerüst der Geschichte hätte wohl auch ohne den Science-Fiction-Part geschrieben werden können, aber dieser Hintergrund erlaubte es Nancy Kress, das Ganze noch zu verstärken, ohne dabei zu übertreiben. Mir hat das Buch gut gefallen, allerdings fand ich das Ende etwas zu offen - aber vielleicht ist ja auch eine Fortsetzung geplant. Als entspannende Lektüre ist es jedenfalls allemal gut geeignet.

Mervi says

The Earth is crumbling under wars and environmental damage. Some people want to leave it. The Mira Corporation has built a ship which will take humans to an alien planet which should be able to sustain human life. Various groups have bought their way into the ship: a group of international scientists, a group of people who want to return to nature and are calling themselves Cheyenne (although they're not Native Americans), a group of New Quakers who can't stand the violence on Earth, a group of Chinese, a family of deposed Saudi royalty, and others. About 6 000 people. Jake Holman is the chairman of Mira Corporation and he's going, too. The trip is one-way and most of the humans will be sleeping through it. While only seven years pass for the passengers, over seventy years pass on Earth before the ship reaches the planet dubbed Greentrees.

Only long range probes have inspected the planet, but the area where the humans will be going should be temperate. But when they get to the planet, a surprise is waiting for them: a small group of aliens. Humans have never met aliens anywhere so they're very excited. However, the aliens live in small huts and don't respond to the humans at all. But then, the humans find another group of seemingly the same alien species. But they attack humans. The surprises don't stop there, either.

The story is told through the eyes of three people: Jake Holman, the CEO who is in charge of the expedition, Gail Culter, Jake's second in command, and Dr. William Shipley, a medical doctor and the leader of the pacifist Quakers. All of them have their own problems. Jake is haunted by a dark secret in his past. He used to be a lawyer and is an excellent manipulator. Gail was born into a family of scientists but realized early that she had no interest in science. Instead, she's an administrator and a no-nonsense type. She's also a lesbian and her lover died before this trip. Shipley's adult daughter hates him but has come along for the journey. Shipley is very worried about her but doesn't know how to talk to her. Unfortunately, none of them were very appealing to me. They also don't get much character development.

The best part of the book were the aliens. They were very interesting and different from usual aliens.

The various groups get along pretty well, mostly because they know that they have to rely on each other and no other help is coming. However, there are some conflicts, too, but they're on the level of individuals instead of communities. I found this a bit strange at time, considering how different the various groups are. For example, there are several active women, most of them working in sciences and at the same time, the Saudi prince keeps his women sequestered – and the Saudi women are apparently happy with it... The prince in question as no problem working with (other) women.

The crew of the ship were Swiss mercenaries and they're expected to act as police on the planet. They're military and keep themselves away from the others. In fact, all of the characters are really only interested in their own specialty: Gail would even stop listening to other people when they talked about science stuff and she isn't even interested in the aliens, the team's main biologist is only interested in biological stuff, and physicist is only interested in ships etc.

The book has some science in it, mostly around space ship drives, but not too much. When the scientists start talking science the POV character either leaves or stops listening. This felt quite strange to me, especially when the survival of the person in question depended on the science but is a way to cut down science aspects for the reader.

This was a bit of mixed bag for me. I enjoyed a lot the exploration and aliens but there were some elements I didn't like as much and none of the characters really appealed to me.

Crossfire doesn't end in a cliffhanger. In fact, it can be read as a stand-alone.

Ryan Mishap says

Having liked her most recent so much, I decided to try another. This was okay.

A group of a couple thousand humans set off for a far away planet called Greentrees. This private venture consists of the partners who made it happen, a group of New Quakers, one thousand Cheyenne, Chinese refugees, a deposed Saudi Prince and his retinue, and many more. Earth in this near future is suffering the effects of industrialization and climate change as governments fall in the face of natural disasters and economic crashes.

Greentrees--uninhabited according to probes--represents a chance to start over, especially for the groups leader, Jake, who is running from a crime.

The journey there is briefly covered and they are soon setting up the new colony. The Cheyenne set off for another continent to re-live the old ways in a new place.

Soon, life forms are discovered nearby: dubbing them Furs, the colonists come across fur-covered bi-peds with tails who exhibit different behaviors depending on which village they visit. But they are not indigenous to the planet....

When the non-DNA based "Vines" show up and explain about the war the "Furs" have declared, things become clearer before ethically muddy.

Decent backstory on various characters gives a little more depth than most SF books.

Miki says

The adventurous story of a group of humans who set out to colonise a far away planet that turns out to be not as empty of sentient life as expected. They end up encountering two different species of aliens, both fascinating and terrifying in their own ways, and they get caught up in a centuries long war, forced to take sides while their own lives and their new colony are at risk of destruction, in a difficult balance between negotiation techniques, respect for all living beings, self preservation and search for the truth.

Peter says

A privately held spaceship leaves Earth, full of thousands of rich eccentrics, scientists, members of religious and ethnic groups and others who have all paid for a chance to start again on another planet. But just as they're setting up, they find a complication... there are aliens already on the planet. And soon they discover they've stumbled upon a war between two races and forced to make moral choices that no one should be forced to make.

This book left me with mixed feelings, because there were some things that I really liked, some that left me somewhat cold, and some that I thought were below par.

Let's start with what the book did right. Firstly, it created some particularly cool aliens. Well, one of them was about average, but I really liked what Kress did with the second one, a different mindset and biology that I was really interested by, and it led smoothly into the moral dilemmas faced by the protagonists without feeling artificial. Sometimes the science veered into the science-magic type, but mostly I really enjoyed this side of things.

This is a science fiction novel, and for some fans, a good SFnal concept, or a familiar one handled well with a few twists, can excuse a lot of other flaws. This is mostly true for me, and why I'd say I didn't feel like the book was a waste of time. But that doesn't mean we don't notice the other flaws.

I normally like Kress' character work, but here not many spoke to me. The only character I consistently liked was the New Quaker doctor. His daughter came close but was too erratic, to the point that it felt like not a nuanced character, but rather an almost cartoonishly irrational one. The rest? A few I got invested in for brief periods, but mainly they just slid off me. The novel did have a built-in excuse for why a bunch of characters who probably aren't well-suited to this type of operation are there, and it serves well for that, but it feels too transparently an excuse.

Slightly related to the character work was some of the plot developments that just rubbed me as poorly handled or not well-thought out. For example, two characters dislike each other, and then realize they're attracted to each other. This is a classic trope, and it in itself isn't a bad thing, but to read these characters who were mildly in conflict through the rest of the book suddenly look into each other's eyes and, essentially, hold hands and agree that they're dating did not ring true to me. Similarly, one of the characters had a backstory where he committed a crime on Earth. This is revealed right at the beginning, but the nature of the crime is only hinted at until finally they reveal the truth... and it just lost all it's power for me because I could not believe the world worked in such a way that that particular crime would have been possible (at least, that he would have gotten away with it). As such, instead of working as part of a satisfying character arc, it made me roll my eyes. There are a few other times where characters seemed to make decisions because that was

what the plot required, rather than it being what a real person would do in that situation.

The tone seemed to jump around a little, and it took a while before I had a good idea what kind of story the book was going to be, not in terms of plot, but in terms of feel. But it didn't take too long, so it's one of the more minor problems.

All in all, the book was okay. But it could have been much better.

Susan says

I had thought when I read this that it was one of Kress' older works, but it's newer than her "Beggars in ..." series. I'm not sure whether I would have felt differently about it if I'd known that as I was reading.

A ship takes off to colonize a supposedly uninhabited planet light years from earth. Once there, the humans encounter not one but two sentient alien races. That doesn't sound like much that's new, but as usual, Kress fills her story with complicated and interesting characters, and the decisions about how to react to the aliens are suffused with questions about honesty, loyalty & betrayal, genocide, and even redemption.

I particularly liked the role played by "new Quaker" William Shipley and his rebellious daughter. I felt that, even fictionalized, it gave me a better feel for Quaker sensibilities than I'd had.

This book is the first of two set on "Greentrees", but it resolves well on its own. It will be nice to meet the characters again in the sequel, but I'm not hanging on a cliff waiting for it. I appreciate that.

Micah Sisk says

You can read the story synopsis elsewhere (the book blurb or other reviews). I just want to add my quick gut reaction...Meh. It was OK.

Well...OK, I'll give some details on that reaction.

I was drawn into the story up until the point where the title conflict became apparent (when we find the humans caught in the metaphoric crossfire between two alien races). By that point the characters had begun showing their flaws. Or rather the flawed writing of character became clear. I don't know Kress's works. Others say she's usually good at character creation. That may be. But in Crossfire I felt that every single character was written way too tightly to script.

The chief administrator was only interested in planning and administration; as soon as anything scientific or technical came up, she tuned out. That's quite a character flaw when you're in charge of setting up a colony on an alien world with NO chance of help from home.

The colony's CEO--a former lawyer--was only really interested in negotiations and manipulating people. OK, he was also preoccupied with his own dark past, but that's really the only depth he had.

The biologist would go without sleep or food as long as he could study alien biology. When he was disallowed the privilege of studying an available sample, he'd hang around the sample practically salivating over it until he could have his way.

The physicist was only interested in alien technology. He'd ignore everything else.

The New Quaker doctor was only interested in his religious morality, sitting in silence and waiting to see the "light" and all that. Yeah, he fixed people up when they needed it, but his internal monolog never drifted from his religion even when he was thinking about his rebellious bratty daughter.

The rebellious bratty daughter was only interested in her own self-righteous rebellion and sense of moral outrage (directed at anyone who didn't let her have her way).

...And so on.

Then there is the convenient parallel between the philosophic outlook of one of the alien species and the doctor's New Quaker religion. They're practically the same. How handy.

But above all, the pace of the book became progressively plodding as we are meticulously presented with "they go here, they do this, they say that, then go over here..." And throughout all this we shift around through the POVs of various characters hearing over and over again the same internal monologs depending on what the characters are fixated upon.

It felt stilted and a bit forced, while simultaneously not really delving into the details of character or technology or even the extraterrestrial "war" the humans find themselves enmeshed in.

Like I said, it was still OK, but its plodding pace and single dimensional characters made the book seem too long for the story. It certainly didn't leave me curious enough to continue reading the second book. I really don't care that much.

Rita Monticelli says

Scroll down for the English version.

Storia complessa un po' troppo riassunta

La Kress ha una fantasia galoppante e degli spunti narrativi veramente intriganti, ma leggendo questo libro in più punti ho avuto la sensazione di trovarmi davanti ad un bozza di un romanzo più che ad un romanzo vero e proprio.

In alcuni passaggi l'autrice sceglie di riassumerci quanto accade senza farcelo vedere, oppure liquida con una frase avvenimenti complicati senza spiegarci come i personaggi abbiano fatto a fare certe cose. In altri casi anticipa quello che poi succederà, eliminando ogni forma di suspense.

D'altra parte invece inserisce qua e là riflessioni dei personaggi che dovrebbero caratterizzarli meglio, ma che a mio parere li trasforma in stereotipi, e che dovrebbero spiegare il perché di certe loro azioni, senza però riuscirci.

Si ha l'impressione di essere davanti ad una banda di matti dal comportamento incoerente, che seguono dei fili logici che sfuggono completamente al lettore.

Forse l'autrice ha voluto mettere nel calderone troppi ingredienti, che per essere ben sfruttati andavano distribuiti almeno in una trilogia.

In ogni caso la storia è abbastanza divertente, ma l'escalation di non-sense, che ha inizio a metà del romanzo e culmina in un finale improponibile, m'impedisce di andare oltre la terza stelletta.

A complex story, but a little too much summarised

“Crossfire” is sci-fi novel about colonisation and first contact. Kress has a runaway imagination and really intriguing narrative ideas, but reading this book at several points I had the feeling of being in front of a draft of a novel rather than a real one.

In some passages, the author chooses to summarise without letting us see what happens, or to reduce complicated events to a sentence without explaining how the characters could do that way. In other cases she anticipates what will happen, thus eliminating suspense.

On the other hand, instead, she inserts here and there meditations of the characters that should characterize them better - but in my opinion that turns them into stereotypes - and that should explain the reason for some of their actions, but she does not succeed.

Considering their inconsistent behaviour you have the impression of being in front of a bunch of madmen, who follow threads of logic that completely escape the reader.

Perhaps the author wanted to put too many ingredients in the cauldron, which should be distributed at least in a trilogy to be well exploited.

In any case, the story is pretty entertaining, but the escalation of non-sense, which begins in the middle of the novel and culminates in an improbable ending, prevents me from exceeding the third star.

Talkswithwind says

This is a book in the, *New Human Colony Meets Disaster*, genre. As this is Nancy Kress, the science is right up there. The Disaster in this case is getting caught in the cross-fire between two alien races.

There is no hyperdrive here. Travel between the stars is done relativistically, making most interstellar travel a one-way trip with regards to those left behind. This allows interstellar wars to last for centuries.

An interesting feature of the writing of this book is that it doesn't hit you over the head with the science. Yes, it is hard science. However, one of the characters sharing point-of-view is a *just tell me the details, don't need the 120 page proof* administrator. Many, many times scientists launch about three paragraphs into a long exposition about how something works and they get cut off at the knees. It's enough to show the hard-SF fans that these issues are being thought of, while at the same time avoiding glazed eyeballs from those more interested in how the characters interact.

The sequel is Crucible

Lis Carey says

In the not too distant future (not next Tuesday, but probably not a thousand years from now, either), Earth

has established a few extrasolar colonies on Earth-like worlds. The Mira Corporation is launching the first privately-funded colonization effort, six thousand colonists in total, comprising a number of groups with quite different goals: the New Quakers, the deposed Saudi royal family and their followers, a large extended family of scientists and technologists who believe Earth is on the verge of environmental collapse and want to get out first, a group of "Cheyenne" (of rather mixed actual ancestry) who want to recreate the tribe's traditional way of life, a small group of internationally funded scientists, and a small group of Swiss mercenaries who are the officers and crew of the ship en route, and the police force of the new colony on arrival. The organizing force behind this mixed bag of colonists is Jake Holman, who has his own reasons for wanting to get seventy light-years from Earth. His principle business partner is Gail Cutler, the only business person in the aforementioned family of scientists and technologists. Other significant characters include Faisal bin Saud, the New Quaker representative Dr. Willaim Shipley, Shipley's difficult daughter Naomi (Nan) Frayne, and some of the scientists and mercenaries.

The technological background is relativistic travel with instantaneous communication by queelink. The small number of colonists who remain awake for the entire voyage experience a trip of six years; over seventy years pass on Earth.

On arrival, they find Greentrees even better than hoped, a truly hospitable, Earth-like world. Life is DNA-based, as has been true of all life yet found in the tiny portion of the galaxy yet explored. Some of the native flora and fauna will be useful, and their own plants will grow. Allowing for predictable minor conflicts amongst groups and individuals, the colony gets off to a smooth start.

And then they find the villages.

The people in the villages are bipedal, fur-covered, have long snouts with big teeth, and have large, counter-balancing tails. On page 55, they're described as being four feet tall; elsewhere they seem to be taller than the humans, but why be picky?

(It's at this point that we and the colonists get a reminder of how cut off from Earth they are, despite the quee. They include news of this first discovery of intelligent non-humans ever in their next transmission. The reply they get is that Geneva is under siege, and is unable to send help against the alien invasion. As the colonists' concern at this point is that they may have accidentally colonized a world that already has natives--that they may be the alien invaders--their reaction to this is, understandably, huh? A subsequent message informs them that the World Life Alliance is now in control, and will send a scientific expedition. This is somewhat more responsive to their original message, but they have no idea what the World Life Alliance is, either.)

The presence of these people, dubbed the Furs, is rather a puzzle. There's no fossil evidence, in the area the colonists have been able to explore, that they evolved on Greentrees, and DNA analysis also makes them too distant from other Greentrees life for that to be plausible. Yet if they came as colonists from another world, and subsequently lost their technology, there ought to be evidence of that, too. The mystery gets deeper as it becomes apparent that there's something wrong with the Furs. The first cluster of villages they find is completely passive, not reacting in any way even to very pushy human intrusion, and gradually letting their huts and hearths decay for want of even the most basic maintenance. The next cluster they find is extremely aggressive; another group appears to be permanently intoxicated. When an accident gives them access to a dead child of the passive group, and an attack gives them a dead aggressive Fur, they find brain damage, apparently caused by a virus--most likely genetically engineered.

They're sitting in the middle of a rather nasty experiment, and they have no idea when the experimenters will

return to check on the progress.

And then, of course, the alien ship arrives. These aliens turn out to be sentient plants--or, not exactly. They look like plants, they use carts to move around, and their idea of a really good time is sitting in the sun. They are, however, the first life humans have encountered that is not DNA-based. Once effective communication is established, they readily admit to being the beings behind the nasty experiment that's being conducted on Greentreers; they're trying to make less dangerous Furs. According to these aliens, whom the humans quickly dub Vines, the Furs are the aggressors in their war, and it has been impossible to negotiate with them or fight them effectively by other means. The Vines, in fact, have no technology except biotechnology, and what they've stolen from the Furs. Even the ship they arrive in is a captured Fur ship. The Vines seem so nice, so likeable, their story is a sympathetic one, they appear to be holding nothing back. Yet they're conducting this nasty experiment on intelligent beings, with the goal of genetically modifying an entire intelligent species. Then a Fur-controlled Fur ship arrives. They, at least somewhat understandably, kill all the Vines, and then also kill all the Furs on the planet--not just the modified ones, but also the village cluster of normal, "control" Furs (those were the extremely aggressive ones.) The humans are stuck in the middle of an interstellar war, they need to decide what to do about it, and they don't know enough to do that intelligently. There's reason to be sympathetic to each side, and reason to regard each side as nasty folk they want nothing to do with. And either side could easily wipe them out, if they make a mistake.

All of this says nothing about the human personalities involved, which of course complicate the already complicated situation. Every one of the colonists was chosen solely based on individual or group ability to pay; the governing council is composed of the leaders or representatives of the component groups. Jake Holman, the president of Mira Corporation, is a lawyer with a nasty secret in his past. Gail Cutler, the one business person in her extended family of scientists, is the leader of that group and the vice president of the corporation. Jake and Gail both think of themselves as calm, reasonable, practical people, and they basically like each other, but Jake's "lawyer talk"--a practiced style of negotiating with and "handling" people--drives her bananas. Both Gail and Jake take it as a given that William Shipley's strong religious beliefs are superstitious nonsense with no relevance to the real world, but Shipley's often able to calm a tense situation down, and he's the one who makes the initial breakthrough in communicating with the Vines, and the one whose ego is least likely to get in the way. (But only "least likely"; he's neither a saint nor an angel.) Gail distrusts Faisal bin Saud because he's so smooth and polite and the Saudi women live in total seclusion and wear veils when they do come out. We never do see inside Faisal's head; he's far too controlled for that. He has to be judged by his actions. Captain Scherer and his Swiss mercenaries are stiff and formal and proper and professional, and turn out to be hiding a much nastier, and ultimately more dangerous, secret than Jake. The Cheyenne prove to be both more and less consistent than you might expect. The way they got the money to take part in this expedition, the next big thing the Indian nations did after casinos, was biotechnology. They have of course brought that with them, to help adapt their livestock to the local conditions, and the local flora and fauna to their needs. This inconsistency bothers Jake almost as much as the back-to-the-past nature of the project itself. Yet in other ways, the Cheyenne appear to be totally sincere and honest in recreating at least a version of the old lifestyle and living by it. Nan Frayne's opinionated, idealistic, intolerant of anyone who doesn't see things the "right" way, i.e., her way, especially her father--a case of emotional development stunted at the worst stage of adolescence. The only who isn't occasionally tempted to bash her skull in is her father, and that's because William Shipley is completely sincere in his commitment to nonviolence. Yet Nan becomes seriously interested in the Furs, and is the only one who manages to achieve some communication with them before the arrival of the Fur ship.

It's an interesting mix of characters, who mostly behave like intelligent adults and try to work together despite personality conflicts, and the story flows naturally out of these characters and the situation they find themselves in. Interesting and enjoyable.

Peter Goodman says

“Crossfire,” by Nancy Kress (Tor, 2003). An intriguing story/speculation almost buried within a clichéd, not-quite-absurd SF space opera. Humans are beginning to settle interstellar space, in a purely capitalist, entrepreneurial fashion. Jake Holman, billionaire, gathers a really odd group: Cheyenne who wish to create their own back-to-the-Plains nation, Chinese for no stated reason, thousands of diverse others. There is a small unit of Swiss mercenaries along as guards. There are a few scientists. But the planning appears to be quite haphazard. It takes years, of course, to reach the planet, though they can communicate with Earth by instantaneous quantum-tangled devices. Anyway, they land and start building their towns (the Cheyenne immediately set out dragging travois and living in tepees etc.) There is not supposed to be intelligent life, though there are plants and some animals. And then they discover aliens, whom they call Furs. There are several villages, some of them populated by Furs who pay no attention to them, some who seem to be completely stoned all the time, some who are aggressive. But they have not evolved on this planet; someone put them there. As the humans try to figure this out, another group of aliens appears, in a mysterious ship that seems to defy the laws of physics. These creatures seem to be plants, and need spacesuits to function on the planet. The humans call them Vines. Long story short, the Vines and Furs are engaged in a 10,000-year war. The Furs are extremely violent and aggressive; the Vines are basically Quakers, who will not kill, and who need to borrow the Furs’ technology. As the novel goes, the human stories are not terribly interesting, somewhat predictable. But the effort to understand two completely alien species---to envision living, intelligent creatures who do not seem to exhibit any human traits---this is well done. A mystery wrapped in a space opera.

<https://nancykress.com/>

Leah says

This is science-fiction in its truest sense -- what carries you along are the ideas and possibilities, and Kress's conception of what true aliens might be like is fascinating. The book's main drawback is that it does not have a single sympathetic character: you have the sanctimonious religious leader, his bitchy daughter, the dishonest leader with the dark secret, and his cold business partner. Nevertheless, I kept reading -- both because I wanted to find out what happened, and because I wanted to find out what this version of the universe really looked like.

Melanie says

HM. Maybe I'm not made for this kind of SciFi. I really enjoyed "Probability Space", despite not having read its previous volumes, but I didn't connect to any of the characters in "Crossfire", nor did I care much about the story. It was good and interesting in the beginning, but then I lost interest in the characters and their conflicts.

Also, I noticed half-way through, it felt too constructed, as in, the plot twists didn't come that surprising and the conflicts felt calculated. That did take all the remaining pleasure from reading, and the last pages felt more like a chore. I finished because I think Kress is a talented writer with great ideas, and I will check out

other books by her in the future. But this series might not be the one I was looking for.

Mjhancock says

In Crossfire, a misfit band of humans (humans that can pay their share of the journey) leave the turmoil of Earth to settle on a distant planet, called Greentrees. Once there, they find sentient aliens--aliens who weren't there the first time they checked. And from that premise, Kress weaves a complicated story of pacifism, violence, and human nature, as represented by the plantlike Vines and the vaguely mammalian Furries. The book works reasonably well on both a thematic and plot level, with a cast of diverse, well-rounded characters. Some of the ideas don't quite work out--the human city, for example, is populated by each family or ethnic group that could pay their own way and wanted off Earth, resulting in a heterogeneous mix of New Quakers, Muslims, Chinese, and radical environmentalists, which sounds like it would have a great story potential. But the human settlement is more or less abandoned halfway through the novel, in favor of a focus on the core cast. It's not a total waste, but it does feel like Kress set up a premise, then decided that she wanted to something else half way through. I understand the book is best read as the first half of a two-parter, and it does feel a bit incomplete on its own. That said, Kress' character work is again very good here, and I especially liked her portrayal of Quakerism.

Jay says

First you should know this is a two-book pair: "Crossfire" and "Crucible".

I really wanted to like these books. But I didn't. In the end, I didn't care about either of the two alien species; nor the humans either, for that matter.

It's tough to write about aliens and do a conscientious job. They're so ... different.

The "vines" are a one-trick pony ... er .. alien. The "furs" are also trivial, with one ambiguous exception at the end; so they have, let's say one and a half tricks. The humans have more complexity, but they're idiots, taking a painful route to meaningless oblivion. They triumph in the end, by grace of a God that watches over fools and madmen perhaps; or just because the author wanted it to end that way. But I certainly don't know why, and I couldn't care less, after all the mess they'd made of it.

I'd rather watch "House".

After thinking about it, I hit on an analogy with orbital calculations. With a little study, anyone with a reasonable background can solve the "two body" orbital problem. It takes someone dedicated to physics to solve the general three body problem. I think after that, you have to make simplifying assumptions and/or run a computer model.

These two books attempt to describe a "three body" (three species) problem. The attempt is heroic. The result is shallow and boring.

Two stars for ambition and stick-to-it-ness.

