



## The Waiting Stars

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The derelict ship ward was in an isolated section of Outsider space, one of the numerous spots left blank on interstellar maps, no more or no less tantalising than its neighbouring quadrants. To most people, it would be just that: a boring part of a long journey to be avoided—skipped over by Mind-ships as they cut through deep space, passed around at low speeds by Outsider ships while their passengers slept in their hibernation cradles.

## The Waiting Stars Details

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## From Reader Review The Waiting Stars for online ebook

### William says

I haven't read anything by Aliette de Bodard before, but I thought this was an excellent short story and I think I'll definitely try to hunt down more of her work. There do seem to be enough plot ideas to justify a longer story, but I think it does work well enough at the shorter length and it does manage to introduce a couple of interesting competing civilisations and a few good characters. There is some interesting ambiguity about the morality of what different characters are trying to do, they are all entirely convinced they are doing the right thing and while in some cases they have clearly ended up doing something indefensible it is debatable whether the other side are entirely in the right either.

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### Lance Schonberg says

Part of two small side-quests this year, to read all of the nominees for the short story and novelette categories for the Nebulas and the Hugos last year. Nominated for both in the novelette category, "The Waiting Stars" won the Nebula and was my pick for the Hugo.

This is two stories, only it's not. You realize that through a slow reveal that becomes obvious about 3/4 through the tale, then it's just a matter of how we'll get there and what emotions will the author pull from us on the way. It's often interesting when someone stretches the definition of family in SF. This was a rather cool thought experiment and I wonder how much more the author has written in this universe. I'd like to see more. (Note: there is more, just look for "The Universe of Xuya".)

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### Olga Godim says

Two societies clash in space in this sci-fi short story: the Galactics, based on the Western civilization, and the Dai Viet, modeled on the Asian traditions. There is a huge cultural gap between them, and it doesn't seem that gap could be bridged. While the Galactics praise individual freedoms, for the Dai Viet, family ties constitute the utmost importance: both the living family members and the dead ones. And for those long-dead great-great aunts, the living Dai Viet people are ready to sacrifice their lives and the lives of their relatives.

It feels obscene for me, but then, I'm a member of the Western civilization, a Canadian. I consider individual freedom the most significant human right. I would wither without it. And probably, just as I don't understand them, they don't understand people like me. One of the protagonists of the story, the one on the Dai Viet side of the divide, talks about a man, Jason, who represents the Galactics camp:

“...naïve and frank and so terribly sure of what he wants and what he's ready to do to get it. Dai Viet society has no place for people like Jason—who do not know their place, who do not know how to be humble, how to accept failure or how to bow down to expediency.”

Yes, that's us, the best of us. The definition fits like a glove. I hate dividing the world into 'us' and 'them', but I'm not sure it would be realistic to assume that we are all the same and value the same things. The cultural upbringing makes us into who we are. Sadly, sometimes people perpetrate unimaginable crimes, do

very ugly things, to instill their own values in the ‘others’. I could see that done in this story, and I wonder: how far from real life the author stepped in her science fiction universe. I’m afraid not that far.

Aliette de Bodard writes beautifully, and her story invokes strong emotions. But I really don’t like where her imagination takes her readers. The universe she created is very alive, very detailed, and absolutely alien to anyone raised in the Western belief system. I wouldn’t want to live in the Dai Viet world.

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### **Nancy Meservier says**

The Waiting Stars tells two stories. One is of two girls growing up in an orphanage, with no memories of their past. The second tells of an attempt to reach a derelict ship. As the novelette continues, the two storylines are drawn together.

I really enjoyed The Waiting Stars, and this is mostly due to the sympathetic cast of characters. I instantly felt for Catherine, and her feeling that she didn’t belong. It took me a little longer into Lan Nhen’s storyline, but once I did I was completely drawn into her quest. There are some worldbuilding elements here that are quiet neat. Apparently, this takes place in a universe that the author, Aliette de Bodard, has written in before, but I have never experienced. I like this version of sentient ships, and the two different societies presented here. I saw the ending coming, but still felt that it was emotionally impactful.

The Waiting Stars is short, but powerful. I hope to read more fiction by de Bodard in the future.

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### **F.R. says**

The issue I have with any story where two seemingly disparate narratives are being told simultaneously is that one of the main concerns of the mind becomes ‘how are they connected?’ Plot, character, all the other myriad of elements which make up a successful short story lose some of their importance as one tries to work out the mystery at the dead centre.

I suppose this tale isn’t too hard to figure out, but I’m not going to hold that against it, as once the central conceit is solved it makes room for an affecting and sad galaxy-spanning yarn.

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### **Margaret says**

The copy I read was part of *Galactic Empires*, edited by Neil Clarke. Waiting Stars is a novelette about what happens when one culture meets another culture. Especially about the winners and losers. And it reminded me of what happened to Native Americans, when their children were taken and sent to school. At the school, they were not allowed to speak their Native language nor keep Native customs. The whole idea was to conquer the Native Americans by preventing the older generation from passing on their culture to the younger generation. Very much a brute force approach.

Now I want to read more Dai Viet Empire series works (whether short fiction or full novels). Yeah,

Vietnamese space opera! This series has Mind-ships (humans who control the ship, rather than an AI). I very much enjoyed this Waiting Stars story and now I want to read *On A Red Station Drifting*!

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### **Ben Babcock says**

Aliette de Bodard's Xuya short fiction continues to be a universe that I enjoy reading but don't hanker to return to very often. "The Waiting Stars" continues her heavily figurative style of writing, something that doesn't always work for me. So my feelings about this story are ambivalent: I want to like it, but I also have to admit it doesn't appeal to my personal aesthetics.

Lan Nhen and her cousin Cuc are on a mission to retrieve a captured Mindship from the Outsiders. But when they finally find her, they stumble into a mystery far larger and more confusing than they expected. The ships are beaming massive amounts of data back to the Outsiders' homeworld, Prime ... and while the ships themselves live, the Minds are conspicuously absent.

On Prime, de Bodard follows tumultuous events in the life of Catherine, a Dai Viet orphan kidnapped at an early age by the Outsiders. Her Otherness in appearance marks her, and she suffers because of how the Outsiders wiped her childhood memories, a process they deemed "necessary". One by one, Catherine's peers have been disappearing, committing suicide ... not exactly the kind of things that are conducive to a healthy and stable life.

De Bodard eschews almost all exposition, really forcing you to pay close attention and study the narrative as it unfolds. The link between Catherine's story and Lan Nhen's seems nonexistent until the very end, when things finally become clear. The idea that the Outsiders have somehow embodied these ship Minds in human form and tried to install them into their society is intriguing. It's not clear from this story whether the Outsider claim that the Dai Viet force their women to give birth to Minds is true, or if it's true, if they accurately depict the process in their propaganda videos. (Stories like "Shipbirth" clear this up, however, see here.) Clearly Lan Nhen and Cuc consider the ship's Mind a family member, adding an interesting twist to the idea of blood relations and AI.

"The Waiting Stars" isn't my favourite Xuya story to date. I still really enjoyed "Immersion" and *On a Red Station, Drifting*. This also has stiffer competition among this year's Hugo nominees, so I'm not sure I'll rank this as highly as it might otherwise deserve. It's one of those stories where I quite like it from a craftsmanship point of view but wouldn't necessarily put it in *my* living room, if you know what I mean.

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### **G33z3r says**

Another fine story set in de Bodard's Xuya universe, a future interstellar space faring civilization based on Southeast Asian culture. The characters involved here are new to me, and the well-told story stands perfectly well on its own. This story is based on a clash between the two dominant cultures of her Xuya universe. They have starkly different views about the morality of the "mindships".

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## **Lene says**

This is my favourite of the stories I have read this year so far. Beautiful and subversive.

It features the vast spaciousness and expansive imagination I love so much in Space Opera, technological societies in which anything is possible, limitless freedom, action and suspense. But wrapped in this optimistic format is a hard lesson about consent and identity, about love between quite different life forms and about hard choices. Leading a normal, happy life or embracing your nature, hard as it may be? This question very much spoke to me.

As an aside, it also got me interested in Vietnamese history. There is an entire world waiting for me about which I knew hardly anything. So exciting!

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## **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

I loved this SF short story, a Nebula award winner and Hugo nominee. It's free to read online or download on the author's website. Review first posted on Fantasy Literature:

In this 2013 Nebula award-winning story, set in the 22nd century, Aliette de Bodard weaves together two narratives that at first seem unconnected but in the end, of course, are. The first concerns a woman's exploration of a derelict spaceship in a graveyard of spaceships in an isolated corner of space controlled by the Outsiders. Lan Nhen's Vietnamese-descended people build Mind-ships, spaceships powered by the brains and bodies of people who are made a permanent part of their ship, and are loved and revered as such. Lan Nhen is searching for her great-aunt and her ship, who disappeared many years ago. Meantime, on an Outsider planet far away, Catherine and other Dai Viet girls taken away by the Outsiders as children are raised in an institution, told stories of the terrible fate ? being "brood mares for abominations," i.e., the deformed humans who provide the Minds of the Dai Viet spaceships ? that the Outsider people have rescued them from. It's a peaceful but melancholy existence for Catherine and her friends, who have a sense of not belonging, elusive memories of a different, less bounded existence, and a yearning for space that the Outsiders refuse to allow them.

It took two readings to fully appreciate *The Waiting Stars*, but I was increasingly moved and impressed by it as I did so. It's highly imaginative in its portrayal of two vastly societies who have clashed with each other in war, both believing they are right. The Outsiders, a Caucasian society, are largely well-meaning but fundamentally lacking in understanding of the Dai Viet, resulting in a paternalistic disapproval that they enforce without consent.

This novelette explores themes of imperialism and cultural deprivation, but does so with a grace and subtlety that is too often lacking in speculative fiction. De Bodard's nuanced writing helps the reader have understanding and even sympathy for characters on both sides. Even if a decision is right, she recognizes the loss that it may bring.

I stumbled across *The Waiting Stars* in the June 2017 issue of Clarkesworld magazine, which just reprinted it. Somehow I missed this story when it was first published a few years ago, even though it's a Nebula

winner, so I'm deeply grateful to *Clarkesworld* for bringing it to my belated attention.

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### **Vanessa says**

This short (nominated for the 2014 Hugo for novelette) was hard to follow at first, the plot not telegraphed early on--which threw me off since it's a short work. Fortunately, the author is able to say a lot in few words, and the story begins to blossom when we meet Catherine, who is stuck in an institution, the circumstances unclear as to why she's there or why she yearns to travel out into space. At the same time Lan and her cousin Cuc work to rescue their family spaceship from the Outsiders, who've captured the ships and the Minds that power them. De Bodard weaves a compelling story as we attempt to understand the mystery of Catherine's situation and also the interesting culture of Lan and Cuc. I finished the story feeling like there's so much potential in the world-building--the shortness of "The Waiting Stars" was a disappointment because there was still so much to learn about these fascinating people (not necessarily a bad thing!).

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### **Carolyn says**

AWESOME. Literally. That an author can pack so much information and emotion into a tiny, tiny little story fills me with awe. This is a familiar science fiction standard, re-imagined so freshly, with so many layers and so much depth and intimacy... I love this so much.

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### **David says**

Not sure what to think of this short story/novelette, which was nominated for a Hugo. *The Waiting Stars* is on the surface a rather traditional space opera, covering ground even hoary old Asimov covered back in the day ("What if the super-advanced expansionistic galactic empire is kind of evil in that they basically roll over everyone in their path, but you're objectively better off being part of said empire?")

The main character was a member of a spacefaring people called the Dai Viet - i.e., Vietnamese, who are pretty much described as Vietnamese, physically and culturally. The Dai Viet apparently integrated their elders' minds in their ships, making them a sort of cyber-dynasty. The "Galactics" who conquered them and put their smashed ships in orbital graveyards are not explicitly said to be of North American/European descent, but it's pretty implicit.

"Catherine" (the name given to a rescued Dai Viet child, raised in a sort of convent by Galactics who "reeducated" her as a good Galactic citizen) has a nice Galactic boyfriend and a nice life on Prime, until her memories of the past start to come back.

This novelette is obviously heavily allegorical, and while there is some spaceship action, de Bodard seems mostly concerned with the emotional impact of Catherine's uncovering of her heritage, her violation, and the extended clans of the Dai Viet.

It's an interesting and clever and resonant story, but the writing was at times confusing. It moves non-linearly and there is not much resolution. I give it 4 stars for imagery and presentation and plot, 3 stars for prose and originality, so overall, 3.5 stars.

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**Dawn Christoffersen says**

Oh god but this was beautiful. Beyond The Tea Master and the Detective this may be my favorite Xuya story. I do recommend being familiar with de Bodard's Vietnamese scifi universe before reading this short story, because it'll have so much more impact.

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**Iain says**

Well-written and thought-provoking novelette looking at themes of imperialism and cultural deprivation. Not familiar with the setting, though I understand it's one the author has written in before, but it's interesting and attractive. The cast of characters are roughly sketched rather than well-drawn, a function of the length and the need to get two parallel narratives into that space, but this is a minor criticism. Worthy nominee for the Hugos, for sure.

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