



Mercury

Ben Bova

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The planet closest to our Sun, Mercury is a rocky, barren, heat-scorched world. But there are those who hope to find wealth in its desolation.

Saito Yamagata thinks Mercury's position makes it an ideal place to generate power to propel starships into deep space. Astrobiologist Victor Molina thinks the water at Mercury's poles may harbor evidence of life. Bishop Elliot Danvers has been sent by the Earth-based "New Morality" to keep close tabs on Molina.

But all three of these men are blissfully unaware of their shared history, and of how it connects to the collapse of Mance Bracknell's geosynchronous space elevator a generation ago. Now they're about to find out, because Mance is determined to have his revenge...

Mercury Details

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From Reader Review Mercury for online ebook

Fredrick Danysh says

Four men will meet on Mercury. Three do not know that they share a massive tragedy that resulted in the deaths of millions. The fourth has brought them together in an act of revenge.

Thomas says

Mercury, by Ben Bova, starts out with great promise as a science fiction story complete with good science, exotic and dangerous celestial locations, and interesting, motivated characters. The book is essentially divided into three sections, the first two of which are outstanding and set the stage for a conclusion which turns out to be less than thrilling. The third and final section was a bit of a disappointment for a number of reasons. It is fitting that the two most interesting characters spend their final hours together in the third section but it is certainly not a satisfying experience for the reader. The last section is rushed by the author, apparently simply to finish the story. It ends without regard to the characters' redemption -- and there was plenty required when you consider that one character was responsible for the deaths of four million people. The theme of Mercury turned out to be vengeance, but Bova mishandles the opportunity to dish out justice to those who deserve it. Heroes are viewed to be villains in the end and the villains get away with their nefarious deeds. That's what makes this book a disappointing read.

The second section is the best writing and concerns the construction of a space elevator, however the project is on Earth, not Mercury. As a matter of fact, much of the book takes place in locales other than Mercury, leaving the reader to feel he's been tricked -- after all, the cover says Mercury...

Bova is a great writer but while the storyline of Mercury has great promise, the ending Bova comes up with is really weak.

Olivia "Don't Blame Me I Voted for Hillary" says

Plots like this excellent novel's are one of the reasons why Ben Bova is one of my favorite authors.

Cathy Craig says

Parts of this we're awesome however the overall writing style seemed so stiff to me. I just couldn't finish it.

Keith Bell says

Re-reading some Sci-Fi that I had sitting around and am enjoying Bova's series. Many of his books are linked even if only by one common character or event. Some day I will go through them all just to find those

links... probably not.

Geoff Battle says

Spawned lovers in intergalactic feud, is a potential tabloid headline for Mercury. It's science fiction elements are but a backdrop to the cast of rather unlikeable astronauts. In tone this feels more like a novel from Bova's Asteroid Wars than an entry in the Grand Tour, due to the overstretched plot and overarching coincidences that stitch the story together. Brilliant series however this entry is a little bit below par.

Broodingferret says

Another good piece of writing from Bova, though the title is slightly misleading, as the only real purpose that Mercury serves in the story is that of a fairly obvious metaphor for Purgatory (one of the chapters is even titled 'Purgatory'). In many science fiction works, the alien worlds upon/around which the stories occur are often fleshed to a point where they stand out as characters unto themselves (Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy jumps to mind); Bova's celestial locals, however, often feel like simple backdrops against which the drama unfolds. Bova's development of his human characters and their interactions, however, are quite good and make up for a lot of the setting's blandness. Mercury is an entertaining tale of the toll that being horribly wronged can have on a person, and of the madness that the need for vengeance can breed in a person's mind. A good, quick read.

Robin Case says

Used the audio version +1 star for above average vocal performances and production values. Story line is decent science fiction.

Phil Giunta says

Previous to Mercury, I had just completed Ben Bova's As On A Darkling Plain and I can tell you that Dr. Bova certainly enjoys his love triangles. In Mercury, brilliant engineer Mance Bracknell constructs the Skytower, a space elevator, in Ecuador alongside bioengineer Victor Molina. The tower stretches beyond Earth's atmosphere to a space platform in geostationary orbit. Bracknell's success inspires him to break out of his reticent shell and ask his girlfriend, Lara Tierney, for her hand in marriage. Unbeknownst to Bracknell, Molina is also in love with Lara.

Meanwhile, Elliot Danvers, a priest with a religious order known as the New Morality, is assigned to the project to provide spiritual guidance to the project's staff--and to spy on the irreligious scientists who dare build a modern day Tower of Babel, using a barely legal variation of nanotechnology no less. Bracknell's hubris angers the New Morality as well as the Yamagata Corporation. The Skytower will prove to be a much more efficient method for launching satellites into space, negating the need for propulsion systems provided by Yamagata.

When the tower is sabotaged by Yamagata, causing most of it to collapse and kill millions of people across the planet, Bracknell is charged, convicted and exiled from Earth for the rest of his days. Molina, seizing the opportunity to have Lara for himself, commits perjury and testifies against Bracknell. The use of nanotechnology in the Skytower also becomes inimical to Bracknell's case.

Bracknell spends the next ten years living a meaningless life as a crewman aboard a freighter, plotting his revenge on Yamagata, Molina, and Danvers.

Bracknell eventually escapes servitude and has his appearance altered by a specialist at Selene base on Earth's moon--ironically through the use of nanotechnology. He assumes the name of one of the freighter's crewman who was killed when the ship was attacked and destroyed. Bracknell, now Dante Alexios, was the sole survivor and beneficiary of the insurance policy on the freighter. With new found fortune, Alexios sets up an engineering firm on the moon. Eventually, he learns of a project on Mercury to create solar powered satellites--funded by Yamagata Corporation. Alexios wins a bid as a subcontractor on the project, opening the door to his plan for revenge.

Mercury is divided into four parts and no chapter is more than three pages long. The first two parts deal with the Mercury project and introduce the main characters. The reader begins to understand just who Dante Alexios truly is and starts to watch the seeds of his vengeance bear fruit. Part three moves back in time to the Skytower project and the rise and fall of Mance Bracknell. The final part brings the reader back to Mercury and the final execution of Bracknell's plan for revenge.

All told, Mercury is a fast, enjoyable read. I did note more than once that POV tends to jump from one character to another inside of a scene. I always found this to be a distraction and in fact, breaks an often taught rule of story structure. However, the POV changes are made clear so as not to confuse the reader.

Continuing my Ben Bova read-a-thon, the next book on the list is Jupiter

Will Johnson says

I guess I thought a book called Mercury, being contained in a universe surrounded by books about planets, would actually be about Mercury.

But, Mercury only takes up about 33% of the book's length. The rest sets up a fun, but slightly melodramatic revenge plot, most of which is told in flashback.

I won't give away anything but Bova does a good job of universe building here and, much like the title of the book itself, we are tricked quite easily into thinking one group of people are our heroes and another set are our villains. By the books end, we don't know which side is up.

I enjoyed the book but imagine there is probably better things in store for me as I explore the Grand Tour. That said, I read this pretty quick and couldn't put it down once Book 2 (of 4) started.

E A M Harris says

This is the second of Ben Bova's 'Grand Tour of the Solar System' series that I've read. The other one was 'Jupiter' and I think this one is better. This is definitely a story about people.

It is about how Saito Yamagata, business tycoon, achieves his dream even as he fails his life; about who Dante Alexios, engineer, is and why he sets out on a path of vengeance; about Victor Molina's fall from a position of importance and respect as a scientist. The mighty mostly fall on Earth, but find their true ends on Mercury.

The planet is more than just a background. It's natural features provide many of the various characters' motives and explain how these people come together to move through their story.

The writing is readable with good descriptions and explanations and the complex backstory is well handled. At the basis of the novel is a love story, coming from the story-past into the story-present and on into the future. Unfortunately this is the thing I found somewhat difficult. I know there are people whose desire to possess the love object takes strange and dangerous routes to the goal, but I didn't think this was made totally convincing in this book. That there should be two people doing the strange and dangerous made it even harder to accept. I think one of the reasons for this is that the loved one did not have a strong enough role to make the excessive desire believable. I won't say more about this as it would give too much away. On the whole this didn't spoil the book for me – it's introduced far enough along in the story for empathy with the characters to have developed anyway.

The book is straight sci-fi – space opera even – no 'steampunk', 'science fantasy' or other sub-genre. Most science fiction fans will be familiar with Bova's work. Any who aren't and would like to make his acquaintance would do well to start with this book.

Thomas says

Reasonably enjoyable near-term space opera. Structurally, it's got problems, but they're not really dealbreakers in my opinion. What is (almost) a dealbreaker is that the two female characters are TERRIBLE. They're two-dimensional and presented, essentially, as tokens to be fought over by men. Gross. If you can ignore that, well, okay. It's outlandish and improbable at times, but fun and filled with pathos.

Matt says

I don't know what it is about Ben Bova that bores me to tears. The book is good hard SF. The plot however is weak and the characters are, intentionally, despicable.

Dante Alexios aka Mance Bracknell has been tasked by the Yamagata corporation to build an array of solar reflective mirrors on Mercury to inevitably power starships out of the Solar system. Work comes to a screeching halt when atrobiologist Victor Molina, on an anonymous tip discovers signs of life on Mercury. Molina and others search in vain for proof of life while Yamagata worries about the status of his project. The plot switches to an earlier time when Bracknell oversees a project to build a space elevator in Equador. There are those who would not like to see this happen however, and Molina, hired to help fabricate some of the structural components of the elevator secretly covets Bracknell's wife. All of this is under the dogmatic, watchful eye of the New Morality, a hard line religious movement bent on sending people back to the middle ages.

The science is ok, but not one of the characters has any redeeming qualities. It is hard to follow a story where I'm not pushing for one outcome or the other. The New Morality faction is not only hard to swallow but difficult to read. They do more to offset the story rather than provide any plausible conflict in the plot. The novel is reminiscent of a Grecian tragedy, but will most likely not endure as well.

Paul Weiss says

Science plays second fiddle to fiction in this "soapy" space opera!

Mance Bracknell is the chief engineer on the Sky Tower in Quito, Ecuador - a construction mega-project which will lift payloads to the altitude of geosynchronous orbit via elevator at a cost of pennies per pound instead of the current cost of hundreds of dollars if the load is lifted by standard rocket launch into orbit. But when the tower collapses killing over four million people and causing untold billions of dollars of property damage in a globe-girdling disaster, Mance Bracknell is found guilty of negligent homicide and exiled for life to a criminal penal colony in the asteroid belt. After a serendipitous encounter with an injured scientist fleeing for his life in which he learns the Sky Tower's collapse was the result of terrorist sabotage, Bracknell escapes and wends his way to a scientific outpost on the planet Mercury where he plots his revenge.

The good news is that **Mercury** is a soundly entertaining story that reads like a blockbuster five-star motion picture screenplay. The elements are all there - disaster, a love triangle, explosions, terrorism and sabotage, murder, the inscrutable Oriental tycoon, jealousy, hatred, suicide, right wing fundamentalist religious groups, mobs, courtroom trials and prisoner riots! The bad news is that the science and the setting of the book in the asteroid belt and on the surface of the hostile planet of Mercury is all but incidental to the plot. I can't help but feel that Bova had a plot in mind. All he actually needed to force fit that plot into the **Grand Tour of the Universe** theme was a planet which had virtually no chance of harboring life forms at any stage of development. Mercury fit the bill so Mercury got selected!

There is some inescapable science to be sure which is reasonably well done - a passable explanation on the geometric structure of bucky-ball molecules; the distinction between slow inertial coasting routes or high speed accelerated routes for interplanetary travel; the idea of a space elevator; the unique mechanics of Mercury's orbit that causes a false dawn, a brief retrograde sunset and then a return to full day - but, if you're looking for the "hard" in "hard sci-fi" at the level that Bova achieved in **Mars** or **Venus**, for example, you're doomed to be disappointed. On the other hand, if a fast-paced easy reading brain candy tale in the style of Sidney Sheldon, Jeffrey Archer, or Irving Wallace tickles your fancy, then you're in luck. **Mercury** will definitely work for you.

Provided you adjust your expectations appropriately, a recommended easy going read for a few days!

Paul Weiss

Chad Sayban says

Saito Yamagata believes the sun-scorched, barren surface of Mercury is the perfect place to generate the power needed to send ships off into deep space. Astrobiologist Victor Molina is looking for evidence that life actually exists in the ice of Mercury's poles. Bishop Elliot Danvers wants to make sure that his beliefs are affirmed and Molina finds nothing. But what none of them realizes is that they share a common connection to the collapse of the geosynchronous space elevator on Earth years earlier – and Mance Bracknell is looking

to get revenge on them all.

Ben Bova – who has been writing science fiction for more than 40 years, including books such as *Moonrise* and *Titan* – continues his Grand Tour series about the colonization of the solar system with *Mercury*. The story begins in the late 21st century as three characters – Astrobiologist Victor Molina, “New Morality” Bishop Elliot Danvers and Billionaire developer Saito Yamagata – come to the scorched surface of the planet closest to the sun. Each has their own myopic agenda, but they are all unaware that they have been lured there by Mance Bracknell so he can avenge the rolls that the three of them played in his destruction a decade earlier.

Mercury really drags early on and it is difficult to have empathy for any of the characters. They are all uniformly shallow, egotistical and appear oblivious to what any of the others are doing. The second act goes back in time to try and explain where Mance’s wrath originated and the pace of the storytelling picks up a bit, but by then there was little chance to salvage any interest in what would happen to the characters. In the finale, Bova makes a clumsy attempt to make a moral statement of the responsibility of big business and the evil of religious zealots in a future where seemingly everyone lives as extremists. By the time Bova begins to pontificate, the whole story is reduced to being unimportant.

Even Bova’s usually engaging science fiction imagery seems to have been sacrificed in this installment. Maybe it was a product of the barren landscape of *Mercury*, but there just wasn’t anything interesting or unique about the world-building which is a prerequisite of science fiction writing. *Mercury* really failed to live up to some of Bova’s other writing and it was a struggle to finish. This is certain not one of Bova’s better works.
