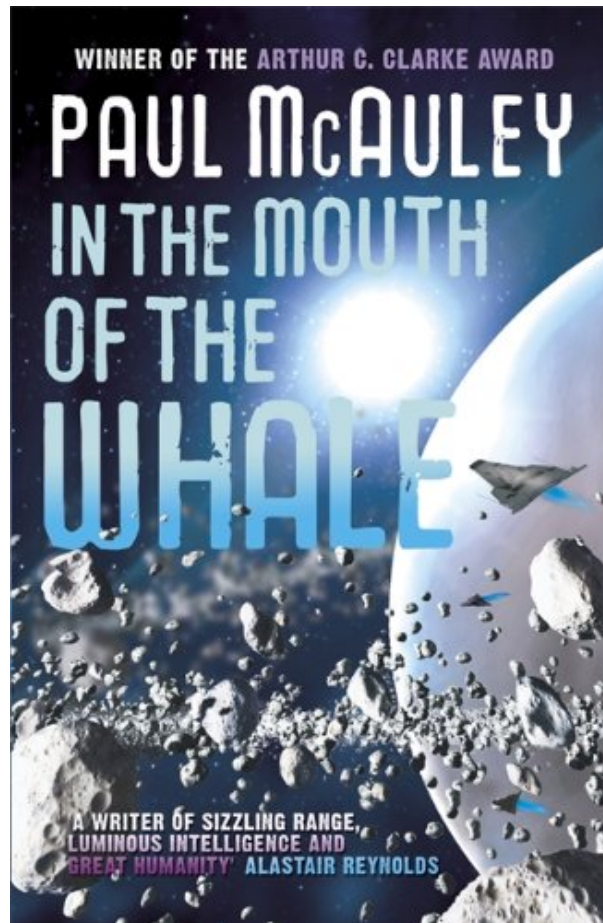
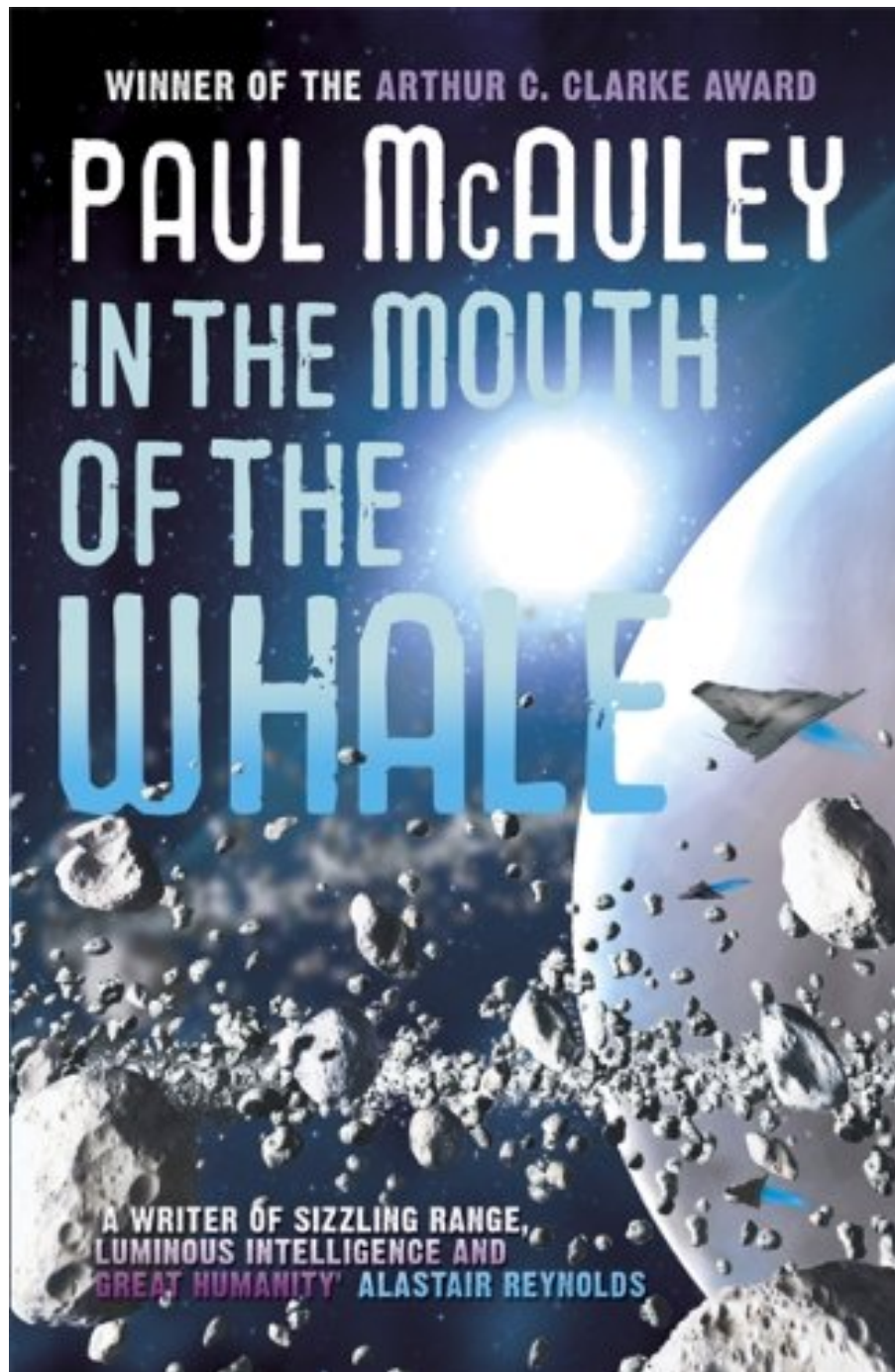


IN THE MOUTH OF THE WHALE (THE QUIET WAR) BY PAUL MCAULEY



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Review

A writer of dazzling range, luminous intelligence and great humanity?Alastair Reynolds

Paul McAuley's balanced grasp of satire and literature, always a rare attribute in the writer of prose fiction, is combined with the equally rare ability to look at today's problems and know which are really problems, and what can be done about them?William Gibson

About the Author

Paul McAuley won the Philip K. Dick Award for his first novel and has gone on to win the Arthur C. Clarke, British Fantasy, Sidewise and John W. Campbell Awards. He gave up his position as a research biologist to write full-time. He lives in London. You can find his blog at: <http://www.unlikelyworlds.blogspot.com>

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IN THE MOUTH OF THE WHALE (THE QUIET WAR) BY PAUL MCAULEY PDF

A novel of a savage future war, perfect for fans of Alastair Reynolds and Peter F. Hamilton.

Humanity's future rests on the shoulders of a Child from the past, and she must never know of the battles being fought for her ...

In the system of Fomalhaut, a war is being fought. The Quicks came long ago, refugees from the Solar System. The True arrived later, to find a declining civilisation and a system ripe for the taking. Then the Ghosts appeared, no longer human, unknowable, powerful and determined to drive out the Quick and the True. The battle continues, but the outcome is uncertain.

Three lives will intersect, because there is something at the centre of their universe, something dangerous and growing and powerful. Something that is worth fighting for. And it will change everybody's life.

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- Original language: English
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- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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Masterpiece of contemporary epic sf

By Liviu C. Suci

INTRODUCTION: As I have read and hugely enjoyed almost all sff Paul McAuley has written to date as well as a few of his near future thrillers, In the Mouth of the Whale has been one of my most awaited novels of 2012. While events in the duology The Quiet War/Gardens Sun impinge a little, this novel takes place far

away in time and space and it's a standalone which can be read independently.

One thing of caution: as the main points of the two above novels are retold here, *In the Mouth of the Whale* contains huge spoilers for the preceding duology, though to be honest the characters and world building are such a big part of the enjoyment of the author's novels, that storyline spoilers are ultimately not that important.

And of course I highly recommend you to try *The Quiet War* and the stories from its universe, part of which the author has recently released inexpensively [HERE](#).

The author describes the novel much better than I can on his website and I will reproduce his "overview" below, while the first 12 chapters can be read at the link above. As Paul McAuley says (and on reading the book I feel this overview presents the book pitch perfect):

"After you die, what do you do for the rest of your life?"

The posthuman Quick settled the system of the star Fomalhaut long ago, and created garden worldlets and thistledown cities in its vast dust ring. An empire that after centuries of peace fell to a second wave of settlers, the fierce and largely unmodified True People. And now the True are at war with interlopers from another interstellar colony, the Ghosts, for possession of Fomalhaut's gas giant planet, Cthuga.

In the damaged and perilous Amazonian rainforest, the precocious Child is being groomed for her predestined role. But control of her story is fraying, and although she is determined to find her own path into the future, others have different plans.

In the war-torn worldlets of Fomalhaut, a librarian, Isak and his assistant, the Horse, are harrowing hells, punishment for a failure they can never live down, when they are given a new mission. The Library of Worlds has been compromised by a deep, mysterious conspiracy; as Isak and the Horse attempt to unravel it, they're drawn into the final battle for Cthuga.

And aboard a vast scientific project floating in Cthuga's atmosphere, a Quick slave, Ori, is snared in the plans of an eccentric genius. As the Ghosts mount their final assault on Cthuga, she discovers that she holds the key that determines the outcome of the war.

Three lives. Three stories that slowly draw together. And at their intersection is the mystery at the heart of Cthuga. Something dangerous and powerful. Something that may not only shape the future of humanity, but may also give control over the shape of its past."

ANALYSIS: Structurally, *In the Mouth of a Whale* is pleasantly symmetric with four main parts in which each of the three threads alternate modulo 3 starting with the unknown god-like narrator of the Child's journey, followed by Isak's first person narrative and ending with Ori's thread told in third person pov style. These parts have 12,12,9,12 chapters respectively, while the last part that concludes the stories of our main characters in three final chapters reverses the order, so now Ori's story is first.

The transitions are handled very well as they make you want to read what comes next in that particular thread, but also what comes next in the upcoming thread and the book maintains this balance to the end. The style transitions well too, from the more serene and slower moving chapters where the unknown entity narrates, to the immediate saga of Isak, the Horse and later Prem, where Isak comes as the typical "naive do gooder but very likable" hero of sf, so you cheer for him, to the action packed, darker story of Ori and the

Quicks.

Overall the first three quarters of the novel were the kind I really wanted to just go on and never finish, while also reminding me why sf is still the most interesting literature when done superbly like here; sense of wonder, great characters, and for once the (as genre sff goes of course) stylistic daring I mentioned above. The last quarter was all action and things converged well with a great ending.

A combination of real - space shoot outs, strange habitats with everything from primitive life forms, dangerous animals to post modern grifters - and virtual action - harrowing hells, immersive drone combat - memorable characters and world building involving human/posthuman clades, slavery and superb references ("wreckers", "the True"...) weave into a rich tapestry that contains hard sf - biology and physics with a sprinkle of math - sociology and politics as well as a deep sense of history and what evolution means, while the speculations about future technologies and future possibilities for humanity are very convincing.

I also want to emphasize the "realistic feeling" that the author's exquisite world building induced, without info-dumps or too much jargon. I will direct you to chapter eight, so #3 in Isak's narration for a great example of this, while I will quote a few paragraphs here:

"A steady spout of water poured from a notch in the fountain's bowl, feeding a stream that ran off along a channel cut in the lawn, rippling clear as glass over a bed of white and gold quartz pebbles. We followed it through a rank of cypresses and emerged at the edge of a short steep slope of loose rock and clumps of dry grass. The parkland I had glimpsed from the flitter stretched away beyond, a mosaic of dusty browns and reds enlivened here and there by vivid green stands of trees. The sky had taken on the dusky rose of sunset, and clumps of stones glowed like heated iron in the low and level light. Rounded hills rising on either side hid the margins of the platform: the parkland seemed to stretch away for ever, like the landscapes of sagas set on old Earth.

Lathi Singleton dismissed my praise of the illusion, saying that it was simple stagecraft. 'My interest is in the biome itself. The plants and animals, and the patterns and balances they make. This one is modelled on Africa. You have heard of Africa?'

'It's where we first became what we are, Majistra.'

'I once kept a species of early hominin in this biome. *Australopithecus afarensis*. The reconstructed genome is contained in the seedship library; it was easy to merge it with Quick templates. And of course we hunted the usual Quick variants as well. But those happy days are long gone,' Lathi Singleton said, and walked off down the slope, stepping quickly and lightly beside the stream, which dropped down the slope in a ladder of little rills and waterfalls and pools, its course lined with red and black mosses and delicate ferns as perfect as jewels.

It grew warmer as we descended, and by the time I caught up with Lathi Singleton, at the bottom of the slope, I was out of breath and sweating. The stream emptied into a wide pool of muddy water whose margins had been trampled by many kinds of feet. Scaly logs lay half in and half out of the water on the far side. When one yawned, its mouth two hinged spars longer than a man's arm and fringed with sharp teeth, I realised that they were a species of animal.

'They won't hurt you because they can't see you,' Lathi Singleton said. It was the first time I had seen her smile. 'None of the fauna can see or smell anyone unless I want them too. Come along. I've arranged a little picnic. We'll eat, and I'll tell you what I need you to do, and why.'"

Overall *In the Mouth of the Whale* (top 25 novel of mine in 2012 and very likely a top 10, possibly a top 5) delivered what I expected and more and shows Paul McAuley at the top of his game. I would love more in this superbly rendered universe as I think there is a lot of scope for stories of humanity's clades and destiny as imagined by a modern master of science fiction.

Note: this review has been originally published on *Fantasy Book Critic* and all notes and references are to be found there

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Not as 'mind blowing' as the first two books

By Ian Mond

There's no doubt that *In The Mouth of The Whale* is more engaging and entertaining read than its two predecessors, but it's also a lot less satisfying. Given my problems with both *The Quiet War* and *Gardens of the Sun* – at times they read more like technical manuals than novels – I could be accused of hypocrisy.

But while *The Quiet War* and *Gardens of the Sun* drove me crazy with their endless descriptions of space plants and space engineering, the imagination on display was, at times, breathtaking. McAuley's idea of how humanity might shape itself to deal with environmental and social change both at home and in the outer reaches of the solar system not only had a ring of truth about it but also evoked a genuine sense of wonder, even if my eyes did glaze over at times.

Set more than a thousand years after the events of the previous two novels I was genuinely excited by what McAuley might imagine as the future for post-humanity. And while the first chapter is intriguing, with lines like: So the Child, our dear mother, twice dead, twice reborn, dreams herself towards her destiny, when we move to Fomalhaut (a star 25 light years from Earth) it all becomes a bit humdrum. There's nothing abjectly wrong with the separate tales of Ori and the Librarian, they just lack the spark of imagination that made reading *The Quiet War* and *The Gardens of the Sun* a worthwhile experience.

For example, while Ori's people, The Quick, have been enslaved by The True she has dreams and ambitions that go well beyond her station. When her desires become clear to her fellow compatriots they feel the need to put Ori in her place leading to the sort of earnest and unsubtle pontification you'd expect to hear from Mr Carson on *Downton Abbey*:

"We were made to serve the Trues, and that's what we do," Inas said. "And we do it gladly. And because the Trues made us, Ori, they don't think of us as people. We are their tools, with no more rights to independence than any of their machines. They can send any one of us on the crew anywhere, without explanation or warning. And we obey them because that's what we must do. Not because the only alternative is the long drop, but because it is our duty, and nothing else matters."

Don't get me wrong, I understand the depressing point McAuley is making – that conquering and enslavement of those weaker than us is in our nature, that no matter how advanced we become we will fall back on the well worn grooves of our past actions. This is further reinforced by the feudal society that the Trues have developed, almost medieval in nature, with certain families holding sway and power. But it's not a very interesting argument. Not because it's pessimistic, but because in terms of world building and imagining a future society, it seems like the obvious choice, to argue that humans will be humans. I expected something crunchier from the guy who wrote *The Quiet War*.

The second story involving *The Librarian*, Isak, has an epic fantasy / cyberpunk vibe that wouldn't feel out of place in the 1980s. There's a quest for something vague and mysterious and a battle against demons in

numerous virtual realities. It's, at times, genuinely exciting and engaging but only because it all feels so familiar.

If there's any originality to be found in *In The Mouth of The Whale* it's with the third narrative, a story of a child living in Brazil at a time three or so decades before the events of *The Quiet War*. This section gives us an insight into the upbringing of Sri Hong Owen – a major player in the first two novels. We soon discover that these historical interludes are not entirely accurate, that they're being cobbled together by a mysterious third party with an agenda of its own. Here McAuley critiques the way we all revise history, how we manipulate and change it for our needs, to justify our actions of the present and future.

In the end, though, I couldn't help but feel disappointing by *In The Mouth of The Whale*. There were times that I found myself wanting just a bit more space engineering if it meant evoking a sense of wonder.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Hollow Adventure in the the Quiet Sun Universe

By Charlie Watanabe

Firstly, I'm a big fan of the author and his 'Quiet War' series. However, "In the Mouth of the Whale" is not of the same caliber as either "The Quiet War" or "Gardens of the Sun". These stories re-invigorated the (for me) moribund genre of space opera.

"Whale" is written in the same fashion of the series with alternating narration, and sweeping plot. However there are only three main characters here, one of which is the enigmatic Sri Hong-Owen, a figure in the series. I found Hong-Owen's storyline to be the only one of any interest. The other characters were mere caricatures. In addition, the plot was much more predictable than McAuley's typical work.

In general, other than "The Quiet War" and "Gardens of the Sun" the stories of the series ("Whale" and "Evenings Empires") have been a disappointment. Its not that the author doesn't have skill, I just suspect its that "The Quiet Sun" story has just been told and what has followed are just hollow adventures.

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