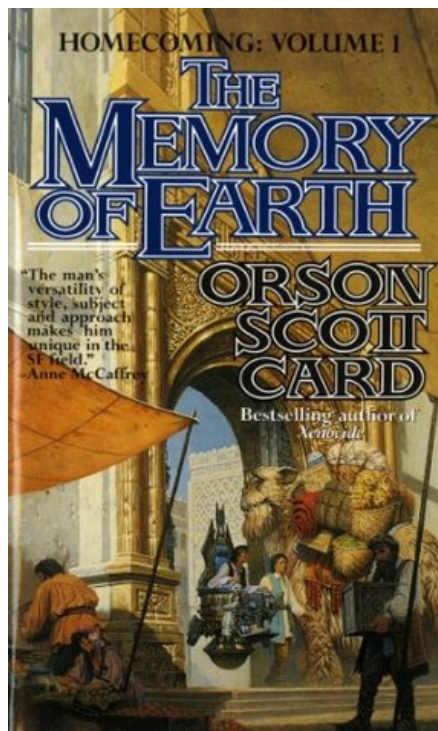




The Memory of Earth

Orson Scott Card

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High above the planet Harmony, the Oversoul watches Its task, programmed so many millennia ago, is to guard the human settlement on this planet-. -to protect this fragile remnant of Earth from all threats. To protect them, most of all, from themselves. The Oversoul has done its job well. There is no war on Harmony. There are no weapons of mass destruction. There is no technology that could lead to weapons of war. By control of the data banks, and subtle interference in the very thoughts of the people, the artificial intelligence has fulfilled its mission. But now there is a problem. In orbit, the Oversoul realizes that it has lost access to some of its memory banks, and some of its power systems are failing. And on the planet, men are beginning to think about power, wealth, and conquest.

The Memory of Earth Details

Date : Published January 15th 1993 by Tor Books (first published 1992)

ISBN : 9780812532593

Author : Orson Scott Card

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy

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From Reader Review The Memory of Earth for online ebook

Travis Bow says

Classic Orson Scott Card... doesn't sound that interesting from the cover blurb, but the execution of the characters makes it a great story in spite of a somewhat brainy and heavily allegorical story line. Got me thinking about some issues:

-What it means to have faith and obey a deity even when you don't agree with or understand why you should... does this make you an idiot/robot, or a very good person?

-Utilitarian ethics: Is it better to do an evil thing to stop an even more evil thing from happening?

-Is it true that some (most) people love control so much that they are constantly, mostly unconsciously, trying to tear others down?

Cons: although the awesome characters and interesting issues kept me turning the pages (or keeping my audiobook playing for hours at a time at least), this wasn't an edge-of-your-seat, can't-wait-to-get-back-to-it kind of book. Also, the ending was a little meh and didn't leave me particularly excited about the next book.

Favorite quotes:

Nafai knew the rules: When a man acts like a child, he's boyish, and everyone's delighted; when a boy acts the same way, he's childish, and everyone tells him to be a man.

The Oversoul has some great purpose here, plans within plans. We listen for its voice, we heed the visions it puts into our minds, but we're still puppets, uncertain why our strings are being pulled, or what our dance will lead to in the end. It isn't right, thought Nafai. It isn't even good, for if the followers of the Oversoul are kept blind, if they can't judge the Oversoul's purpose for themselves, then they aren't freely choosing between good and evil, or between wise and foolish, but are only choosing to subsume themselves in the purposes of the Oversoul. How can the Oversoul's plans be well-served, if all its followers are the kind of weak-souled people who are willing to obey the Oversoul without understanding?

I will serve you, Oversoul, with my whole heart I'll serve you, if I understand what you're trying to do, what it *means*. And if your purpose is a good one.

Who am I to judge what's good and what isn't?

The thought came into Nafai's mind, and he laughed silently at his own arrogance. Who am I, to set myself up as the judge of the Oversoul?

Then he shuddered. What put such a thought into my mind? Couldn't it have been the Oversoul itself, trying to tame me? I will *not* be tamed, only persuaded. I will not be coerced or led blindly or tricked or bullied-I am willing only to be convinced. If you don't trust your own basic goodness enough to tell me what you're trying to do, Oversoul, then you're confessing your own moral weakness and I'll never serve you.

It all spoke of the willingness of people to hurt each other, the burning passion to control what other people thought and did. So many people, in secret, subtle ways, acted to destroy people- and not just their enemies, either, but also their friends. Destroying them for the pleasure of knowing that they had the power to cause pain. And so few who devoted their lives to building other people's strength and confidence. So few who were true teachers, genuine mates.

That's what Father and Mother are, thought Nafai. They stay together, not because of any gain, but because of the gift. Father doesn't stay with Mother because she is good for *him*, but rather because together they can do good for us, and for many others.

Side note: finished listening to this book just as I was reaching the top of Mt. Fuji.

Kent Winward says

The Memory of Earth left me wondering if it is blasphemous for a Mormon to compare God to a computer? The re-telling of the Book of Mormon as science fiction works to create a sense of familiarity, which anyone who knows the Old Testament (let alone the Book of Mormon) will feel as they read the book. The most interesting aspect of this book for me, wasn't the story or the characters, but musing throughout on archetypal story-lines and the moral questions raised and answered by scripture/fiction. Probably the most jarring aspect of the book was the modern sense of morality that was imposed on a clearly tribal and backwards community. I just couldn't buy the Oversoul controlling people's thoughts. Also, the gender wars in the book also seemed to be more of a commentary on modern marriage practices of divorce and step-families, than a futuristic society, but then again, I guess that is the point of science fiction.

Julia says

I liked this whole sci-fi series. I've heard that it has a lot of Mormon themes in it (the author is Mormon or lapsed Mormon or something like that) but to be honest, I didn't notice it at the time I was reading it and it didn't interfere with my enjoyment. Dramatic stories, fun characters, big mysterious computers...

Ahavaa says

Here's the biggest problem with this book: Card's a terrible world-builder.

(Okay, the biggest problem might've been that whoever edited this book didn't feel comfortable telling Orson Scott Card that big chunks needed to be rewritten or scrapped, but I can't be too hard on our hypothetical editor: this book came out in 92, right when Card was big.)

Sure, he's fine when telling us about his world - this is a book about a matriarchy, a city ruled by women, a city where women hold power, and no man can spend even one night inside the city's walls if he doesn't

spend that night in a woman's house.

Okay. Fair enough; a little ridiculous, but okay, I'll play Fantasy Matriarchy with you, Card. How do we play?

Oh, well, it's a matriarchy, but every guard mentioned in the narrative is a man.

Oh! Unmarried men cannot spend the night in the city unless they spend it in a woman's house...unless they're the men selling goods and services in the market, because those markets are open 24-7. Is there a curfew? Is there any way to enforce this particular rule, or are we on the honor system?

Spoiler: throughout the book, hahaha nope, we are on the honor system.

Oh! Uh, if we're talking construction, all of the construction workers are burly men, by the way.

Oh! If we're talking politics: the protagonist's mom has some sway, politically speaking, but every other named character with any influence in the politics of the city is a man. So in this matriarchy, Card gives us one (1) woman with a speaking role who's shown to have political power, and three (3) men with political ambitions and power.

Oh! Um, also every merchant selling goods or handling money is shown to be a man, and all the bankers and stewards mentioned in the book are men. (There's a couple of merchants explicitly identified as female who sell...poetry and history and pornography, but I trust I don't need to explain why this is Not the Matriarchy I'm looking for.)

How is this a matriarchy?

Good question! Men have 75% of the political power, and men are the guards and bankers and construction workers and explorers and tradesmen, and they can enter and leave the city with impunity, and women are singers and dancers and teachers and raise each other's kids, and a couple of them are scientists, and a couple of them are politicians, but mostly: they are actresses and teachers and homemakers.

This is not a Matriarchy, you're scowling. Where are the men crushed under the stiletto of oppression?

I knooooow, I tell you. Look, this is what Card thinks is a matriarchy: exactly the same as the US, circa mid 1980s, but only women are allowed to own residential property inside the city proper, there's a special religious lake that men aren't allowed to visit, and people sign marriage contracts with each other that only last one year.

(ONLY HETERO MARRIAGE. So basically: no-fault divorce is legal, but marriage is still only one man, one women, and gays are still icky, and there is DEFINITELY only two natural genders - which, by the way, is presumably why every man in the book spends 80% of his time panicking about whether he is Manning the Right Way, haha, lil sarcasm for you there - and no one is ever transgender.)

Oh oh! There are "wilders" - naked desert women who wander into Matriarchy City, where the women of Matriarchy City consider them holy and sacred, but ...it is so common for men to rape them in the street that there's slang phrases that have developed to describe the act.

Your Evil Oppressive Matriarchy, folks! Tremble at all of this sexy Male Oppression, y'know?

So there's *that* trainwreck.

Look, just...it needs an EDITOR so badly. Like all of Card's work, our protagonist is a boy whose one weakness is that he is Too Smart, right? So when we're in his head, it is generally acknowledged that his observations and perceptions are *correct*. There's a line in this book where the protagonist seriously considers who is "better," the "brutal but rational men, or the irrational but gentle women," when he's comparing their styles of worship.

SPOILERS: in this book, women worship by going down to their sacred lake, jumping in the water, and tripping balls. Their magic computer gives them hallucinations, but only in that lake.

In this book, *men* worship by going into a fountain and tearing themselves up with barbed rings. Everyone bleeds into the same water.

It is apparently considered pious to submerge your freshly-wounded body in this mix of god-knows-how-many-men's-blood and water*. Why? WHO THE FUCK KNOWS? The only rational explanation is "because otherwise how will you be SURE that everyone has the same amount of hep C and HIV?" but I don't...think that's what Card was going for.

But remember! Men: brutal, rational, (ALL INFECTED WITH EVERY SINGLE DISEASE). Women: gentle, irrational, (AND YET NOT THE ONES WHO ARE GOING TO WIPE OUT THE ENTIRE POPULATION WITH A HARDY STRAIN OF SYPHILIS.)

I could continue picking out the stupid bits - this is a city that doesn't have wagons because wheels are forbidden, and the city is not DIRECTLY on the coast, but somehow *shark fights* that take place in *pools* inside the side are big enough that they're a commonly accepted cultural practice.

(No, really. These people carry their goods in caravans on camelback. Explain *in detail* how you would transport a shark from the ocean to the shark pool without a wagon or wheeled conveyance of some fucking kind.)

The whole book is like this! Maddening, weird, nonsensical bits that don't fit with anything else that Card has told us about this world that he's building. It's a promising first draft from an aspiring writer who's not bad but needs a lot of technical guidance? But not really worth money, honestly.

*this practice is first seen through the eyes of the (probably?) fourteen-year-old protagonist, while he's naked, waist deep in a "swirling, thick mix" of other men's blood and water". there might be a way to interpret this that does not make you want to call Chris Hansen. good luck; i haven't found it.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I haven't set aside a shelf titled "science-fantasy" but now and then there are books that should be called that. This is a slightly odd book in a couple of ways. It's firmly a fantasy but set in a science fiction universe with a science fiction set-up.

I found the book's opening interesting and was drawn into the story. Sadly it tends to lag badly in several places gets bogged down often. Aside from that the story itself is an interesting one and I think many will like it.

There is something I feel bound to mention here. If you know much about Mormon Theology I think a lot of it will jump out at you here. It's often about as subtle as a hammer to the side of the head. Still if you're not familiar with it I doubt you'll even notice it's there and you'll read this as just a "science fantasy" with some odd plot points.

In the end I give this a lukewarm 3 stars. I found much of it interesting, a lot of it slow and almost boring and some of it annoying. For example, for some reason (and this could harken back to what I mentioned earlier) Mr. Card a la Robert Jordan has built a pretty much pointless and (as noted) annoying battle of the sexes motif into the story. I found it a distraction from the book, but there you are.

So decide for yourself. I'm sure some will like this far more than I do and others will like this far less. To each.

I added a "Science-Fantasy" shelf.

Meghan says

Once upon a time, I was a huge fan of Orson Scott Card. I eagerly devoured his short stories, and read his series with high anticipation.. and was never disappointed. Back in those days, his moral messages were heavy, but struck a note that was universal.

I don't know what happened, but I know exactly WHEN it happened.. it was in the middle of the Ender's series.. suddenly the book got preachy, complete with bible quotes and a cast of characters so moralizing that I was barely able to stomach them. And it has only gone downhill from there.

I've tried to listen to this one at least twice... and just... well... no. I don't like the world. I don't like the characters. I don't like the storyline. I don't like the highly sexist feel to the thing, although I couldn't tell you WHY it feels sexist.. it just does.

And I'll confess that this book turns me off (eh-he) early on... Have you ever had a conversation with someone who clearly needed to 'get some'? Yeah.. this book. On and on about who is sleeping with whom, what the contracts are, blah blah blah. Listen: I like sex as much as the next person, and I understand the author thinks 14yo boys think of nothing else (I have a 14yo boy.. I'd argue that point) but.. really. I'm uninterested in a society built entirely on sex. And considering this is supposed to be the Utopia part (before it all goes to hell in a handbasket) well... it already lost me. And this, just.. no way I'm buying it: (view spoiler) No matter why I'm supposed to believe that, it is just too far of a stretch for me.

I won't pretend my opinion is the majority. And you, reader of my review, may very well love this tale. There is no denying that Mr. Card writes a complex story with a complex plot line. His characters always (well, not this one, imho) feel like well-visioned people. From an entirely literal standpoint, his books are 5 stars, and he is obviously a master storyteller. But this is my final try with this particular one, and to even give it an 'ok' rating is saying I liked it more than I really did. On to something else!

(Just a note: I'm not LDS, so any correlations between The Book of Mormon and this are entirely lost on me. I noticed other reviewers who took offense to this as a retelling as that story, but that did not factor into my own read. I disliked this book entirely based on my own preferences.)

Jason says

Fans of ENDER'S GAME--BEWARE! This is not on par with that novel in any way. Personally, I can't believe how many of the novels within this series I've read when I realize I should have ended with this one. To me, this novel felt like it was one of Card's many forgotten manuscripts, written while he was a writer honing his craft, left at the bottom of a desk's drawer in a beat up manila folder to gather dust. Then, when the Ender novels garnered much appraisal & awards, Card's publisher must have asked: "What else you got?" & lo, we have this novel.

It's not a good novel, nor is it the worst. It has a lot to be desired & even though it is the first in a series, its main flaw is failing to make the reader want to continue--to take the journey through so many other books to reach a conclusion. Even by writing that last sentence within this review makes me realize how mediocre this book is. I'd continue with a synopsis but the one Goodreads provides is good enough as an overview. I don't see much point in expounding upon it.

I will say this: There are a lot of blatant Mormon undertones (Card is from Utah & if I remember correctly, an excommunicated Mormon) & the reverse polygamy within the novel is not at all shocking--Women on the planet Harmony can choose more than one male to mate with & it's encouraged--hell, it's contracted! It provides an interesting look at family values within the planet's society & is played out within the main character's family through the interaction between the siblings. Also, the idea that the satellite orbiting the planet, Oversoul, has the ability to block certain ideas that may form within the populations' minds, resulting in no technological advances & weapons, shows how freewill is stunted & human growth with it. Could this be a statement by Card on how religion does the same--by placing blind faith within a god can lead to the hijacking of one's liberties, whether it be vocal or thought? Or is he merely rewriting The Book of Mormon? To emphasize my point: The realization by certain people on the planet Harmony that Earth is something to be sought out again makes me think of the Mormons pilgrimage to their land of Zion. Plus, the Index of the Oversoul is plainly a metaphor for The Book of Mormon & the main character whom the Oversoul mentally communicates with is clearly the society's John Smith.

All these concepts are interesting but are played out within what I believe to be a very weak novel masked in science fiction. They need a stronger structure & a better cast of characters who are far more interesting than the ones presented in THE MEMORY OF EARTH. I wanted to like this novel--I really did--but I think it reveals more of a sermon by Card than an sci-fi epic. I believe he intended to make a great series but there's a reason why certain stories should remain at the bottom of a desk drawer--a reason why they were put there in the first place. It's exactly like what I've said about people who pull "lost" recordings of John Lennon out of the vaults: There's a reason why they're still in the vaults & why they're "lost".

So after reading this one, why do I have two other titles in the series on my list? They're there because I borrowed the audio books from the library when I was driving on a long trip & I wanted to see if the story got any better. It didn't.

Stephanie says

This series had good potential, and I liked this novel, but once the series started getting "preachy" I dropped it like a hot potato. Card is a perfectly decent writer, though his style is pretty straightforward and lacking much flourish, but he let's his personal beliefs creep into most of his works. If it were just a couple of his

novels that were thinly veiled Mormon mythologies it would be fine, but a large percentage of his later work is very colored by his religious beliefs. This novel and the subsequent novels in the series are basically a retelling of the Mormons move from the East coast to Utah with some space thrown in. It's lazy scifi and lazy religious allegory to me. If I don't think about Card's preachiness then I like this novel (solid 3 stars.)

Katie says

This had shades of Asimov's Foundation series, mainly the parts that I liked without the parts I didn't. I felt connected to characters and sucked in to the interesting culture, loved the bits about how there were archaic sayings that had lost meaning and technology that had been lost this far out into humanity's future. Also getting a bit of a sense of the Biblical story of Joseph and his visions and having brothers who resent him. Definitely looking forward to reading more and have not felt let down by any Card book yet.

Emma says

I really enjoyed reading this book. I liked the descriptions of the cultural and political systems used in the setting as they are very different from any other kind I have known of. I have also gotten to like many of the characters, and even some of their strange names, though a few of them still bother me (such as "Luet").

The only reason that I gave this book four stars rather than five is that I would have liked for it to surprise me a bit more. Being very familiar with the story that it is based on (the first few chapters of the Book of Mormon), I knew what to expect every time. That made it interesting for a little while ("How is he going to incorporate *this* detail?"), but then I was disappointed that most of the suspense was lost. I always prefer to discover a story as I read it, and I wasn't able to do that to the degree that I wish I could. I would rather that, instead of simply being a retelling of parts of the Book of Mormon in a science-fiction setting, it took some main themes from the original story and incorporated them into a new story.

Despite that setback, I liked this book a lot and would have other people read it, and will be looking for its sequels next time I'm in a bookstore that has a higher likelihood of carrying more of Orson Scott Card's books than just his most famous ones.

John says

This was the first Orson Scott Card novel I read and I liked it a lot. If I remember correctly I went through the five books in this saga (Homecoming Saga) in about two weeks. Several years later I found out that the series is loosely based on the Book of Mormon (Orson Scott Card is mormon). Go figure.

Mel Windham says

The first I realized right off the bat was that this book was a retelling of the "Book of Mormon." Not the entertaining (and not-so-accurate) musical, but the actual book. Instead of Nephi, the main character is called Nafai. His brothers Laman, Lemuel, and Sam become Elemak, Mebbekew, and Issib. And instead of God leading the way, it's the Oversoul, a supercomputer that watches over humanity on the planet Harmony over

the past forty million years.

At first I thought this was pretty cool and a neat idea, but then as the story progressed, I came to realize that I knew exactly how the book was going to progress. This started to become annoying and distracting. You ever try to read a book when your friend told you how it's going to end?

Also, I think the actual book I read was a first edition. It had many errors such as bad punctuation, unclosed quotes, and misspelled/wrong words. (And it was published by Tor?) I'll just assume these got fixed in later editions. All this came together for me almost as if this were an early attempt at writing from my favorite author, and not a particularly good one--heavily relying on a religious text to guide the plot.

But then I noticed something else. In a way, it was commentary on what could possibly have gone through the heads of Nephi and his brothers as they did what they did in the "Book of Mormon." And when Card's book ended, it did feel like it was somewhat more than an imitation of scripture. I had enjoyed some parts of it even though I knew what was coming. After all, Orson Scott Card always finds a way to bring everything together with a satisfying conclusion.

Ultimately, I recommend reading this book, especially if you're an Orson Scott Card fan. This book tells the story about Nafai and his brothers. After forty million years of decay, the Oversoul computer realizes it's dying and losing influence on men. He/she/it calculates that the humans will destroy themselves. It chooses Nafai's family for reasons that become more apparent in the later books. Nafai's family must flee their extravagant lifestyle and prepare for whatever the Oversoul has in mind.

Eddie D. Moore says

The story was a little hard to get into in the beginning, maybe since the names are very strange. The biblical parallels are obvious, yet they pull the reader deeper into the story.

Mike Hankins says

This is a difficult review for me to write, as it raises the question of what my book reviews need to be. On the one hand, I found this book to be very well-written, yet the themes, implications and general message I profoundly disagreed with and found a little disturbing. To deal with this, I've decided to score this one based on it's craft, not counting "against" it because I happen to disagree with it's message, although it will be impossible for me to make a full review without commenting on it.

If there's one thing Orson Scott Card does well more than anything else, it's character creation. His characters almost always have a depth and pathos that is often lacking in pop sci-fi stories of this type. That tendency is certainly true in the main characters of The Memory of Earth. We follow a group of brothers (and half brothers, begotten through a complex web of regularly shifting marriages) and their sibling rivalries in the midst of a strange society that is simultaneously very primitive, and highly advanced. The world is controlled by The Oversoul, a powerful machine that can influence the minds of humans, essentially, to prevent them from developing technologies that could lead to destruction, such as fast land vehicles, flight, atomic power, etc. Thus, certain technologies such as complex electromagnetic manipulation and powerful computers are common, yet things like cars and explosives are unheard of mysteries. This creates a setting that looks in many ways, like ancient rome, the renaissance, or perhaps the Old Testament, but allows for science fictional high-technology elements as well. It's an interesting mash-up that has a lot of promise.

Card also spends a lot of time developing a matriarchal society with complex family relationships, and a very ordered religious system that is based on worship of The Oversoul. It's an interesting culture, to say the least. Women have more power and prestige than men, often having many husbands, although never simultaneously. Only women are allowed to perform higher religious ceremonies, and have more say in government and politics.

But the intricacies of the unique setting and cultural background is not what the book is about. The main plot concerns the Oversoul becoming weak, losing its influence over humanity, allowing people to think of once forbidden technologies and begin to implement them. But even this plot is not what the story is really about. Most of the plot concerns the main characters--a group of four brothers--and their sibling rivalries. Card gets into the heads of all four, and allows us to see things from their perspective at all times, which is nice. Each character comes across as understandable, and while the one main character is clearly presented as the hero, I felt that I could just as easily "root for" any of the others. This is not true of the book's villain, who is the only character I've ever seen Card present as a completely one dimensional caricature. The villain serves just to create a situation for the protagonists to react to, and while his motivations and actions make sense from a plot perspective, little thought is given to him other than, "he's the bad guy."

And now we come to the real problem of the book. Ultimately, the story is about faith triumphing over reason. This bothers me on a fundamental level. I believe in reason. I believe in rationality. I believe that logic and reasoning should be the largest factor in decision-making. This book features characters who ignore logic and reason, acting irrationally because of their faith in something they have no direct evidence for. Some people may find that uplifting, but I do not. However, I was still interested, because, in this universe Card had created, we weren't talking about mystical gods, paranormal weirdness, or cosmic forces. The "God" of this book is a computer, a literal Deus ex Machina that was created by humans. From the perspective of the characters it might look like faith, but I was curious about the implications that the object of their faith was a man-made machine. These implications were not explored, but this is only the first book in a series, so I had hope that this line of reasoning would be developed.

So, I did something that I often do when I read the first book in a series and find myself intrigued, but also filled with trepidation. I've been burned by enough seemingly interesting books whose sequels ended up being absolutely awful. So I went online and looked at spoilers. And boy was I surprised.

I had obviously noticed all the Old Testament references in the book. Many plot points seemed to be mash-ups of Old Testament stories, a little bit of Joseph here, and little bit of Abraham there, etc. But that's only because I am unfamiliar with the Book of Mormon. Apparently, this story is an exact retelling of the Book of Mormon, to the point where some character's names are only a few letters off. Not having read Mormon literature, I can't say this for sure, but it appears to be the consensus of readers. And apparently, the subsequent works in this series only continue to exploit this connection. The implications of the culture Card creates, the unique setting, and the consequences of having faith in a man-made machine are, according to plot summaries of the works, not explored at all. The apparent consensus is that this series is essentially nothing more than Mormon propaganda designed to proselytize readers.

Some fans might think that harsh, and, while I can't say for absolute certain that this is the case since I haven't actually read them all, the consensus is so strong that I have absolutely no interest in reading the rest of these. The only elements I was interested in are ignored, and the points that I had misgivings about are amplified. So I won't be continuing this series. I have far too many better books on my "to-read" shelf to spend time reading Mormon commercials wrapped in science fiction trappings.

Stephen Gallup says

More or less by chance I've been reading a lot by Orson Scott Card recently--probably because each title I've picked up seems different enough from the others to make me curious about the author's range.

Along the way I've noticed that a fair number of other readers object to the author's themes and messages, calling the writing "preachy," "Mormon propaganda," "religious allegory," etc. Personally, I wouldn't recognize an LDS message if it bit me on the butt. I do react badly to being preached at in fiction, but have failed to discern preaching in the four or so novels by Card digested thus far. Sure, he reuses some classic/Scriptural themes such as (in this case) hostile siblings, the disdained boy thrust into a man's world, and the necessity of giving up what's known and comfortable in favor of the unknown. And there are moral dilemmas and conflicts, in which one might find a lesson if so inclined. So what? Highly regarded writers have been doing that for a very long time. Everything handed down in our culture is fair game for a writer, and mining that material is not propaganda until the author begins drawing conclusions and passing judgment for us or noting parallels to current-day scenarios. You're free to do that while reading (I often do), but your takeaway and mine could be quite different. So I fail to see what the critics are talking about.

The story is set on another planet, in the very, very distant future. It had been colonized by survivors from Earth, who'd established a supercomputer, called the Oversoul, to monitor/direct their activities to the extent that their descendants would never again resort to war. War apparently all but destroyed Earth, although there are hints that some few people may have remained behind there.

At this point, little or nothing is generally understood about such ancient history, and even the existence of the Oversoul is questionable. The problem is that now the Oversoul is wearing out. Its influence on human thought and activity is now limited to just a few receptive individuals. The rest are betraying one another and making dangerous choices.

Of course, people have always retained the capacity for being disagreeable. One character who has pondered the question explains it thus:

"The Oversoul doesn't want to stop us from being human. Including all the rotten things we do to each other. It's just trying to hold down the *scale* of our rottenness."

But without more active intervention, that rottenness is now getting out of hand. Speaking directly to Nafai, the main character, the Oversoul says, "I *would* help the good people of Basilica. But there aren't enough of them. The will of the city is for destruction. How then can I keep it from being destroyed? ... They are far too few, those who love the living city instead of desiring to feed from its corpse."

Apparently the baton is being passed to Nafai and any others able to join the cause. And that more or less covers the arc of the narrative in this installment of the story. It looks like there are four sequels. It's a fairly safe guess that they will involve an effort to reconnect with Earth, which the Oversoul says now has a master computer of its own. (I might read the next volume, but at the moment feel more inclined to go back to Card's Old Testament dramatizations, like *Rebekah*, if I read more of his work.)

Again, I don't see anything wrong with this story. Fantasy is not my genre of choice, but what we have here is a perfectly good tale. I did kind of smile when the enfeebled Oversoul enabled Nafai and the other good guys to slip past hostile guards, because it reminded me of this

Maybe that counts as cheating.

G33z3r says

An interesting story premise, and a well-written narrative, though only the start of what will apparently be a very long tale. Unfortunately, I found all the major characters so obnoxious (and frequently stupid) that I have no interest in reading the rest of their story.

Shelly says

I'm not an Orson Scott Card hater and though I despise many of his political views I am a fan of a lot of his work, especially the Ender Game series which I think is terrific. This one, I just didn't like. It wasn't horrible, but it is certainly nowhere near as good as the Ender series. Plus, all of the things that I don't like about Card (e.g., politics and moralizing) seemed to be front and center in this story. It was just too much and I didn't enjoy reading it.

Scott Marlowe says

So I'd never read anything by Orson Scott Card before. Of course I had heard of him and seen his books all over, but he was just one of those authors I never quite got around to reading. While that misstep has now been corrected, I had to put down The Memory of Earth.

I fully intended to read the book front to back, but something had been nagging me almost since the beginning. Given that I was a newcomer to Card's work, I was keeping an open mind and had no idea what to expect except that he's a prolific author so his stuff must be good, right? The thing is, the book isn't bad, it's just not good. It's a great idea--benevolent supercomputer controls peoples' minds, keeping them from destroying each other like they did literally 30 or so million years ago on Earth. Except that the computer starts to break down and needs help, so it starts to send certain individuals visions (that's how it communicates) saying more or less that it needs help. Sounds good, right?

Except the book really lacks two things: (1) execution and (2) complexity. What I basically mean by #1 is that not enough happens, and, when something does happen, I often thought, "oh, that's nice". Not nearly enough suspense and the characters really aren't engaging enough. #2 has to do with the author's style. It's too simplistic. He tells me that this character is angry, and this one is sad instead of showing it, or something happens where it's painfully obvious what's going on, but Card has to come along and throw in an explanatory sentence just in case you didn't get it. It was annoying to say the least.

One of these days I'll take a look at Ender's Game, if only because it's considered the author's seminal work. For now, though, Card fades to the background on my reading list.

This review at <http://www.scottmarlowe.com/post/Book...>

Jennifer Busch says

Orson Scott Card is a very creative science fiction and fantasy writer! This book (series) is a great look into the philosophy of life on other planets and the possibility of higher intelligences. The last books in the series introduce new characters that are not as likeable as the earlier books and the storyline suffers because of it.

D. A. says

MEMORY is one of those books you either love or you hate. Well, let me revise that. Love, like, or hate.

I liked this book. It reminded me a good deal about DUNE (which if you haven't read yet, you should). It has a strange culture, one that mixes old school tech--like horse-back riding and actually walking from place to place and swords and arrows--with cool new tech--clearly illustrated by the Oversoul's mental blocking and Issib's flotation devices.

Card draws up a fascinating group of people, throws them into a plan made by God (i.e., the Oversoul), and then proceeds to wreak merry havoc with their lives. Actually, now that I'm thinking about it, I can draw up a lot of parallels with DUNE. There's a messiah, swords, an assload of religious fanatics, and the sense throughout the book that shit is going down. There's even a desert, although Harmony is not a true desert planet.

MEMORY is a clear allusion to the Bible. Or, in Card's case, the Book of Mormon. (Yes, Orson Scott Card is, in fact, a Mormon.) There's a whole lot of religion in this book, enough so that it could very well make you want to put it down. But that's also where the book gets a lot of its shine. Much of the action is the play between two differing religions that are essentially praying to the same god in different ways.

But I digress.

On to the point of this review!

The book, as a whole, is decent. Certainly, it has its flaws: I don't love Card's dialogue (at times, it sounds too much like a lecture, or a sermon), and sometimes Card dips into *dues ex machina* just a tad too much.

But the *dues ex machina* can be explained by the Oversoul doing its thing, so I guess I can live with that. And the characters are very well-rounded. They're full, with strengths and weaknesses like we all have. They speak in bias. They're not perfect. Nafai--the central character of the book--is a young boy thrust into this world as much by the hand of the Oversoul as his own meddling. The plot is very well paced (something I think Card does very well, and is probably one of his greatest strengths as a writer), beautifully written, and masterfully done. It wraps up the episode storyline, while leaving enough tension in the end to make us want to read more.

All in all, I think that Ender has overshadowed most of Card's other work, and this is truly a good series. It's not perfect, just like his characters, but that's where a lot of the joy comes from. Besides, what series is ever perfect? No book series--fantasy or otherwise--perfectly wraps up everything so that the readers are completely satisfied. Or at least all the readers.

I would warn you, though, that if you can't stand a story with extreme religious undertones, don't read this.
