



The Burning Skies

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In his electrifying debut, *The Mirrored Heavens*, David J. Williams created a dark futuristic world grounded in the military rivalries, terror tactics, and political wrangling of our own time. Now he takes his masterful blend of military SF, espionage thriller, and dystopian cyberpunk one step further--to the edge of annihilation

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Life as U.S. counterintelligence agent Claire Haskell once knew it is in tatters--her mission betrayed, her lover dead, and her memories of the past suspect. Worse, the defeat of the mysterious insurgent group known as Autumn Rain was not as complete as many believed. It is quickly becoming clear that the group's ultimate goal is not simply to destroy the tenuous global alliances of the 22nd century--but to rule all of humanity. And they're starting with the violent destruction of the Net and the assassination of the U.S. president. Now it's up to Claire, with her ability to jack her brain into the systems of the enemy, to win this impossible war. Battling ferociously across the Earth-Moon system, and navigating a complex world filled with both steadfast loyalists and ruthless traitors, Claire must be ready for the Rain's next move. But the true enemy may already be one step ahead of her.

The Burning Skies Details

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Author : David J. Williams

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From Reader Review The Burning Skies for online ebook

Enso says

This is Williams' follow-up to his first novel, **The Mirrored Heavens**. Together, they form the first two parts of a trilogy but can be read alone (though I wouldn't recommend doing so).

The Burning Skies (TBS) picks up four days after the end of The Mirrored Heavens (TMH). The setting for the novels is a century from now, 2110, in a world divided in a cold war between two superpowers, the Americans (the good ol' USA) and the Eurasions, which are a joint power of the Chinese and the Russians (joined in loathing self-protection). TMH focused on an attack on the space elevator, a "beanstalk," jointly built by the superpowers by a terrorist organization known as the Autumn Rain. (As an aside, Williams mentions that he started writing the first novel well before 9/11.) TBS deals with the aftereffects of that attack, focusing on a summit between the powers at a neutral (and huge) space platform in orbit and the attempts by the Autumn Rain to disrupt this summit and kill the leaders of the superpowers.

The pace of the novel is staggering. "Frenetic" is the word that I use to describe it and this applied to the first novel as well so I expect it will be a feature of the entire trilogy. The action is non-stop and Williams increases the subjective speed by using no chapters and telling the story entirely in the first person. We only know what they know, as they discover it through their trials and attempts to survive the chaos. The world of TBS is one of orbital directed energy weapons that work at the speed of light. If a weapon has line of site on you (or your cities), it can instantly destroy what it sees. Think of mutual assured destruction cubed with a high tech and nearly invisible Al-Qaeda thrown into the mix trying to disrupt things. The characters are all either soldiers, intelligence operatives, or other down and dirty sorts working for the military, which has effectively taken over the United States in a perpetual paranoid military situation. As one of the characters comments, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand was doing last week and things are so compartmentalized and factionalized within this military apparatus that double-agents, plans within plans, and schemes to take control, either directly in a coup or indirectly through leaping atop the chaos, are the constant order of the day. To add to this, the characters live in a world where memories can be erased, altered, or added and people can be conditioned with preset commands. It isn't uncommon for characters to be on a mission where the ends are not known to them but appear as memories in their minds as the mission progresses. It is all very paranoia inducing and stressful and each of the characters reflects that.

The characters generally fall into two official types, those of "mechs" and "razors." Mechs are the hardcore soldiers. They fight in mechanized and powered armor covered in weaponry and meshed to other mechs or their razors. Razors are normally paired with mechs in the field and are something like Gibson's console cowboys crossed with an intelligence agent. They hack the systems and acquire the data to give their mechs a chance to survive the environment in which they find themselves.

Beyond this, I'm not going to get into the overall plot of the book as it would be fairly hard to do and avoid spoilers.

It was a very quick read and I quite enjoyed the book. There are twists upon twists as things progress at lightning speed within it. The only difficulty I really had with the book is that there are a lot of viewpoint characters. There three primary ones but a number of secondaries as well. With the changes back and forth, especially when the plot points are divergent, it can get a little complex to tell who was where and, wait, is this person a mech or a razor or whose side are they on? If I'd read TBS right after TMH, I would have had less difficulty but it had been a year, at least, and it took a while for me to reassemble some of the character backgrounds. While the book stands alone, reading them together (and in order) would really enhance the experience.

I am very much looking forward to reading the third book when it comes out. Williams has recently submitted the manuscript to his publisher, so I expect it in a year or so. If you wish to see what he's up to in the meantime, he has a site for the books at autumnrain2110.com and he maintains a blog there as well.

Raja says

This is runaway bullet train that never so much as slows down along the way. I'm enjoying this series more, but I'm still somewhat frustrated by the plot twists that come out of nowhere with zero foreshadowing. Now, I have the added frustration of not understanding why certain characters made the choices they did, because somehow despite them being significant POV characters, we're given almost no insight into their motivations. Since the book doesn't even pause at the end, let alone conclude, I'm expecting some of this to be cleared up at the beginning of the third (and final) book in the trilogy.

The author claims this book is intended to be suitable for people who didn't read *The Mirrored Heavens*, but I think reading it should be a prerequisite for reading this one.

Mark Ames says

Okay, this is non-stop action. Talk about an action film waiting to happen, I say that not in a bad way. Well anyway solid action adventure stuff that builds on the first novel, *Mirrored Heavens*. In fact it is set four days after that novel which leads to my only complaint. I'm having a hard time understanding time in this novel. Things seem to happen much too quickly in terms of travel and preparation of characters for their actions. A quibble I admit and one that I overlook because if you like sci-fi actions novels well this is that for sure. Lots of twists, turns, betrayals and even some droll comedy this time around (much needed if you ask me). Recommended to action adventure lovers.

seak says

Seak's Intro -

This combined review has been in the works for some time now, actually since before EdifanoB started his own blog, Edi's Book Lighthouse, so without further ado, here's Edi's intro:

Edi's Intro -

This is nothing new under the sun. Two guys decide to write a combined review. This is something new for us. It is our debut. For the first time ever Seak and ediFanoB went into a huddle – virtually. Mails made it possible.

Enough chitchat! Before we go into details we proudly present our "victim."

Science fiction - 22nd century - Settlements on the moon - Space stations - Cyber space - Terrorism - Second book in the Autumn Rain series This is (drum roll):

Burning Skies (2009) [US:] [UK:] by David J. Williams

Life as U.S. counterintelligence agent Clair Haskell once knew it is in tatters - her mission betrayed, her lover dead, and her memories of the past suspect. Worse, the defeat of the mysterious insurgent group known as Autumn Rain was not as complete as many believed.

It is quickly becoming clear that the group's ultimate goal is not simply to destroy the tenuous global alliances of the 22nd century - but to rule all of humanity. And they're starting with the violent destruction of the Net and the assassination of the U.S. President. Now it's up to Claire, with her ability to jack her brain into the systems of the enemy, to win this impossible war.

Battling ferociously across the Earth-Moon system, and navigating a complex world willed with both steadfast loyalists and ruthless traitors, Claire must be ready for the Rain's next move. But the true enemy may already be one step ahead of her."

Neither of us is either as talented as David J. Williams nor we are literary critics.

That means we can deliver only a whiff of the BURNING SKIES pace and atmosphere.

But we deliver you our honest impression of the book. We talk about things the three W's.

Come on you should know what does this means:

What = the story, Where = the world, Who = the characters

Finally we round off the picture with additional thoughts and er, er, er, a recommendation.

And now lift the curtain. and read the two two cents from Seak and ediFanoB:

What -The Story

Edi

BURNING SKIES continues where THE MIRRORED HEAVENS (Seak's review) ended. And David J. Williams is getting better which is a surprise because BURNING SKIES has been a great read. There is more action, more intrigues, more fights, more character insights. It is a gripping mix of brawn and brain. The twists and turns forced me to read several passages again. Who is friend or fiend? Who follows which plans? There is no time to stop and think about it because you have permanently fight for you live. You even don't know if your memories are real or just hacked by someone else. The story is told in present tense which intensify the story. The point of view changes often which can be a bit confusing at times. All in all it is an extraordinary good "middle" book of a series. It is even possible to read BURNING SKIES without know THE MIRRORED HEAVENS! But I highly, highly recommend to start with THE MIRRORED HEAVENS because it makes it easier to understand the story and it is an awesome read. Anyway I like to use pictures.

BURNING SKIES is like a roller coaster ride where you wear a helmet with no visor and you get permanently conflicting information of your surrounding and yourself. And during the ride you have to hit the bull's eye with darts. ATTENTION: Don't forget to breathe!

Seak

Loved the story especially the twists and turns that come out of nowhere. You're convinced that a character is on one side and suddenly he's on the other, but is he really? Who knows. The Burning Skies kept me guessing the whole time while surprising me constantly. I think Edi explains it best with the roller coaster simile...I forgot to breathe plenty of times.

The Characters

Edi

The paperback copy contains a page titled Dramatis Personae which shows the names and the aka of the main characters. I think you need it because David J Williams uses sometimes the first name or the last name or the aka for his persons. That makes it difficult to identify them during the faced paced action. Each of the main characters has his own background story and personality which makes them believable. I must say I have been fascinated by Claire Haskell aka Manilishi. Used by different parties, never sure about her own memories but intelligent. She is a highly skilled super-razor. what will be her fate? You never know who will survive. Survive as a human being or as a peace of software.

Seak

I really like Spencer for some reason. Maybe I relate to him the most. I love a story where the little is expected of a character, but he blows you away and overcomes the odds. I also can't get the scene out of my head of Linehan jumping through space without a suit on. That was just plain awesome and he's just plain crazy.

What's great is that you're going back and forth between each of the characters so quickly that although it's harder to get to know them, the sense of mystery about each of them is kept up. The power-team of 3 (who came together in the first book) is also just cool. What can't they blow their way through?

The World

Seak

The world is a very real not-to-distant future. The idea behind the Zone is completely realistic, I mean, everything's already connected digitally and it's almost like the hackers (razers) have realistic magical powers to be able to quickly hack an attack before it comes at them.

The world building in general was a bit confusing for me because of the fast-paced nature of the story. I had a hard time visualizing the Europa platform especially during the huge fight scene that goes on for half the book.

Edi

I agree with Seak in this case. My paperback copy contains a picture of the EUROPA PLATFORM with explanations which is helpful. The interesting thing is that David J. Williams took a lot of things directly from NASA papers. Anyway I highly recommend to read his guest posts over at Mentatjack where the author explains parts of the technology.

David J Williams Guest Post1 - Space-elevator

David J Williams Guest Post 2 - O'Neill-cylinders

David J Williams Guest Post 3 - Project Orion

And of course you should not miss a visit of the Autumn Rain Trilogy site.

Additional thoughts

Edi

The whole concept of the series is great. From beginning to end BURNING SKIES (and also THE MIRRORED HEAVENS) is an unbelievable good mix of continuously action, technology and physics on a high level which catapults you though the story. Can't wait to read the conclusion of the series: THE MACHINERY. And this mix This perfect mix of physics, technology, and action continuously propels the action in Burning Skies, from start to finish.

Seak

I still think the razer/mech pairing is awesome and creates some interesting twists because of how much the razer knows that the mech just has to accept. I liked the idea of programmed memories and objectives. You have to start the mission before you even know what you're supposed to do. That was really interesting especially the way Williams worked that to further the plot.

Recommendation

Seak

Definitely recommended. I liked Burning Skies even more than The Mirrored Heavens. We got to see more of the characters' point of view and there was even more non-stop action... and it was really cool too. :) Note: the author mentions at the end of The Burning Skies that this book can be read without reading The Mirrored

Heavens first.

4.5 out of 5 Stars

Edi

I don't have a rating system. I thought it would be a good idea to give word to one of the characters. And this is the message I received from Strom Carson (aka the Operative): "What the f*ck you want from me? You shouldn't trust Seak and ediFanoB. They are definitely members of Rain. Why the f*ck you hesitate to buy and read BURNING SKIES. We deliver you a hell of a ride. I promise you non-stop, breath taking action. We f*ck your brain until you no more longer know if you are male or female. Do you really exist? Or are you just a peace shit of software which easily can be deleted? There is only one way to find out: Read the AUTUMN RAIN trilogy!!!" I'm sorry for the rude remarks. You will understand when you read the books.

Kenneth says

Trash by any other name is still trash. This guy is the bottom of the heap

Jason Kelley says

The entire first half of the book is one continuous action sequence.
Awesome.

Jamie McFarlane says

I found the beginning of the book quite hard to get into, it's been a few years since I read Mirrored Heavens so the characters and ending of that book weren't clear in my mind. The back of the book says you can read this without having read MH but I wouldn't recommend it. And if you read MH I would read this right after so it's fresh in your mind. That's being said once I remembered who was who and the action started to flesh out a bit more I thoroughly enjoyed this book, will be heading out to pick up part 3 today so that I can start it with the characters still clear in my head.

Joe says

The pace of action William's is able to maintain is impressive and a lot of fun. It sort of stutter steps when the plot gets twisty, but when this thing is barreling towards a target it's a roaring good time. Book three, here I come!

edifanob says

Nearly non stop action. Sometimes confusing.

Full review in progress

LMW says

OK, I am befuddled. The first book was great, I gave it 5 stars. This one I just could not finish. I dragged myself 2/3 the way through it and gave up. What happened?

Joshua Palmatier says

Everything in this book--the length of the scenes, the quick jumps from character to character, the way the scenes are structured--is designed to make the book MOVE! And that's the sense you get from the very first page. The pace is fast, with multiple plot threads to follow through multiple characters, all woven together and meshing by the end. In fact, the entire first two-thirds of the book is really one long scene, with every twist and turn you could think of (and some you didn't) coming into play.

The Burning Skies is the sequel to **The Mirrored Heavens** and pretty much picks up four days after the events in the first book. I'd suggest you read the first book before diving into this one, or the action won't make a whole lot of sense. The terrorist group Autumn Rain continues to harass the world, this time on the Europa Platform, a neutral territory that contains New Zurich and New London . . . along with a safe house for the U.S. President. And that's the target: the President. And who is loyal and who isn't as the fighting escalates is what drives most of the tension throughout the novel.

And this is also the book's major drawback: the question as to who is doing what for what reason and why makes it nearly impossible to know who's "good" and who's "bad." I didn't know who to root for, and the twists and turns became so convoluted that I ended up simply sitting back and not trying to figure out who was doing what to whom. Part of the problem was that the twists and turns were so numerous, but another part of the problem was how David J. Williams kept the motivations, etc, hidden by having oblique references to what was really going on at the end of a scene before jumping to another POV character. This has the effect of increasing the tension . . . but also the confusion because there is never a straightforward answer to all of the many questions. And when it's used too much, it can get annoying.

So, in the end, it was an enjoyable ride, but it would have been MORE enjoyable if I'd known who to root for and had been able to follow all of the twists and turns. Will I buy the third book (titled **The Machinery of Light** I believe, coming in May 2010)? Yes. I'm definitely intrigued by the story, the world that David has created, and the outcome of all of the twists and turns. There's some spectacular worldbuilding here, and some interesting characters.

Mark says

So in this second book of David's series, we're back to the action in the 22nd century pretty much where we left things at the end of *The Mirrored Heavens*. The Autumn Rain group have destroyed the Earth's Phoenix Space Elevator and much of what was there at the beginning.

In this second book, things happen mainly off planet. Despite the actions in *The Mirrored Heavens*, the terrorist group Autumn Rain have not been defeated. In an attempt to create peace between different Earth

factions, a top secret meeting between the US President and the Eurasian Coalition has been arranged on the Europa platform, two O Neill space stations built into an asteroid at L5.

However, as you might expect, the situation soon deteriorates rapidly as we end up with Europa being compromised, surrounded by spaceships at standoff positions and an attack by Rain commandos with plans to assassinate US President Andrew Harrison being initiated as part of the Autumn Rain plot, to destroy Earth alliances and dominate humanity.

To this we have the book written as before in short burst chapters from a number of perspectives, the main characters in the book. Returning are Claire Haskell, US counterintelligence agent (Razor), now on the run after the events of *The Mirrored Heavens*; Stefan Lynx and Leo Saramax, two other Razor operatives met previously, Strom Carson, Razor leader and member of the elite Praetorian triad and Lyle Spencer, undercover operative.

The narrative moves quickly and at times blindingly fast between these characters. Those who have read the previous novel will be aware of this – others may find that takes a little bit of getting used to. At times, this can lead to characters being a tad interchangeable if you're not careful, though there are helpful hints along the way, such as the main characters each being given a symbol to show from which perspective the narrative is coming from.

Haskell is soon given protection by the command of *The Throne* (Harrison) and is put under the protection of Gunnar Huselid (*The Hand*), the Commander of the Praetorian Guard. Her ability to hack into Autumn Rain's cyber-network makes her a valuable asset in the fight against terrorism and may just give the superpowers the edge in the battle. The scenes where Haskell is protected and moved to safety whilst Europa is under attack are brilliant, everything Star Wars stormtroopers should be.

However things are not perhaps as clear as they at first seem to be.

What we have here is David's style of fast-paced action and complex political machinations. There are intricate power plays and struggles for power as things reassert themselves, crossed and counter-crossed agents where no one trusts anyone else and the differentiation between right and wrong is deliberately blurred.

Such actions and style are quite filmic. In places the rather expletive-heavy dialogue reads as if it were part of a script rather than a novel. Like the fast-cut style of 21st century TV, the book assaults the reader from different perspectives throughout. You do have to follow things closely, especially when events are moving very quickly. This is not a book to skim through! Less focussed readers may find they have to backtrack at times, though the plotting and the consequences of such manoeuvrings are quite ingenious.

Likewise, the ending of the novel is brilliant – like the ending of *24* but in an SF setting, and leaves the reader wanting to know how things will change next. I'm not going to spoil it here, but it is pretty awesome.

Which is a good thing, especially as the next book in the series - *Machinery of Light* – is now available.

If you want to read complex, fast-paced SF, where the next plot-event is never obvious, then this is a book for you.

Cheryl says

Burning Skies continues where Mirrored Heavens left off and doesn't miss a beat as it keeps you guessing the whole way through with old, new and phantom characters. I LOVED the character flow chart in the index/front of the book, maybe it's just me, but, I continuously flipped back and forth as I was reading (just to make sure I was keeping all the characters, their loyalties and backgrounds straight.) It works as long as you trust the author and/or characters to really be who they say they are and honestly on the team they say they're on. (2/3 through I almost made my own flow chart/diagram, instead I simply buckled up to enjoy the freaking crazy, turbulent, fast ride.) Most the time the "new truth" (AKA twist/turns, revelations) is either kicking you in the teeth or laughing at you as you try to make heads or tails of its metamorphosing act. Go ahead, try to stay one step ahead of the story, I dare you. I couldn't, so onto book 3.

Kelli says

Shallowly-written and a waste of time. I gave it 100 pages, but there was literally nothing for me to sink my teeth into. Not characters, not plot, not setting. I was basically just looking at a random bunch of stuff that added no actual value to the paper it was printed on. I don't think I have ever come across an emptier book.
