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The global war on terror has a new front—the very edge of outer space.

In the year 2020, Kazumi Kimura, proprietor of shooting star forecast website Meteor News, notices some orbiting space debris moving suspiciously. Rumors spread online that the debris is actually an orbital weapon targeting the International Space Station. Halfway across the world, at NORAD, Staff Sergeant Darryl Freeman begins his investigation of the debris. At the same time, billionaire entrepreneur Ronnie Smark and his journalist daughter prepare to check in to an orbital hotel as part of a stunt promoting private space tourism. Then Kazumi receives highly sensitive information from a source claiming to be an Iranian scientist. And so begins an unprecedented international battle against space-based terror that will soon involve the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, NORAD, and the CIA.

Orbital Cloud Details

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From Reader Review Orbital Cloud for online ebook

A.M.G. says

Rating: 2.7 / 5

I'm sure that Taiyo Fujii meant this to be a greater book than it actually is. Just based on the summary alone, I was hooked on the idea. Something space-related--check. Cool cover--check. Unique author that I'd never heard of--check. Assortment of fun characters--eh, so-so.

To be honest, I think that I was expecting this to be something like *The Collapsing Empire* by John Scalzi, which I read last year and consequentially made an insta-fave right after my first read. (Will be re-reading that again this year as soon as the sequel comes out.) But, alas, it turns out that Mr. Fujii just doesn't have the same storytelling skill that Mr. Scalzi has.

To sum up why I put this book down after reading only about 125 or so pages of it, it's not that the idea isn't interesting, because it is. Set to take place in 2020 with the threat of North Korea as the enemy in a post-Cold War battle for space (with no war actually breaking out yet, but it's still that same paranoia of before), an object, SAFIR-3 is sent into space and defies all expectations as it accelerates the higher it goes, contrary to what was expected. This raises some select few eyebrows, which are elaborated on by the author as he zigzags from character to character, but the problem turns out to be bigger than that.

There are tons of events and characters and personalities and perspectives all expressed in the story, and I really did like some characters like Jamshed, Akari, the "man Friday", and so on, so I congratulate the author for making the characters interesting, given that he attributes only a limited amount of space in each chapter per character. However, as is often the case for me personally as a reader, just the characters alone aren't enough to really carry the story through.

The biggest problem with this novel that brought it into the boredom corner of my mind is that there were too many technical terms and calculations and technical visualizations, etc. that I didn't understand, and this took away from my enjoyment of the story. There's a point in every reader's experience, when they start skipping over paragraphs that contain data that they don't want to read, that one starts to pinpoint as the time to set a book aside. Or, even more likely, that time is when one has to continuously remind themselves that they *should* read the book. "Should" is for a job or for school--never for recreational reading.

As such, with no hard feelings on my end and complete liberty to set this one aside, I move on to something that will hopefully appeal to me more.

Stephen Douglas Rowland says

Neat story, interesting enough to get through, but overlong and I absolutely hate Fujii's writing style -- so many cliches. It's a big novel that plays like a colossal Hollywood blockbuster that nobody ever remembers.

the gift says

exactly the book you do not want to give to someone to introduce science fiction. this is hard science. i do

not know much physics or astrophysics but got some of the ideas, though i do not know if you really need 528 pages of not-very-convincing espionage, simple characters, linear plotting, minimal poetics, to get them across. there are a lot of numbers, tech, computers, geek heroes, but this made me think in comparison the last paul auster book read: not that i had similarly high expectations but i did read this in three big chunks, less happy each time, and figuring, as this is Japanese, perhaps it is going somewhere interesting- no. if i had had another book to read... well if literature is auster, this is sf, both are prolix and disappointing and really not likely interesting to each other's readers...

Charl says

"Orbital Cloud" is a good, plausible near-future story that enjoyed right up until the author flubbed his science completely, totally negating the heroes' triumphant destruction of the threat.

Warning: Major spoilers ahead!

First he describes a formation of AWACS aircraft flying above the satellite cloud, upside down so their radars could get a good image of them.

Wait, what?! AWACS are aircraft — it's impossible for them to leave the atmosphere, much less reach LEO and maneuver. So how would they get above the satellite cloud? That's like having someone drive from California to Hawaii.

That flub shattered my immersion completely, but I could simply ignore it and continue reading.

Until they started cutting the tethers. The plan was to beam energy at the satellites at a frequency and power level such that they'd only pick up energy when they're perpendicular to the energy beam. That way they can control when the tether burns through by where they aim from. And by cutting the tethers when they're perpendicular to the direction of orbit, one satellite in each pair slows and drops to Earth, and the other flies completely out of the Solar System.

So far, so good. To beam the energy so the tethers burn through at the right time you'd have to be ahead of or behind the cloud, but by positioning yourself in a slightly higher or lower orbit, you should be able to avoid and collisions with the released satellite pairs. You'd have to adjust your position frequently, but it's doable.

However, he then has them beaming the energy from the Earth's surface. The way they work, the tethered pairs spin in a plane tangent to the Earth's surface. Which means they'd always be perpendicular to energy beamed from the surface, and they'd have no control over when the individual tethers burned through. Leaving them with the very same random dispersal of the untethered elements they're trying to avoid.

Denise says

Full of complex IT and orbital physics, so much so I was a bit concerned I might need to be more knowledgeable to continue reading. But the story that unfolds is of the work it takes to solve a LEO terrorist attack is accessible and enjoyable.

Peter Tillman says

From Rachel Cordasco:

"Space tethers, Iranian scientists, Japanese tech wizards, NORAD, and the CIA- you know you're in for a wild ride. And Orbital Cloud certainly delivers, pulling the reader into a complex story about space terrorism and political intrigue, in which some of the greatest scientific minds must race against the clock to stop what could become a global disaster. This is Fujii's second novel translated into English (after Gene Mapper), and it's a must-read."

<http://www.tor.com/2017/07/11/tor-com...>

Ernest says

When Kazumi Kimura discovers that the orbit of a spent rocket booster is increasing rather than degrading, he posts an article about it on his website, Meteor News. When Ozzy Cunningham, former realtor to tech startups and now retired and obsessed with astrophotography, sees the post, he turns his lens to the sky and captures images of the anomalous object for his own post, but decides to add some click-bait to it by speculating that it's a kinetic strike platform, dubbing it the "Rod from God." That's not true, but it works just fine for the terrorist nation behind what's actually going on, hiding their intent until they're ready.

They've put up some 40 thousand tiny spacecraft which use a revolutionary power and propulsion technique developed by an Iranian graduate student, who doesn't know that his thesis paper has found a receptive audience after being ignored by his adviser. The Rod from God ideal doesn't get any traction with Kazumi, or NORAD for that matter, but they quickly realize that something potentially more dangerous is going on and a tale of international intrigue and space science takes off complete with web developers saving the world, CIA agents holding project meetings, scientists and engineers not being given the support they need and getting even, and a tech entrepreneur and his journalist daughter in an orbital hotel on a collision course with disaster.

Taiyo Fuji is an award winning Japanese SF author whose first book, Gene Mapper, was the #1 Kindle title for Amazon.co.jp in 2012. Orbital Cloud, his second novel, swept a number of awards in Japan for its 2014 release, and was published in English in March 2017, but hasn't gotten a lot of attention. That's too bad, because the thinking in this sf/techno story is on a par with James Cambias second novel (Corsair) in terms of tech vision and real world consequences. As for the story itself, there's a quality to the characters and prose which is very Japanese, a little too proper, a little too burdened with getting the details presented correctly, and not leading with as strong a hook as it could have. The story starts out a bit slowly, but once you get into the rhythm of the translated writing, and things pick up, the action pulls you along nicely.

Sweemeng Ng says

This book have a lot in it, hacking, web advertising, startups, orbital dynamics, anti satellite weapons. It even feature internet shutdowns and raspberry pi!. As this is set in near future, it is not hard to imagine on how all this can work. The thing is there is not much of a character development, but they are still very likable.

One of the recurring theme in the book is about engineers that didn't get enough support. What happen if engineer didn't get infrastructure support. What about the environment with good infrastructure, but the

people don't support them well enough! It is a thing to think about.

Ivo says

Techno-Thriller, eher am tech-nerdigen denn am mainstreamigen Ende der Skala angesiedelt. Wer Freude an astrophysikalischen Abhandlungen hat, sollte hier mal vorbeischaun. Ansonsten eher dünne Kost, was Charaktere, Spannung und Glaubwürdigkeit der Handlung angeht.

Der Roman wurde in Japan mit mehreren SF-Preisen ausgezeichnet und ist bereits das zweite Werk des Autors, das auf Englisch vorliegt.

Diana What says

A delightful read!!! Epic SF with a wide lens that reminds me of the TV show 'The Expanse' (which I want to read but haven't yet), this book skillfully navigates between locations all over the world to build international cooperation and intrigue. All the characters are brilliant and wonderful in their own way, all incredibly dedicated and impressive in the humanity. I highly recommend!!

Guy L. Pace says

I really enjoyed Orbital Cloud. I wasn't sure what Taiyo was getting at in the first chapters. But he kept the action moving and brought out a unique technology concept around which he wove an interesting, immersive story. I love the characters and the interplay of the geo-political landscape.

Good hard science fiction is rare and Taiyo delivers well. I'm always watching for translated works from him and have not been disappointed.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

I absolutely loved this.

Queen says

So good!!! We follow an amateur meteorologist and web designer (both with untapped skills) as they discover mysterious objects in low earth orbit. As they work with international experts and spies on a case of global terrorism, we get to enjoy the main characters coming into their own. They're brilliant! An incredible space scientist and computer engineer. They and their team are so fraking competent. I love reading nothing more than books about competent people in hard sci-fi espionage thrillers.

Lindsay says

A techno-thriller with thin but likable characters dealing with hostile action in Earth orbit and an international cast of entrepreneurs, terrorists, government and military.

In Japan in 2020 the proprietor of a small web company dedicated to tracking objects in orbit notices some debris moving very strangely. Across the Pacific, NORAD investigates it as well. Something very strange is going on and as more parties get involved it becomes clear that something is happening in orbit that threatens the whole world.

Wide-reaching, with a cast of characters from Japan, the US, Iran, China and Korea, the book is a hard science espionage thriller with lots of action and politics. There's also a lot of commentary on the state of the aerospace sector, from the careers of engineers in this sector to the roles of JAXA and NASA and how private companies are moving forward into that space and why. Unfortunately all of the commentary and background information (particularly around aerospace and IT) along with a fast-moving plot leaves little space for character. As such, while entertaining and likable, most of the characters here get very little development.

Realistically this is probably a 3.5 star book, but I'm bumping it to 4 because of how much I enjoyed reading it. This is squarely in my wheelhouse of interests so gets a bonus there.

Jessica says

Glad I read a book about LEO (low earth orbit) and it was quick enough despite its size, but... Characters were flat and story was plot-driven in a sort of unsatisfying way. It was moving toward one obvious, happy-ending kind of ending. Didn't say anything really aside from the plot and the bit of science in there. The science was the most satisfying part for me personally, cause this was completely new for me. It was chock full of a few tropes I can't stand - unlikely characters called in to save the world and crazy-mushy super-supportive team work to save the world. So, overall, glad I read it, but will not be picking up this author again.
