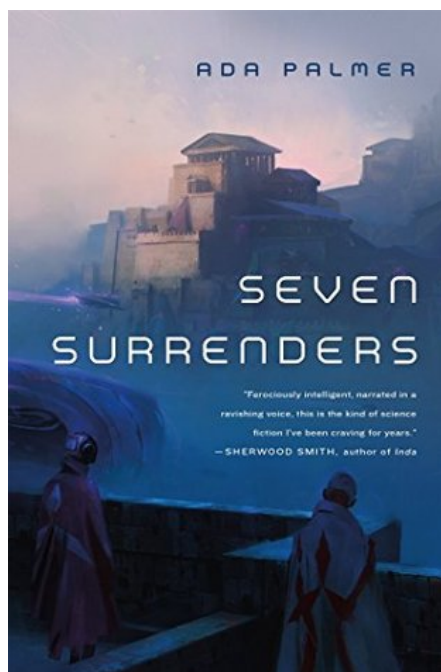




Seven Surrenders

Ada Palmer

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Seven Surrenders

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The second book of Terra Ignota, a political SF epic of extraordinary audacity

It is a world in which near-instantaneous travel from continent to continent is free to all.

In which automation now provides for everybody's basic needs.

In which nobody living can remember an actual war.

In which it is illegal for three or more people to gather for the practice of religion—but ecumenical “sensayers” minister in private, one-on-one.

In which gendered language is archaic, and to dress as strongly male or female is, if not exactly illegal, deeply taboo.

In which nationality is a fading memory, and most people identify instead with their choice of the seven global Hives, distinguished from one another by their different approaches to the big questions of life.

And it is a world in which, unknown to most, the entire social order is teetering on the edge of collapse.

Because even in utopia, humans will conspire. And also because something new has arisen: Bridger, the child who can bring inanimate objects to conscious life.

Seven Surrenders Details

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Author : Ada Palmer

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

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From Reader Review Seven Surrenders for online ebook

Julie says

This world is a utopia, not perfect, not finished, but still a utopia compared to every other era humanity has seen.

I procrastinated on this review by writing other reviews for books I'd read afterwards, purely because I don't know how to marshal my thoughts together. As with *Too Like the Lightning*, I am baffled as to how to talk about this series without writing a several thousands-word-long essay. Like its predecessor, it's gloriously ambitious and messy and complicated and thoughtful and bizarre, albeit with a bit more plot/events this time.

Now that we're into a second book, my test was whether Ada Palmer would be able to back up her sociological/anthropological/psychological ruminations with a real plot. And she does, for the most part: some shit goes down in this book that made me literally gasp out loud and my jaw physically dropped on the subway. It's things that I didn't expect to happen, at all, and which genuinely surprised me.

And there's still so much to dissect! The reason I chose the quote above is because the line between utopia/dystopia is a very fine one, and it's difficult to define the world of *Terra Ignota*. I think Yoon Ha Lee described it as *a utopia that doesn't know it's a dystopia* — and I do like that this shows you don't have to have Hunger Games-style child murder competitions in order to be a dystopia — yet I would still rather describe this as a real honest-to-god utopia, but with fractures below the surface, ones which might hold or which might rip right open. And I think that jives with Palmer's own view on it, courtesy this interview:

I wanted to depict that—a future that is difficult. Wow, I can have a 20-hour work week, a 150-year lifespan, I can live anywhere on Earth I want to, and still see all of my friends whenever I want, and there's been 300 years of world peace. And yet there's censorship, and people are still incompetent about gender and [some] race relations, and some things that are incredibly precious to us, like religious freedom, are gone. That isn't an easy utopia. That is also not a dystopia.

I wanted to push the reader and ask—if that were the future your efforts built, would you feel your efforts had paid off?

In the first book, Palmer introduced us all to her futuristic society and laid out all the pieces... and now, she's flipping the table and blowing it all up in the shadow of war. You're watching the house of cards come tumbling down, all its warts exposed.

There's some desperate over-use of Explanatory Monologues (ugh, that whole Sister Heloise bit), but the questions raised in them are still so important: big philosophical ideas about war, complacency, balance, and human strife being the driving motivator behind so much of our accomplishments. And I think I agree with a lot of it. Because if you become a post-scarcity utopia, then where *do* you go from there? How does mankind strive for the next achievement? How do you take risks if your basic lifestyle is so comfortable?

I've been talking about the *Terra Ignota* series a lot since reading the first book a month ago. Like, *a lot*. So as with the first one, it may be flawed but it's still so thought-provoking, and I love that sci fi can be like this now, that it can try tackling these questions in a serious way.

Some other random thoughts:

- My favourite characters are, hands down, Papadelias and The Major — which is so predictable, because of course I would love the dogged Inspector Javert-type and the gruff war veteran. I also love Bridger, that sweet precious summer child.
- I'm still so goddamn charmed by the narration style. Trading off narrative duties and different punctuation for different languages, so you get a sense of this code-switching polyglot mindset, a fluidity in language so everything isn't quite so Anglo-centric.
- Gender: I saw that a few readers were livid in the first book about Mycroft purposefully misgendering characters without those characters' input, but the thing is, we're *supposed* to know that he's wrong to do so. Palmer has been very open about the fact that we should question Mycroft as a narrator, and not take his word as gospel. That's the whole point. So like, the fact that I'm discomfited by him calling a hermaphroditic character "it" is actually exactly purposeful and I think we *should* be questioning his decision.
- Sexuality: The mingling of sex & politics still drives me, personally, batty. I think it was Jo Walton who described this series as being about extraordinary people doing extraordinary things, but the way it all circles back to the sexytimes salon it makes me despise every single world leader in this world, for being such hapless slaves to their sexual appetites. And once again, I do believe that it's all a *purposeful* choice on the author's part (look at these brilliant people, all undone by sexuality because we ignored dealing with it, we moved on too quickly before society could integrate it healthily), but a lot of the scenes in the salon still left me irritated because it felt gratuitous, unnecessary, over-the-top. And mostly because it paints a picture of us as weak, inherently ready to be steered and completely manipulated due to our baser urges, but a) I would like to think we have better self-control than that, and b) where do asexual & demisexual people belong in this, then? They'd be like goddamn superheroes for being able to resist this temptation while everyone else trots to Madame d'Arouet's drum.
- I still love the Hives. I still think that non-geographical 'strats' (rather than nations) are, honestly, the way to go. The European Union, Humanists, Masons, Utopians, Cousins, Mitsubishi-Greenpeace, and Gordians — the other good thing about them is that, unlike the shallow factions of e.g. Divergent, these strats reflect *the way you look at the world*. Not just which personality traits you value, but what avenues of research you endorse. What sort of political system. Which language. Where you think the human race should focus its efforts and development (the Utopians are terraforming Mars, and the Gordians are working on transhumanism). And since you can change your citizenship at the drop of a hat, it's all about self-determination, and choosing the exact place where you belong.
- Again, as with its predecessor, the plotting gets a little loose and wild and sloppy — at times I found my head spinning trying to remember what all the different loyalties and betrayals and triple-crosses were supposed to be — but I forgive it once more due to its staggering ambition.

===

Anyway. **In conclusion:** *Too Like the Lightning* and *Seven Surrenders* are depicted as part one & part two of a single narrative, and they definitely do feel like one single massive book — I didn't feel 'complete' until I'd finished the second one. And then what a corker of an ending!

I can't recommend these books to absolutely everyone because they require a lot from you; it's not a fast fun frothy read, but rather a meandering and philosophical one. I think it might appeal to a certain type of reader and, even then, a particular mood for that reader. If someone's looking for more thoughtful, experimental sci fi and loves worldbuilding and questions of 'what is the ideal society', point them in the direction of this series. I'm eagerly awaiting the next book (not out until December, sob).

I tried to avoid this review turning into an essay, but then it happened anyway.

Gary says

About halfway through *Seven Surrenders*, it dawned on me how nearly all the characters we've met in Ada Palmer's *Terra Ignota* fit neatly into one category or another in the traditional RPG alignment system. I don't know enough about Palmer to know if this was intentional or not (she is obviously an intellectual, and a history scholar by trade, but who can say what she does in her spare time?) but that is ultimately beside the point. Mycroft Canner, whose perspective on the proceedings is nearly absolute, is the only one who is impossible to classify. Canner, by his own admission a slippery and untrustworthy fellow, grants himself the ubiquity and breadth of understanding he denies the other actors in his grand narrative. He aggressively typecasts each player, right down to his belligerent gendering of them. They are all slaves to their nature, in his view, and their capacity for self-deception portends the unraveling of their fragile utopia. That his opinion of other humans – born of an extreme, narcissistic self-regard – is a well-documented feature of psychopathy is not entirely lost on him, and certainly not on Palmer.

Seven Surrenders is as philosophically dense as its predecessor, and as playfully baroque in tone. Its style, a deliberate imitation of 18th century literary discourses, necessarily favors the rational over the sensational (especially the visual); while this is one of the most original, and oddly subversive, features of the series, it sometimes works against *Seven Surrenders*, as the second half of the novel could have benefitted from a little more sensibility over sense. But even if a crack or two shows in this volume, *Terra Ignota* continues to stimulate the intellect and the imagination, and I look forward to picking up the next volume.

Sarah says

This was a group read with a few of my SFF book club buddies as a follow up to *Too Like the Lightning*. I think I was able to glean a lot more from it as a group read and it was interesting to see everyone's different perspectives and take aways on it. If you're considering this book, and have the opportunity to buddy read it- I highly recommend reading it that way!

I know the first book was very polarizing in that readers either enjoyed it or DNF'd or just didn't like it at all. I think if you made it through the end of the first book, you owe it to yourself to finish with *Seven Surrenders*. I really think they should have been sold as one huge Sci-Fi epic. I get why the publishers did it, but I think a lot of readers will miss out on at least the plot related answers we were asking after in book one. *Too Like the Lightning* does not feel complete without *Seven Surrenders*. This is part of a four book series overall, but I can tell you that *Seven Surrenders* does not end on the huge cliff hanger type ending we were given in Book 1.

I don't have any words to say that could do this book justice. There are too many topics covered. Religion. Individuality. Gender equality. Gender's purpose in society: whether it is completely learned or innate. Utopia. How society achieves Utopia: what it looks like for humanity as a whole. Morality. Whether a people's desire for justice and truth, a right to know, to not hide behind closed doors and propaganda, should be first before the safety of the rest of humanity. The greater good and the nature of goodness. Stagnancy vs. Progress. The nature of man. The nature of (G)od.

I don't mean to say that the author is offering answers to all of these questions, more like, she is imposing these questions to the reader. There are so many complex shades of gray in this story. They are important

questions to be asked, and I have to wonder, if as Mycroft would say, Providence hasn't meant for these books to be released at this time. "Why now?" When Trump rules the USA, firing everyone who doesn't agree with him. Using his twitter accounts as his own personal form of propaganda. Calling any news channel who dares question him #FakeNews.

This is not an easy novel to digest and I think it will require multiple readings. It will be one of those books that you pick up something different from every time you read it. It is complex and intricate and we often aren't given the whole picture. People's motives are unclear and sometimes don't always make much sense in the context we receive them.

Aside from all the serious things happening, the world building was excellent. There are so many complexities to this society and I still have questions about it. I'm not sure what the difference is between blacklaws and graylaws etc. I don't understand the nature or purpose of all the Hives. Or precisely how bashes are formed. I'm not sure why The Anonymous is so important and what precisely their contributions are to society.

But most of what I love about these books is the characters. I'm still strangely attached to Mycroft. I'm attached to Sniper. I'm attached to Mother Kosala and Papadelias and Ganymede and am fascinated by all their strange interpersonal relationships. The plot is twisting and turning and once again, whenever you think you have something pegged, another bomb is dropped, another layer peeled away and everything shifts. It's like trying to solve a rubiks cube. For every shift of one square into place, another face of the cube has changed.

Overall- a fascinating and thought provoking read.

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

Full review on Youtube:
<https://youtu.be/EiJLQcSCFTQ>

I really loved this as much as Too Like the Lightning.

Nick Imrie says

I do not ask you to believe, just play-believe, since often things we play-believe in - superstitions, bedtime stories, luck - still make us feel a little better when hard choices come.

The Enlightenment and SF influences on this story are so much fun to find and follow that it took me ages to see the great big *anime* influence, and of course once I'd seen it I couldn't un-see it. It made this so much more fun to imagine. I swear everytime Sniper came onto the page the visual in my mind was like something from *Death Note*. Achilles is drawn like Guts *Beserk*. Poor old Bridger is from *Medaka Box*, maybe? And now it makes so much more sense when characters break off in the middle of a fight or police arrest or terrorist explosion to have a heated debate about philosophy or a heart-felt chat about who's their real dad.

Girl says

Again 3.5 stars.

This is really *Too Like the Lightning*, continued, as it picks up right after TLtL ends, no time wasted. (Most of) the setups are finally paying off. Stuff is going down. Mayhem! Mayhem! So it's worth reading, even if only to learn what came out of all this worldbuilding.

One interesting thing is that the book very much follows in the tradition of 19th century novel - think Dumas (father), think Hugo. There is a lot of similar sensibility (think steady, reasonable people who burst into sobs at any opportunity). There is also much more focus on the world itself than on any particular character. I'm... not actually sure I enjoy that too much, although I appreciate the effort.

There is a lot of fun stuff (again, the politics; some of the post-humanism, too). Overall though, I have to say that while I find the plot engaging (for the most part) - I burned through the book in under two days - I disagree with the worldviews presented in this narrative in so many ways. Here, the gender stuff gets into truly terrible territories, with characters explicitly equating "feminine" with "gentle, caring, nurturing" and "masculine" with "achieving". So the narrator suddenly refers to one of the characters as "she", although previously they were a "he", because at this point they are "gentle and frail" (or sth). There is a character (view spoiler) who is referred to as "it", because... ugh. It's not like the bloody *default* pronoun in this world isn't "they". There is challenging the reader, and then there is this. (view spoiler)

Sex (as in intercourse). (view spoiler)

Metaphysics / religion. Oddly enough (for me), I just didn't really care or I was annoyed. (view spoiler)

What else? Well, there is the big behind-the-scenes(view spoiler)

Minor continuity quibbles:(view spoiler)

I'm cautiously curious what happens next, but I'm not sure I will pick up the next book on release. Maybe sometime later, though.

Leseparatist says

This one is both better and worse than volume one. I think the worldbuilding gets more coherent and interesting. The philosophical elements and the plotting actually begin to pay off, at least partly. But. I think the stylisation is revealed as not worth the price of admission (by which I mean particularly the misogyny and sexual violence whose omnipresence doesn't even have plot impact other than highlighting existing themes some more - Sniper's rape [fantasy] in particular was a drawn-out exercise in "look at me, writing a 19th century book, so politically incorrect" with little purpose beyond "because I can" with a side of "look at female-bodied characters doing the raping, how ~edgy~"). I think essentialism is still essentialist even when hinging on gender rather than sex (and it can actually be more insidious and simply annoying). The way it is explored only reinforced rather than undermined the status quo. And the dehumanising of both women and

the one non-binary character engendered by the stylisation was not worth it either (oh for fuck's sake those pronouns were *terrible* and I don't think calling Sniper "it" resulted in any value added, unless value added is pissed off and dehumanised readers).

And then there's the fact that every time feminism is mentioned by name it's to draw up some strange scenario in which postfeminism (see also: the ideology that crows about the success of feminism and thus consigns it to the past) instead of being actually largely invested in re-entrenchment of gender roles (ironic sexism, glamour of femininity, pencil skirts, SatC and new gender regimes) leads to abandonment of pronouns and the words for femininity/masculinity and thus brings about new gender oppression of genderless ("neutered") world. It's so completely divorced from how postfeminism actually perpetuates itself as to resemble rants of anti-feminists, decrying how feminism oppresses humans by forcing them to abandon "natural" gendering.

The hero worship of Apollo never rings true. The ideas the characters espouse about war and progress can only bring about hollow laughter in an Eastern European (oh that moment when Mycroft waxes poetic about how violence is good because of valour or something, give me a break, I literally see the old Gestapo building out of my window). They also sound strange in a book written by someone with a background in history.

I think the world and people - both sociology and psychology - defy my ability to suspend disbelief. And I think the religious themes never really pay off, either, regardless of Christ figures doing some Christ figuring.

I still don't get how you can have "religion is utterly private! no discussion of personal religious beliefs in larger groups!" and also Catholic kings of Spain who go to confession.

And I think there's a huge problem with how this book tries to have its cake and eat it too with regard to CLASS, caused by its reliance on tropes of a hugely classist, racist, sexist era, that doesn't get sufficiently - or at all - explored, much less deservedly exploded. We're told the world is a utopia (in progress). At the same time, the world is very blurry and opaque with regard to economic conditions beyond the existence of rents, which must be paid, and work, which doesn't exceed 20 hours a week unless you want it to. But it's those economic conditions that existence of aristocratic rulers involves, implies, creates and perpetuates. It's about wealth and its unequal distribution. But even with the invocation of rents, the world as written seems to wage wars about ideas (religious wars of the past become entangled with GENDER!!! but not with, I don't know, economic exploitation and access to natural resources?) I feel like playing with people who all belong to the ruling class and telling the reader not to hate them because they may make mistakes, are only human, but also strive to "give a better world for [the reader]" may have worked in the 18th century, but sounds utterly out of place and time post-Marx. (But then again, this book doesn't care about stomachs, only minds. I thought it would, with that debt it claims to owe to Hugo, or timely mention of how Mycroft relies on his services being needed to be fed, but that topic is then dropped almost never to arise again. This is a world of philosophers, not workers.)

I'm honestly baffled by the hype this book has received because to me it misfires, a lot.

Erik says

Seven Surrenders may be more appropriately titled Too Like the Lightning, Part 2, as the whole tome was clearly conceived and written as a single unit (that just so happened to be longer than first-time authors are allowed to get away with). As such, you will feel the same about Seven Surrenders as you did about Too

Like the Lightning. My own feeling is that these books offer a unique and interesting, if not quite believable, vision of the future. They're not exactly page-turning reads, especially this second half, which occasionally gets bogged down in overly long speeches, but they're ripe with enough suspense to keep you hooked. Their narrative qualities aside, there's no question they explore some fascinating ideas, particularly war, gender/sexuality, and divinity. They also invoke – though it is never explicitly mentioned or discussed – psychopathy, which is going to be the focus of this essay I mean, review *wink*

Here in Seven Surrenders, we learn of Mycroft's crime in great and disturbing detail. Honestly, it was a bit shocking. Pretty gruesome. Now Mycroft is never specifically labeled a psychopath but given his background (he witnesses nearly his entire 'bash die in a fire when he's quite young), his brutality, and his reasons for his crime, it's a safe bet to label him as such. And yet he's the protagonist and in many ways the actual BEST / most moral character in the entire novel. Interesting!

Now, unfortunately, it must be said this characterization is terribly inauthentic, probably one of my biggest critiques. Servicer Mycroft does not mesh in the slightest with Homicidal Mycroft. I was highly anticipating seeing the transformation scene that instigated this metamorphosis, but, alas, it was completely unbelievable. Basically magic. Mechanically speaking, pure plot convenience. Nevertheless, I cannot understate my joy at the character of Mycroft. A humble, service-oriented psychopath?! I'd buy that for a dollar! ...Most importantly, it affords me the opportunity write on a topic I've long been fascinated by: the GOOD PSYCHOPATH.

For some time now, I have been playing with the insidious thought that psychopaths need not be evil. Now, clearly, the stereotyping of this diverse spectrum into a singular criminal role is simplistic and probably false more often than true. But I would go even further and state the GOOD psychopath – the one who has been trained by himself or others to wield his cold rationality in service to good – has the potential be one of the morally best people.

This idea floated around in my mindscape as a nebulous cloud for some quite time before it was crystallized into concrete form when I was playing a computer game called Shadowrun: Hong Kong. It's based on a pen n paper game of the same name and set in a future in which magic and technology have merged and there are elves and orcs and dragons and street-samurai and cyborgs and spirits and AI and all that delicious sci-fi & fantasy stuff mashed all together.

One of the primary mechanics of the game is ESSENCE. As the game is set in the future, many people replace parts of their bodies with machinery (biological eyes with mechanical ones that can see in different light spectrums, for example). However, each replacement lowers this character's ESSENCE, which is a spiritual/magical quantity that represents his/her humanity. Too much cyber-modification and a character's essence will drop to 0 and that character will perish and/or suffer from severe psychological effects.

So if we think of psychopathy as 'lacking in humanity', then we might say a psychopath is someone who has low ESSENCE.

WELL! It turns out that in Shadowrun: HK, one of your allies has had over half his body replaced with cybernetics so that he has no ESSENCE left whatsoever... and yet he lives and thrives. His secret? Psychopathy.

He admits his psychopathy early on in your relationship and even goes on to claim that psychopathy represents the next stage in posthumanity – that ESSENCE (and therefore humanity) is in fact an anchor holding us back from our ascension into our next form: that of machine intelligences, freed from our corporeal shackles. He says that psychopaths as coldly rational beings are the most machine-like, a necessary condition to truly understand – and even program – your own thought processes. That EMOTION really only gets in the way and is unreliable, at best. Psychopaths are free from it and thus *must* rely on logic and

reason.

Now I'm by no means underplaying the fact that while 1% of the (male) population are psychopaths, 25% of the prison population are. I'd never argue that psychopathy is a GOOD thing. However, there are some aspects of psychopathy that might lend themselves to positive traits. For example, one of the major differences between psychopaths and those with normal pathologies is how they experience empathy. Normal pathologies experience an automatic "spontaneous empathy." In contrast, recent studies suggest that psychopaths have "willful empathy" or the ability to switch empathy on and off at will. In other words, psychopathy is associated with intact cognitive empathy but with impaired affective (emotional) empathy.

I would suggest this is symptomatic of psychopathy as a whole: high cognition, low emotion. Unfortunately our world is such that this often leads to criminality and evil. But what if it was trained in service of good? Could it be? Do the seeds of goodness sprout in the heart – or in the head?

Already we recognize the danger of emotion. For example, when we consider citizens for jury duty, we try to choose those with no emotional stake in the matter. We want jurors who will be able to look at a beautiful woman or a friendly old man and ignore their instinctual empathy and instead judge the case on cold hard facts.

Consider, too, the danger of conformity...

Conformity & The Black Dahlia Killer: In Yale History Professor Timothy Snyder's collection of essays *On Tyranny*, he claims the success of Fascism was helped by the general human need to belong, to join a group, to fit in with the crowd. See Milgram's electric shock experiment on the power of obedience & authority, which was designed and carried out to test the claims of many Nazi soldiers who said they were simply "following orders."

Psychopaths, however, feel no such need to belong or to "follow orders", which is probably why psychopathy is associated with independence and defiance to authority. Steve Hodel, suspecting his father George Hodel of being the Black Dahlia Avenger (aka a murderer), said, "[his father] was a loner, not a joiner."

Typically, not joining in with society is a bad thing, as it means disobeying laws or rejecting social norms. But what about not joining in a lynch mob? Or a pogrom? What about a scientist who refuses to join in with accepting the currently popular theory and instead explores something else? Non-conformity (differentiated from anti-conformity) is a trait closely linked with psychopathy.

Buddhism, Jedi, & Darth Vader: I have always associated Jedi Knights with Buddhist monks. Both groups are celibate and ascetic, but even more germane to this topic, they both seek mastery over their emotions. Nirvana literally means 'blown-out' referring to a release from suffering and the cycle of rebirth – a state of detachment from one's ego. This is roughly equivalent to the Light side – freedom from suffering and emotion – as opposed to the dark side, in which one becomes too attached to the world and suffers for it. When confronted by Anakin's fears, Yoda counsels him to "train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose," which in a sense is advocating for the adoption of certain psychopathic tendencies.

Alas, Anakin ultimately fails to follow Yoda's advice. He is unable to turn his empathy off with regards to his wife, and it ultimately consumes him and turns him to the dark side.

But what if he had been a psychopath, or at least possessed some psychopathic tendencies? What if he had managed to master his empathy, to free himself of affective empathy and instead rely on cognitive empathy?

Anakin might not have fallen to the dark side. So Mace Windu would have slain the emperor. And the Jedi would not have fallen. And the Death Star would never have been used. The Republic – and the admittedly fragile peace it maintained – would have continued.

The story here in *Too Like the Lightning* & *The Seven Surrender* is at least partially an exploration of this idea of the GOOD psychopath. Is it possible? How? Why? Under what circumstances?

In Mycroft's case, he receives a unique education that helps him create an intellectual conception of good that, combined with his psychopathy, allows him to undertake some horrific deeds that are ultimately for the benefit of society. I'd also argue that his swift change from serial killer to servicer was only possible because of the cold rationality of his psychopathic mind. You just don't see such fluidity of personality from people with normal pathologies.

Combine such a narrator with the themes of war and divinity, and you have yourself a pretty interesting book. I will say that it's a bit ambitious and unfocused at times. In particular, I felt both books spent far too much ink on gender ideas, which by comparison felt rather trivial and anachronistic (in the sense that gender explorations of this particular type – with linguistic & social rather than technological foundations – seem to me like a fad or at least only the first paltry step in a much greater redefinition of humanity) and really only distracted from more interesting & timeless ideas.

Still, the *Seven Surrenders* was a solid book, which for the most part succeeds at the two most fundamental criteria I apply to a book: Is it FUN to read? Yes. Lots and lots of suspense and mysteries to keep you turning the pages. And is the book INTERESTING to read? Yes, as the above discussions reveal. I look forward to more work by this author.

Scott says

Damn, it's a great time to be a reader of Science Fiction. Authors like Ada Palmer and books like *Seven Surrenders* make me genuinely excited about SF and where the genre is going.

From the first page in her new novel Ada Palmer continues the story she began in the scintillating *Too Like the Lightning*, and the two books can be read as one story split into two halves. (I'm guessing they were written as one story, but would be too large if left as one book).

Mycroft Canner, indentured servant, friend to the powerful and one-time sadistic mass-murderer is once again our narrator, reporting on the meetings of world leaders, their secret dalliances, their power struggles, their betrayals. Through Mycroft's eyes, and occasionally the eyes of someone he has invited into his story, we see events that threaten to shatter the utopia that earth has become- a world with no war, no hunger, no want.

The characters introduced in the first novel- The Saneer-Weeksbooths, Bridger, the god-child who can bring any inanimate object to life, J.E.D.D Mason, the strange youth who can see a person's deepest secrets at a glance and appears to be the heir apparent to many of the world's leaders, Carlyle foster the Sensayer, and others continue their machinations as the revelation of a centuries old murderous plot (A plot used to *keep* the world from war) threatens to spark a civil war of unimaginable, epoch defining brutality.

Around this fascinating plot Palmer continues to explore ideas of gender and faith, bringing new insight and ideas to the old trope of the near genderless future where everyone gets around in androgynous robes and uses 'theys' instead of 'his' and 'hers'. one of the most fascinating ideas she presents is the impact that old

gendered forms of sexuality could have in a society only a few hundred years distant from the sort of gender roles we have in 2017. Could sexuality and gendered behavior be used as a weapon in such a society? Could people unused to gendered behavior be vulnerable to seducers using old forms of behaviour? And should they succumb, could they become addicted to illicitly partaking in socially frowned upon gendered behaviour, and then be manipulated by their unprincipled seducers?

This is a novel unafraid to play with ideas like this, in an interesting and convincingly constructed future, an interlinked world where nation states have been overtaken by voluntarily joined Hives, societies formed by millions of like-minded individuals. It's a fascinating, tightly constructed work that left me in awe of Palmer's imagination and writing skills.

Palmer has a gift for interesting characters and convincing conversation- it's a rare book that can hold my interest through pages and pages of meetings and keep me coming back for more, but Palmer does this. She makes political machinations sexy, and nails the tensions and undercurrents that run beneath the conversations of the powerful, making these sections addictively entertaining.

That's not to say there's no action, no high-stakes physical threat in *Seven Surrenders*. There is engagingly depicted action here, but it is not the book's focus, and if you're looking for a kinetic, 'splosions-heavy story I would look elsewhere.

If however you're looking for a thoughtful SF story with intrigue, betrayal, regret and intellectual heft then this is the book for you. *Seven Surrenders* isn't *perfect*, but it's damn close to it, and I've already ordered my copy of *The Will to Battle*, book three in Palmer's series.

Ada Palmer is to my mind one of the bright new talents in SF, and this book cements that reputation. She has written only two books so far, and both of them deserve to be included on SF book-of-the-year lists. If this is what she can do at the start of her career I'm very much looking forward to the work she will produce when she really hits her stride.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

My rating is 3.5 stars.

Too Like the Lightning was an ambitious, complex, thought-provoking work of science fiction, one which challenged a reader to brave its intricate futuristic world and rewarded those who did. Ada Palmer's writing a return to the beautiful, ornate styles of the past; her measured words and nuance meanings contributing mightily to the powerful nature of the book. And *Seven Surrenders* is on par with its predecessor in every way, continuing the masterful breath of fresh air which this author has injected into the science fiction genre.

Continuing on with a large cast of characters led by Mycroft Canner, there is a plethora of interconnecting events transpiring everywhere in this 25th Century world. Revelations are made. Conspiracies are uncovered. Motives explained. The structures of power shaken to their foundations. The seemingly utopia society presented in *Too Like The Lightning* beginning to crumble and disintegrate under careful inspection. War looming eerily and horribly in the background of this peaceful place. All the plots within plots within plots too complicated, too heady for a simple description to capture. Suffice it to say Ada Palmer juggles numerous plots here without allowing any of them to fall to the ground, delivering a narrative a reader will become fully immersed in for hours, days and weeks.

What continues to set the *Terra Ignota* series above other current science fiction is the stimulating exploration of religion, politics, gender, and the continued evolution of humanity. All of it played out against the backdrop of a culture strange yet familiar, modern yet so very human. This future humanity still bound to the earth alone; people still divided by politics; resources still needed to drive the engines of consumption; religion still playing a significant role in people's private life; and gender issues still a thorny one worthy of change. The author's exploration fascinating, provocative, and frustrating in measured doses.

Prospective readers be warned though that this is a demanding series; the layered plot and slow reveals requiring dedication and determination. The philosophical discussions of its cast enlightening yet requiring outside thought to fully grasp, as Ada Palmer demands that her readers engage themselves in the discussions, open their minds to new, unfamiliar concepts, and meditate on the meanings. Many elements of the story not fully understood until later when your mind finally unwraps all the folded layers and rejoices in that stunning beauty of pure epiphany.

Seven Surrenders is everything I expected from Ada Palmer when I opened this novel: stunning prose, vivid setting, prophetic philosophy, political pensées, and fascinating characters. Where *Too Like the Lightning* was an unlooked-for revelation; *Seven Surrenders* was a much anticipated return, one which met my expectations and heightened my desire for the next book in the series. Certainly, it isn't for everyone, but for those searching for a serious work of science fiction, *Terra Ignota* is the series to try.

I received an advanced reading copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.

Bradley says

Thanks to the publisher for the ARC of this novel!

This is one of those situations where extremely high expectation meets flawless delivery, and I can't be happier for it.

Too Like The Lightning was a futuristic political thriller with very heavy under and overtones about the meaning of God and what it means, with great variety and depth of exploration, to a people who are both jaded and very reliant on old Enlightenment ideas and ideals even though they're firmly set in the 25th Century.

By way of great reveals and thriller moments, we're invested in the machinations of seven enormous political entities defined by the ideals they hold since nations' borders are pretty much a dead issue with near-instantaneous travel.

We're introduced to so many great elements in that novel and even more that I'm not even touching upon here, such as gender questions, practical and general philosophy, and especially the whole realm of politics and its basic nature.

However, while all of these issues are also important in the sequel, the one that really strikes me as most important is the whole issue of God and/or Gods.

Things get really hairy when an actual incarnation of a deity in the shape of a growing little boy who is now a young man who really can perform miracles, potentially unlimited miracles, finally has the attention of the

rulers of this strange, nearly utopian Earth on the brink of war and total dissolution.

On the other side of the coin and firmly in the political arena is another deity who has been locked away from his ineffableness and who has been seated firmly in the body of a regular human. His is knowledge without power as the other is power without knowledge. This spinning coin is truly hypnotic even as the enormous world-building and the political maneuvers reach a screaming intensity, and let's not lose sight of the truly wonderful characters of Mycroft and Sniper and Carlyle that carry this tale all the way through to a fascinating conclusion.

Not that this is the end of the tale, of course.

Ada Palmer has done something truly brilliant with these tales and the sheer density of ideas and the drives of such a strong underlying tales are more than enough to make me a lifelong fan and rabid reader of much, much more. I suspect that we're far from done with this. I was satisfied with the end of Too Like The Lightning and I was very satisfied with the end of Seven Surrenders, too, which is a very neat trick for any tale so complicated as these. Even so, I was heavily motivated to re-read the first in preparation for this one and I was very happy to do so.

These are extremely re-readable tales with a lot of easter eggs and multiple layers even while the text is quite easy to follow. It's a mark of something quite amazing, I believe. Just the really late realization of what the Masons really meant even though all of it had been staring in my face all along made me grin like an idiot for a good fifteen minutes. I love being surprised and being shown that I'm rather dim-witted. :)

This is a very smart read and well-worth a lot of close attention. I know that both of these novels have rocketed up to my top-favorite tales. :)

Keep a close eye out for these! The quality is quite amazing. :)

Ashley says

Just as a heads up, I will be calling the police at the end of this review to report a crime, because this book and its author tried to murder me. Does anyone know the legislation about this? Can I have a book arrested for assault?

Okay, but seriously, this book is a monster. There were several points where I nearly threw it across the room, I was so upset. And then I kept going and almost immediately it became clear why Palmer did that monstrous thing that I hated and that made me want to go to my bed and curl up with my cat and the warm blanket that my cat thinks is her boyfriend. It was like she was continually slapping my face, and then immediately turning around and being like, okay, but here's why I just did that! And it makes sense! And so you find yourself agreeing to your own assault.

CALL THE POLICE.

I am of course being (mostly) facetious here, but I am finding it hard to actually talk about this effing book without descending into hyperbole. It's clear to me that Ada Palmer is some kind of heinous genius who uses her powers for evil and writing books that torment me, and keeps me there with the promise of cool stuff and philosophical meanderings.

Also, all the talk about humanity and its relationship to war was legit giving me anxiety so by the end I could only read this book when the sun was up.

I actually ordered book three from my library when I was about a third of the way through this one, but that was before it betrayed me and stabbed my kidneys with knives and then dripped lemon juice on my open wounds. If you want intelligent discussion about this book, you can try Julie's review, or Erik's, because you won't find it here.

P.S. Make sure you read the Author's Note at the end, which is when she talks about the title of book one (and the epigraph for this one), *Too Like the Lightning* (a nod to a line from *Romeo and Juliet*: "Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say 'It lightens.'") That is when her true evilness is revealed. I haven't had the title of a book sneak up on me like that since I read *The Constant Gardener*.

Philip says

4ish stars.

In my review of *Too Like the Lightning* I questioned whether that book was pretentious. After reading this second book I feel that I can confidently confirm that suspicion about this series. I think it's extremely intelligent, ambitious, and layered. It's also ostentatious, affected and self-satisfied. Regardless, it's very entertaining in a gaudy sort of way and, if not quite brilliant, it's a very well realized possible future. Ultimately, the best way I can describe this book is to say that it's *a lot*.

It's intentionally frustrating and Palmer pushes all the buttons that make her audience seethe, scoff, question and contemplate. She touches on politics, gender and other social constructs, sexuality, authority, and especially religion. But is her future society *really* as plausible as she seems to think it is? To each his own, I suppose. In more ways than one I'm reminded of *Atlas Shrugged*. Decide for yourselves, readers, whether that's a recommendation or a dissuasion.

Some acts stray quite close to erotica (or maybe I'm just prude)- there's lots of sex including bondage, rape, orgy. There are also times the novel strays close to trashy soap opera territory. Readers can play a drinking game with the number of times Mycroft *shudders* or *weeps*. It's so interesting, though, to see the disparity between those sensibilities and the philosophical, sophisticated ones.

If this review seems negative, I hope my rating shows that I still really liked it and it's a satisfying conclusion to the first half of the series. I'm glad for the break before the next book comes out at the end of the year, but I'm looking forward to seeing how things play out after the events of the first two books.

Posted in Mr. Philip's Library

Sherwood Smith says

The short version is, Big Secrets Blow Up Bigger.

Long version: this is a gleefully, even triumphantly messy novel, which revels in the messiness while gradually drawing us toward a conclusion.

Our differently-sane narrator repeatedly assures us of the absolute truth of their testimony while mixing gender pronouns (and assumptions), Enlightenment language with modern, modes of address, Germanic Capitalization of Nouns and glyphs of other languages, striking sparks off two thousand years of philosophy as well as classics of literature as well as some current tropes.

The general thrust is how human beings can't stop tinkering with utopia, in this case through secrets. Or, put another way, we (apparently?) find out who is at the center of everything, and why.

There is so much going on here, in this second volume of a projected four. I am aware that we're all going to be reading a different book. I'm also aware that a lot of what's going on could be whizzing right over my head. And that every conclusion I come to, however tentative, might change.

But I still want to talk about it, because I want more people to read it, and talk about it. Yup, and point out what I am too clueless to get.

Here are a few of my . . . not reservations, or even issues. Things. I will call them things that I want to talk about with other readers.

First and easiest, it took me a long time to read.

I once entered a Buddhist temple so coruscant with brilliant color and gleam that I had to go out again, shut my eyes, and prepare myself before reentry. Then I was able to—slowly—take in the wild variety of elements, and appreciate a space in which every inch was taken up with art.

When I read, the type of dramatic tension that draws me most can be summed up by either two contrasts: ordinarily people in extraordinary circumstances, or extraordinary people in ordinary circumstances. The same book can delightfully mix and match.

But here, we have 100% extraordinary people in 100% extraordinary circumstances. There are no Situation Normal scenes. (Which are not “situation static” scenes that tempt the reader to skim past because nothing is happening beyond establishing shots or plot points.) That is going to be a feature for many readers, and it's not like a negative for me, it's just that I had to break up my reading for pauses for reflection, and come back to it when my mind was ready to engage with more headlong Situation Extraordinary.

Okay, time to shift to (view spoiler)

So far, Palmer is playing with current tropes instead of coping to them as the One True Way. And this in the middle of a steadily rising tension that jacks up a level with each blown secret, triggering events that resonate

with current affairs in an unsettlingly prescient way.

The book comes to a resolution of sorts that also manages to be a significant cliffhanger in that it sets things up for . . . what?

I finished the last page in a vortex of emotional reaction akin to launching off that cliff into freefall, after which anything might happen—I might begin to fly.

This is a big, sprawling, exuberantly chaotic, fizzing-with-ideas work that everybody who complains about current SF treading the same ground ought to be reading.

I can't predict where it's going to go. I only know that I must be along for what I believe will be an exhilarating ride.

Copy provided courtesy of Tor Books.

Preeya Phadnis says

So, I loved Too Like the Lightning. LOVED it. As in, literally counted down the days until Seven Surrenders came out. And then it did...and I read it. This book might be one of the biggest disappointments of my year.

tl;dr: Lots of what made TLtL so good is here. The complexity, the philosophy, Mycroft Canner. Most crucially, SS has the same extrapolation (that feels like unmasking) of current cultural and political trends. Ada Palmer is undeniably brilliant. But nothing new is added in terms of worldbuilding, the characters all go frankly insane, and without any grounding, the plot sinks into its own soapiness.

(view spoiler)