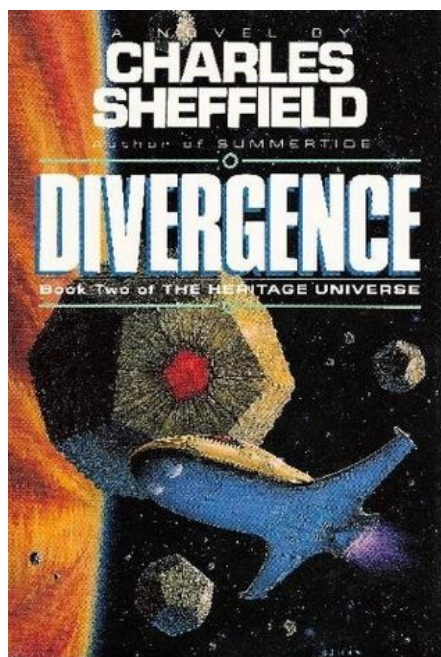




Divergence

Charles Sheffield

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For millennia, humankind and the other intelligent races have studied the bizarre and unfathomable constructs of the legendary beings known as the Builders. But for all that study, they are still no closer to figuring out who—or what—the Builders have been, or where they have gone. Then, on the world called Quake, in the midst of the violent planetary upheaval that is Summertide, a small group of humans and aliens witness the culmination of all those years of watching and waiting: the planet Quake opens up, and something comes out—and it looks as if, at long last, the discovery of the Builders themselves is at hand.

All her life, Darya Lang has dreamed of finding the Builders, whose artifacts she has single-handedly cataloged for the rest of the universe. Troubleshooter and adventurer Hans Rebka has his own dreams of unraveling the mystery of those artifacts. To Louis Nenda and the Cecropian Atvar H'sial, the Builder artifacts represent a once-in-a-lifetime shot at untold wealth. And close behind them comes the others: Councilor Julius Graves, who does not trust anyone else to make first contact unassisted; the slaves J'merlia and Kallik, who crave only a reunion with their masters; and the embodied computer E.C. Tally, charged with finding out just what the rest are up to.

Divergence Details

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William Webb says

There is something about Sheffield that makes him hard to read. His characters are all okay, but they do and say things that are often hard to believe. His science is grand, though, and the settings original and interesting.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

"The Eye of Gargantua is not a natural wonder of the stellar system. Because it is not natural."

Divergence is the second instalment in Sheffield's **Heritage Universe** series, and is a sequel to *Summertide*. It is also a novel of ideas, and doesn't spend a lot of time on characterization. The characters featuring here are, for the most part, carried over from *Summertide* so most of the introductions have already been taken care of.

This series is all about Builder artifacts, and not too much else. The Builders, of course, being an ancient, enigmatic and highly technological race that has disappeared from the Galaxy. I wouldn't recommend reading *Divergence* if you haven't read *Summertide* yet, since that will certainly be a bit of a disjointed experience. Everything is connected, especially as far as the search for the Builders themselves are concerned. If it feels that the pieces are being moved around the board without any clear resolution, it's because the story continues in *Transcendence*. It's also, probably, fairly safe to say that if you're not partial to exploration-type Sci-Fi stories, you might not enjoy this as much.

I suppose, if it comes right down to it, I would argue that this story is too big to be told with the handful of characters being utilized. The stakes are enormously high, with themes like species genocide and the like. Also, it is sometimes hard to identify with these far future people. Responses and reactions often appear out of sorts (and just plain bizarre). For example: at one point the characters contemplate the exploration of a million-kilometer artifact. On foot. And lament the fact that it would take tens of thousands of years. (I seem to recall the same sort of thing happening in *Marrow* by Robert Reed – if memory serves?)

[She] emerged to an overhead dazzle of orbiting fragments and a cold, orange twilight.

It's a pretty "visual" little novel at times. I'm not a scientist, so I sometimes understand just too little about the exposition to determine whether a novel should be classified as Hard Science Fiction or Space Opera. A lot of the astrophysics in here reads like it is legit, but I can't offer a qualified opinion as to whether it is pop-science, proper-science or just-plain-made-up. The *Heritage Universe* features a rich extra-terrestrial lore aspect. Perhaps, to at least some degree, comparable to David Brin's *Uplift* Universe. There are a number of races (or **clades**) and a very specific sense of historical context, or who-fits-where in the racial hierarchy. The story is even accompanied by "Universal Species Catalog" entries dealing with clade, or species, specifics.

Speaking of aliens: as far as the characters in the story are concerned, the aliens are often the more endearing, especially the Hymenopt, Kallik.

All in all, even though the series has its faults, I've found it interesting so far, and I'm curious to see what happens next.

Ahead of [her] in the open void sat a great space structure, agleam with internal lights, sprawling across half the sky, of a size impossible to estimate. [She] had the sense that it was huge, that those trailing pseudopods of antennas and twisting tubes of bright matter, spinning away into space from the central dodecahedron, were millions of kilometers long. Before she could confirm that impression, there came a final transition. Stars, galaxies, and stellar clusters vanished. [She] found herself standing on a level plain. Overhead was nothing. At her feet, defining the level surface itself, were a billion twinkling orange lights.

An observation: this passage encompasses the sense of wonder element of Science Fiction but it also underscores an inherent obstacle that some readers may have. This is an artifact, but more than that, it is an artifact that is lying about 30,000 light years above the Galactic Plane of the Milky Way. Or about 300,000,000,000,000,000 kilometers right up in the void between galaxies. The galaxy itself is about 100,000 light years across (1,000,000,000,000,000,000 kilometers). The scale of all of this is so astonishingly vast as to be completely unimaginable. There is really no way for the human mind to imagine what the hell this looks like. But we make do, because it's awesome. And it stretches our imagination in ways that normal books can't possibly do.

Joe says

I happened across the first book on this series, Summertide, as a downloadable audiobook at my local library. It is a slow burner; high on intellect, low on action. Divergence cranks everything up to 11. I finished Summertide only interested in the Builders, the ancient alien race who was so advanced that even after millenia of study, the races that inhabit the spiral arm are still no closer to understanding it. After finishing Divergence, however, I can't wait to see what happens with everyone else. The characters are more faceted, they leap off the page rather than fall flat like they did in Summertide. Although just about all of the characters from Summertide are equally as prominent here, I actually care what happens to them in the next installment and I'm eager to learn what fate the author has in store for them. Simply put, Divergence is a better book than Summertide, which makes eager to see if this trend will continue in the next volume.

Sharon Blauvelt says

The first third of the book was a little slow setting up the plot but after that it was really exciting which is typical of most books.

Mike says

Part one THE SUMMERTIDE was a good. Part two DIVERGENCE is not. It reads like a rushed, uninspired novel. Sheffield's weakest book.

John Loyd says

Divergence (1991) 293 pages by Charles Sheffield.

Book two of the Heritage Universe. This picks up immediately after Summertide. Hans Rebka and Darya

Lang travel to Gargantua to look for what must have been a builder artifact that came out of Quake. They are joined by Killik, a hymenopt, and J'merlia, a Lo'tfian, who hold out hope of finding their masters Louis Nenda and Atvar H'sial, a Cecropian. Meanwhile the fourth alliance is wondering why Julias Graves hasn't returned from Opal, so they send E. C. Tally, an embodied computer, to find out why the councilor is still in the Dobelle system.

Throw in Bridie Kelly, who is drafted into piloting Councilor Graves to Gargantua, and the story follows those nine characters, putting obstacles in their way (such as the phages that seem to be common around builder artifacts), giving some information about the builders, and finally getting the whole group together on Serenity (another builder artifact) with an even bigger problem to solve.

A lot of the suspense comes from trying to figure out the who and what of the builders. It's a bit of a balancing act of the reader getting weary, and Sheffield holding that one more tidbit in reserve. It didn't work as well as it could--for me--because I didn't have enough contiguous hours to read. It still came out as an enjoyable read.

Fellini says

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Todd Taylor says

I was hoping for a bit more with this series, but after this one I think I'm outta here. While I would like to find out more about the Builders, I don't think I have the patience, and none of the main characters are compelling enough for me to remember their names or care about their futures.

Nicatel says

Secondo romanzo del ciclo dell'"Heritage Universe": più che una nuova vicenda ambientata nello stesso universo, è in pratica lo stretto seguito del primo romanzo del ciclo, "Quake, il pianeta proibito" (che Urania ha pubblicato quasi vent'anni fa).

E' molto opportuno procurarsi "Quake" e leggerlo prima di dedicarsi a questo. Non so quanto sia pienamente comprensibile "Un mondo per gli Artefici", che inizia "in medias res", senza una conoscenza degli eventi pregressi, che nella trama vengono accennati solo per sommi capi.

Romanzo scorrevole, classica fantascienza spaziale tecnologica, con qualche ingenuità che lo avvicina quasi ad un juvenile.

Del ciclo dell'Heritage Universe Urania ha pubblicato anni fa anche il quarto romanzo, "Punto di convergenza": non mi è chiara la motivazione che spinge una collana di fantascienza a pubblicare le opere di un ciclo a casaccio e nell'arco di due decenni, comunque prendiamo quello che viene e speriamo che prima di altri vent'anni vengano pubblicati anche il secondo e il quinto romanzo.

La quarta di copertina - come troppo spesso succede su Urania, quasi a mostrare un leggero disprezzo per l'intelligenza dei lettori - pare scritta da qualcuno a cui è stato sommariamente accennato il contenuto del libro, ma che si è ben guardato dal leggerlo davvero.

Inoltre la biografia interna dell'autore sembra quasi copiata e incollata da un volume precedente, perché parla di Sheffield come se fosse ancora vivo, mentre è morto nel 2002 (come giustamente scritto nella quarta di copertina).

Maddalenah says

I'm not entirely sure of what I think of this books. There are interesting bits, but the characters are kind of shallow and the writing is not as fluid as it could be, and it often gets far too technical for a fiction book. I'm still curious enough to keep reading, but it's not my favourite Sheffield.

Tom Rust says

Charles Sheffield situates the action in one place, making the whole plot feel a bit claustrophobic, just like the first Heritage novel. The same set of characters also continue on and are the story's strong point, in my opinion. The central veil of mystery (the purpose and origin of the Builders) is lifted somewhat, but the whole book feels much more like another chapter than a whole book. I look forward to more in the third of the series.

John Strohm says

If you've read an Elmore Leonard novel, you know that he creates interesting characters and then has them interact. Sheffield takes that one step further -- he creates interesting scenery and little else. The characters aren't developed from the last book, and nothing much happens. People stand around for a few hundred pages wondering what to do, and then the book ends.

Sci-fi in general needs to get out of this "everything must be a trilogy or tetralogy" mindset. Summertide (book 1) and Divergence could have easily been a single book, with some fat cut out. Maybe some of a future book could be added as well, so something interesting can actually happen.

Ricky Penick says

Unfortunately, this followup to Summertide is alternately expository and sappy, like some 1930s melodrama. Perhaps the 10 year publication gap has something to do with this disappointing followup. The narrative moves forward a bit but all in all, it seems like it was written by a completely different author. Maybe the third book will be a return to form but I'm going to wait a while to find out.

Eric Moyer says

Competent and interesting space opera.

Penny says

Endless detail and repetition ... Iv'e read the 1st one, and half of this, but I give up.
