



Rider at the Gate

C.J. Cherryh

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Rider at the Gate (Nighthorse, Book 1)

Stranded on a distant planet that abounds with fertile farmland, human colonists appear to be in paradise. But all the native animals communicate by telepathy, projecting images that drive humans mad. Only Nighthorses stand between civilization and madness. When a flare of human emotion spreads to all the horses, chaos erupts.

Rider at the Gate Details

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From Reader Review Rider at the Gate for online ebook

Terri says

C.J. Cherryh is well known for her ability to develop wonderful ecosystems for the worlds she creates. Even though her worlds are fantastical, they always speak to what is most human. In *Rider at the Gate* and its sequel *Cloud's Rider*, Cherryh does not disappoint. We get a mostly recognizable landscape inhabited by previously starfaring humans and the native telepathic fauna. Among the native fauna of this unnamed planet is the fierce and intelligent nighthorse. Nighthorses are curious and addicted to the thoughts and emotions of the human mind and often choose a particular human to be a "rider." The symbiotic relationship that develops between nighthorse and rider is a strong connection meant to be mutually beneficial but sometimes results in a pairing of devastating proportions. Within this alien system Cherryh builds a beautiful coming of age story that captures the often painful and baffling aspects that accompany the human journey to adulthood -- desperate feelings of longing, loneliness and a desire to be independent yet "fit in."

Cherryh is known to take quite a bit of time developing her story and I suggest patience when starting this set. I didn't feel completely drawn into the story until about page 150 of the first book, but after that point couldn't put the books down.

J. Rocci says

I remember reading this book in one sitting back in high school, staying up late into the night because I couldn't walk away from the tightly built tension. For a straightforward storyline, *Rider at the Gate* has so many threads interwoven that greater depth is given to every scene. Cherryh has created a world that is both alien and familiar, reminiscent of frontier tales with the isolated mountain villages and rudimentary technology, but starkly different with telepathic horses and hungry beasts waiting for any faltering step out on the road. My younger self identified with the main protagonist, Danny, as he fought to be taken seriously in a dangerous world, and even now I resonate with his determination to take action and how he deals with the consequences of those actions. *Rider at the Gate* is haunting and beautiful, and still keeps me up reading throughout the night.

Terry says

Any book By Carol Cherryh is a pleasure to delve into and the first Finisterre novel is no exception. Complex characters, deft plotting and plenty of action personify her pre-*Foreigner* work.

** Sadly, her older novels are disappearing from my local (Chicago) libraries at an ever increasing rate as new media and immigrant pressure has forced libraries into freeing up finite space to address their needs. More dvds and tape books etc. mean less space for older novels that aren't read often enough to guarantee their allotted space won't be sacrificed for more modern media and newer book titles.

I'm buying up what's available but my retirement income prevents me from saving a lot of great works from years past. A literary tragedy in the making which I'm sure is occurring nation-wide.

Suz Thackston says

I'm a die-hard Cherryh fan, but I don't love all of her stuff. I wanted so to love this, but it turned into more of a slog than I expected.

One of the things I love best about her is how she does stream-of-consciousness thoughts, that put you so solidly in the character's head. No one does it better. But in this one, where the nighthorses and their riders speak in telepathy so much, it bogs it down for me. Instead of putting me in the mindset, it keeps yanking me out of the action.

And because the telepathy is so ubiquitous, and there are several main characters, it gets hard to differentiate. I found myself having to double check whose perspective I was reading, never a good thing.

The world is wonderful, and so is the relationship between nighthorses and riders. I read Cloud's Rider first years ago and adored it (hope I do when I re-read in the near future) but I found this book a little ragged and hard to sink into.

William Crosby says

Humans on a planet where the native species have telepathic ability (usually imagery). When a horse is hurt and loses its rider it can go "rogue" and its insanity can spread throughout the immediate area causing humans to kill each other.

What happens in the thought/imagery sensations is often more important than what is happening in the "real world" so that distortions and emotions can cause mistrust and anger and .

This book's plot does not move fast; it gets mired in excessive description and continually repeats thoughts about descriptions about the roads and the weather and relationships.

Pam Baddeley says

This sounded like a concept that would be quite fascinating: on a remote planet, a colony of humans have set up a sort of wild west society in which they depend on the sentient nighthorses, creatures which bond with humans. Most of the wildlife is telepathic and has the ability to send distorting emotion laden images which can overwhelm and kill human beings in umpteen different ways: the nighthorses defend against those and keep most at bay. They also enable travel and trade, with their riders acting like a travel guild who ride gunshot, literally, on convoys of trucks between settlements, enabling people to live a fairly comfortable if precarious existence.

Into this, early in the tale, comes the rumour of a rogue horse: one which can turn human emotions and impressions back on themselves and amplify negative emotions to a fever pitch, resulting in fights, murders, and at worse, people opening the gates of towns and letting in the multitude of predators great and small which look on human beings as a walking larder. A man called Guil Stuart is told his partner Aby has died because of a rogue horse, but then enemies of his start to twist things, amplified by the large numbers of nighthorses in the rider camp beside a large settlement town, into making out Stuart and his horse to be the rogue. He is forced to set off into the wilderness, initially unarmed and wounded, on a quest to kill the real

rogue.

Another main character is a young man, Danny Fisher, a town boy who has been 'called' by a nighthorse, Cloud, and villified by his family and the local priests who teach that listening to nighthorse sendings means people will go to hell - despite the fact that without nighthorses, human existence is impossible on the planet. Danny is struggling to come to terms with his alienation from his family and his inability to calm his young horse at crucial moments. Feeling a debt to Stuart who once gave him sound advice, he becomes involved in an attempt to track Stuart and then falls in with Stuart's enemies.

The story switches constantly between the different characters, mainly Stuart and Danny, but others also, as the situation with the rogue becomes deadly for all.

So far so good. But I found the execution of the story a barrier to enjoying it fully. The narrative is an attempt at immersion in the experience of emotion-laden telepathy, with words constantly appearing in pointy brackets, and becomes quite hard to follow in places. Also, the story seems overworked and laborious, taking pages and pages for the smallest bit of action, and a lot of emphasis on travelling in the onset of winter. The story didn't really need 468 pages to tell in my opinion and might have worked better with some judicious cutting of what came over in places as unnecessary blow by blow spelling out of every piece of character internal dialogue. For that reason, I can only give it a 3-star rating.

Donna says

Wow! Both this book and the second one (Cloud's Rider) form a very tight sequence told over a short winter season. The edgy, dangerous, spooky ambience of these books are a delightful terror to read. Every storm, every slip, every gunshot resonates with a wierd otherness that is captivating. I literally couldn't stop reading these books until I finished, and it was a hell of a ride! As is usual with Ms Cherryh's writing, her characterisations are superb. And look our for the amusing references to "cattle tails" and the self-references of hopeful bacon-mad nighthorses! Highly recommend.

7thTrooper says

Detta var minst sagt en liten revansch från Cherryh, med tanke på vad jag senast läste av henne. Fading Sun-trilogin var ju inte världens bästa första intryck. Jag vill minnas att det nog mest var karaktärerna som satte käppar i hjulet för ett välutvecklat och intressant universum. Språket var väl inte skitspännande, heller. Med det sagt är inte karaktärerna perfekta eller språket sprakande här heller men de är i alla fall så pass bra att de inte är i vägen. Det är helt dugligt hantverk båda två och ibland riktigt bra. En minst sagt lite schizofren bekantskap med författaren, minst sagt.

Nåväl.

"Rider at the Gate" kan enklast beskrivas som en western där hästarna är telepatiska. Det pratas förvisso om att människorna kommit ned i rymdskepp (den utspelas inte på jorden) men det är också det enda som egentligen är uttalat SF, utom hästarna, då. Jag hade ärligt talat förväntat mig mer av just science fiction än vad som faktiskt finns med i boken. Det är nämnda hästar (och i och för sig alla djur då de alla är telepatiska) och deras förhållanden till människorna som är bokens bästa del. De attraheras av människor på grund av

deras tankemönster och människor har dragit nytta av detta för att skydda sina boplatser, då allt annat på planeten fruktar nämnda hästar. De är också allätare och har tre tår på sina hovar. En av dem har en mild besatthet med bacon, men inget koncept alls om vart det kommer ifrån. Cherryh lyckas över förväntan med att skriva förhållanden mellan hästarna och deras ryttare som man kan investera känslomässigt i. Speciellt det mellan Burn (den som gillade bacon) och en av huvudkaraktärerna, Stuart, fungerar bra. Djuren är inte bara människor som råkar vara hästformade, hästarna tänker inte som människor och betar sig inte som människor heller.

Men det är inte en lätt bok att komma in i. Cherryh är inte så brydd i att förklara lätt och smidigt för läsaren hur världen funkar. Det kan lätt bli förvirrande även när man vant sig då hästar och ryttare sällan pratar i ord. Speciellt i början när Westman med vänner kommer till staden. Våldigt förvirrande. Men hon rör ändå iland det i slutändan.

Perry Whitford says

For human settlers on the planet of Finisterre life is hard, holed up in frontier towns amongst the peaks and valleys, subject to harsh winters and more threateningly to the thoughts and minds of the native animal population, which can both read and project feelings and emotions into the surrounding "ambient".

Only the nighthorses are friendly to humans, picking out riders with whom they form a symbiotic relationship. These riders fulfill the crucial role of shepherding resources from one town to the other, yet are shunned by the majority of society, who consider it evil to converse with the beasts.

Within this grim environment, Cherryh builds a suspenseful and engrossing fantasy-horror Western, full of laconic frontiersmen and women, remote outposts that need defending, and the constant threat of a shoot out.

It's also a convincing, empathetic coming of age story, as junior rider Danny Fowler and his horse Cloud join a trio of hardened veterans on a grueling trek through the frozen wastes, attempting to locate avenging rider Guil Stewart and his mount Burn, hell-bent on finding and killing the "rogue" nighthorse that caused the death of his partner, Aby.

I mention the horses names above as they are as much characters as the humans that ride them. Similar and different from horses as we understand them, the nighthorses and their riders are in constant communication with each other in an equal partnership, the mood of each affecting the other.

When masses numbers of nighthorses and humans come in close contact projected feelings can merge and intensify within the "ambient" to create mass panic and hysteria. Cherryh plays this for all it's worth, and she writes with a great sense of her created environment.

Rarely have I experienced a terrain and ecology brought to life so vividly, you really feel like you are out there in the wind and snow, suffering the same numbing privations that the characters are subjected to throughout.

The story was brought to an exciting and satisfying conclusion, though there is a sequel too, which I will certainly be aiming to get hold of. Cherryh is a prolific writer of science fiction and fantasy novels, but this was my first by her.

If her others are as well written and emotionally involving as this one I will be looking to read more.

Juushika says

Telepathic Nighthorses are the most powerful creatures on the planet, and partnering with them enable humans to maintain settlements and trade. But a rogue Nighthorse is a fearsome threat, with the power to drive entire settlements mad. There's a lot going on here: four convergent groups of characters, a modicum of worldbuilding based around telepathic bond animals and early winter alien frontierism, and a mystery plot--all written in Cherryh's terse, minute style. Those aspects don't always coalesce--I disliked the aesthetic, rarely cared about the characters's interconnections, and, while the final tableau is effective, the plot's resolution is too simple. But I came to this book for telepathic horses companions, and there it delivers without qualification. The focus is communication: the intimacy of Rider/Nighthorse interactions played to effect against grim winter; the fallout of telepathy, how it forces some intimacies and denies others. The unforgiving and rewarding focus on the (inter)personal is precisely what I wanted from this trope by this author. *Rider at the Gate* is difficult to recommend, as it's hardly an essential read even for fans of Cherryh--but if you love this trope, it won't disappoint.

Jim Mcclanahan says

I have read more novels by C.J. Cherryh than any other author. This may not be unusual in that we are age mates (born within a month of each other) and may have something of a temporal commonality. But, without going into specifics, I have to say that she has provided me with both the zenith and the nadir of much of my reading experience. Mind you, I don't think it has much to do with when the work was created. I have loved both her earliest and most recent works and much from in between. But not everything. This novel was completed somewhere in the midst of the first Foreigner novels.

I found it to be among the best of her work with rich character development that not only allowed the reader to get to know them well, but also to see them change and progress. All-in-all, her tales work best when the people involved are the prime focus. In this case, the humans on the planet created by Ms. Cherryh are faced with the problems created by an indigenous population of fauna which have telepathic abilities. Happily, in the instance of the horse-like creatures (the nighthorses), they are willing partners to those who can aspire to and succeed at a relationship with them as riders.

But it is an uneasy relationship, often fraught with conflict and cross-purposes which can be fomented by either horse or rider. In this story, the sudden appearance of a "rogue" horse creates chaos and murderous conflict throughout the entire human/nighthorse milieu. The task of resolving the conflict is not either easily conferred or pursued. To put it bluntly, the issue is in doubt until the very last pages.

A good read and plenty of incentive to go directly to the sequel *Cloud's Rider*.

Verity Brown says

Although this book has a slow and confusing beginning, it eventually picks up into a really fascinating thriller/murder-mystery in an exceedingly intriguing world. The basic premise is that human colonists have been marooned for generations on a planet where most of the wildlife is "telepathic" (considering that radio signals are one of the most dangerous attractants, I suspect there's some semi-scientific explanation possible for the telepathy). The only thing that prevents humans from getting swarmed and devoured by the wildlife is the presence around every human settlement of Nighthorses--omnivorous horse analogues (and one of the planet's upper-level predators) that tend to pair up with particular human Riders (humans being the suppliers of interesting, focused thoughts...and bacon).

If this set-up sounds a little too much like McCaffrey's *Pern*, Lackey's *Companions*, and every other magical animal pairing story you've ever heard of...well, I think it's *supposed* to. It's a wry (but subtle) send-up of that kind of story, with companion animals who very definitely have minds of their own and are not merely compliant extensions of their human friends' wishes. Cherryh uses a logical lens rather than a rose-colored one on the scenario, and I really enjoyed the result. I just wish she'd write more in this universe (the second book, *Cloud's Rider*, ends with far too much unanswered).

Gregg Wingo says

Cherryh's "Rider at the Gate" and "Cloud's Rider" are part of her experiment with the Western genre. However, the author is doing more than placing cowboys in space or creating a "Wagon Train in the stars" or costuming a la Han Solo or "Firefly", in fact, she has invented a new High Plains Drifter and a society dependent on upon him. This stories are also an exploration of the nature of telepathic societies and its relationship with the mindblind.

Both stories pivot around the relationship of the cowboys and their "horses". However, these are not your normal equines, rather, they are alien four-legged carnivores with telepathic abilities. Nor are they beast of burdens but intelligent beings who choose to enter symbiotic relationships with their riders. This symbiosis has enabled humans to survive on a planet where all fauna have evolved telepathy as an adaptive mechanism.

The stories are exciting and action driven, and, in fact, more violent than C.J.'s normal work - this is the Wild West re-envisioned in the stars after all. Culture clash is as always the point and in these books it is literally on everybody's mind. As always the author delivers the goods.

Dark-Draco says

This is set in a world where human colonies exist in walled cities and where all the local wildlife survives by using telepathic images to hunt or flee. The Nighthorses, native animals similar to our own earthly mounts, befriend humans and pair up with individuals, who then act as escorts and guards for other humans when they need to travel across the wilds. Dan Fisher is still getting used to his mount, Cloud, and as a village boy, he is looked down on by the children brought up in the Rider camps. When riders escorting a truck convoy enter his town, spreading panic amongst the riders and townspeople with visions of a rogue horse and death in the mountains, Dan is disgusted by the treatment of the dead rider's partner, who is accidentally injured in

the chaos. So he agrees to help track down Guil and ends up trekking up a mountain range as winter fast approaches. There are plenty of people looking for Guil, some to make amends, some to get revenge, but they are all surprised by what waits for them up the mountain. Because there is a little girl who wants nothing more than a Nighthorse for her own and a Horse that is lost, bleeding and looking for something it has lost.

There are huge echoes of Anne McCaffrey's Pern stories here, but the world created around the ideas is so different. I love the way the horses are given character and enjoyed how much a part of the story they were. The ending is unbelievably sad and a little rushed, so with lots happening, it was hard to keep track of it all. Considering what the riders had been hunting, I am surprised that they shot Harper with so little thought, but hey ho!! An exciting book and an author I have never read before.

Saphirablue says

As much as it pains me to say - I can't finish this one. I just can't connect to the characters (on the contrary, when certain characters are the POV, I get angry) and the story/writing itself.

Which is sad, because the concept of the book is great and I really wish I could get into it. But, I can't and I won't force myself to read further.
