



The Pirates of Ersatz

Murray Leinster, Elliott Miller (Narrator)

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Bron is the offspring of infamous space pirates but instead of following in the family footsteps he decides to become an electronic engineer. Unfortunately, every time he tries to get out, something pulls him back in. This is a tongue-in-cheek space adventure along the lines of the Stainless Steel Rat by Harry Harrison. It was originally published in the FEB-APR issues of Astounding Science Fiction in 1959.

(Read by Elliott Miller)

Approx. 6.25 hours

The Pirates of Ersatz Details

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From Reader Review The Pirates of Ersatz for online ebook

Debbie Zapata says

What do you do if you are from a planet famous for its pirates, but you would rather play with electronics? Well, you unconsciously absorb all your Grandfather's pirate wisdom until you are old enough to be on your own, then you go off to another planet and start working on the Master Plan for your life: *(a) to achieve splendid things as an electronic engineer, (b) to grow satisfactorily rich, (c) to marry a delightful girl, and (d) end life a great man.*

But when do Master Plans ever run smoothly? Our hero Bron Hoddan has a problem that is not compatible with Civilized Society: he has a brain and he knows how to use it. He can't help it if Civilized Society doesn't want him to use his brain. But that is where his trouble begins. Hoddan is an endearing combination of Jimmy Stewart naiveness (things seem to happen to him without his being aware of quite why) and James Cagney tough guy (he knows just how to handle himself when these things happen, he never panics. Well, okay, maybe just a little that one time.)

On his newly adopted civilized planet, he created a receptor that would save the Power Company millions in credits but they are not interested in allowing him to give a demonstration so (here comes Cagney) he breaks into the Power plant and attaches his device anyway. But the next morning the police are at his door and he reverts to Jimmy Stewart. And the situation spirals out of control from this point on.

This late 1950's story was interesting, with bits of sarcastic wisdom tucked here and there. For example, here is what the Interstellar Ambassador tells Hoddan: *You proposed to improve a technical process in a society which considers itself beyond improvement. If you'd succeeded, the idea of change would have spread, people now poor would have gotten rich, people now rich would have gotten poor, and you'd have done what all governments are established to prevent.*

Or this, when Hoddan (in Cagney mode) has kidnapped a few soldiers to use as a pirate crew: *When men are to be led it is rarely wise to discuss policy or tactics with them. Most men work best when they know only what is expected of them. Then they can't get confused and they do not get ideas of how to do things better.*

I had the distinct feeling that Leinster was commenting on the high muckety-mucks of his day, and enjoying himself while doing so. This was the second or maybe third Leinster story I've read, and it won't be the last.

Libromaniac says

Both an old fashioned space opera, and a cutting satire, Murray Leinster's The Pirates of Ersatz can be enjoyed on multiple levels. Thrill to tales of space piracy, smile wryly at the follies of men, nod sagely as Mr. Leinster elucidates the underpinnings of economics. An enjoyable and thought provoking read from a time when men were men, and women were NOT to be trifled with.

Yibbie says

This is such a fun improbable little story. The hero gets into and out of more scrapes than any human ever survived. He is improbably smart, infinitely wise, and wonderfully caring. All while just trying to invent something marvelous, make money, and marry a delightful girl. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, civilization, that is the first major obstacle then there is barbarism to overcome. Apathy, greed, custom, fear, ignorance, and jealousy all just might derail those marvelous plans of his. He does have one staunch ally. His Grandfather just might be able to pull him through all of this.

There are a few curse words. There is nothing else objectionable. I would recommend it as a very fun read.

Kevin says

This Hugo nominated novel is a lot of fun, it didn't win the Hugo, neither did the other nominees "The Sirens of Titan" and "Dorsai!" they all lost out to "Starship Troopers", a pretty nice group of novels for 1959. I'd decided to read it in celebration of Talk Like a Pirate Day 2017, so a few days later I had time to read it. The beginning is decidedly pirate free but the fast moving story doesn't take too long to get to the pirates. I've never seen pirates such as these and the way they turn a profit while saving galactic civilization is highly entertaining.

Brian Greiner says

Great fun! One of the classics that I've read a number of times over the decades (yah, I'm old), and have enjoyed it every time. It holds up well over the years, unlike a lot of other books.

It is a classic Leinster book, so if you don't like his style then you won't like this.

Not laugh-out-loud funny, but certainly a light-hearted romp. What saves it, I think, is Leinster's wry humour and clear insights into people and societies.

prcardi says

Storyline: 3/5

Characters: 3/5

Writing Style: 3/5

World: 1/5

The Pirates of Zan features a hapless protagonist who regularly finds himself in absurd predicaments not entirely of his own making. Resourceful, motivated, and with enough wit to outsmart an army of commoners, Bron Hoddan salvages misadventure after misadventure by taking advantage of the skills from his upbringing and a natural intellect. The first half gallops along, tossing out piercing commentaries on society erratically along the trek and with craftily designed escapes laced with comedy-of-errors embellishments. This is not prose to ponder or relish; this is supposed to be read rapidly and in a sitting. It is most dazzling for what it accomplishes in the rapid delivery, the story bursting with interconnections, surprises, and bite. The pace leaves one breathless, and one wonders who will falter first, the reader or the author. It does end up proving too much of a challenge for Leinster to keep up the pace for the entirety of the

book, and the escapades of the latter half are more laboriously constructed and contrived. The story manages to keep the absurd tone throughout, though, ending with the same fanfare with which it began. This is not an era from which I find a lot of science fiction books to enjoy, but it fits right in with a few gems I've come across: Poul Anderson's *High Crusade*, Harry Harrison's *2nd Deathworld*, or James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*.

Gary Holt says

One of the best of Murray Leinster in my opinion. It's got the classic Leinster hero who's a very smart engineer, turns out to be surprisingly good at manipulating people, takes bold and clever action, but can be a bit clueless about people at times. (And those are the times you are snickering at him.)

This book has some of Leinster's best social satire--at times approaching even the *Retief* books by Keith Laumer, but with a much lighter touch. It also has a pretty good plot: a brilliant engineer finds society not receptive to his world-changing inventions, so he goes off to change another world. Along the way, he saves several other worlds.

I think this book is enjoyable for a wide range of ages. My boys (7 and 10) loved it, and so did I.

The very light and fluffy romance feels dated and stereotypical for early science fiction (i.e., its stereotypes would be offensive if released today), so you have to appreciate it as a piece of period fiction. That's not really an integral part of the story, though.

By the way, this story is also known as "The Pirates of Zan", and you can buy it under that name too. I have no idea why he called it the *Pirates of Ersatz* originally, because (unless I missed it) that name does not appear in the book, but Zan does.

Marts (Thinker) says

Planetary adventure, as Bron Hoddan attempts to runaway from his native planet of Zan, where his relatives are to be executed...

He escapes to the planet Walden hoping to establish himself as an electrical engineer but then one day the police come looking for him...

Jim says

It was not mere impulsive action when Bron Hoddan started for the planet Walden by stowing away on a ship that had come to his native planet to hang all his relatives. He'd planned it long before. It was a long-cherished and carefully worked out scheme. He didn't expect the hanging of his relatives, of course. He knew that they'd act grieved and innocent, and give proof that they were simple people leading blameless lives. They'd make their would-be executioners feel ashamed and apologetic for having thought evil of them, and as soon as the strangers left they'd return to their normal way of life, which was piracy. But while this was going on, Bron Hoddan stowed away on the menacing vessel. Presently he arrived at its home world. But his

ambition was to reach Walden, so he set about getting there. It took a long time because he had to earn ship-passage from one solar system to another, but he held to his idea. Walden was the most civilized planet in that part of the galaxy. On Walden, Hoddan intended, in order (a) to achieve splendid things as an electronic engineer, (b) to grow satisfactorily rich, (c) to marry a delightful girl, and (d) end his life a great man. But he had to spend two years trying to arrange even the first.

Nick says

A little slow to get going so don't give up too soon. If you have liked his other books this one will probably work for you too.

Sean Brennan says

This is a great little story, very reminiscent of Vance albeit without the eloquence of Jack's love of language, highly recommended.

Lora says

Fun and short, this serialization is available free from several sources and worth the read. Satire, humor, and interesting characters rounded out a series of misadventures for the main character. I always enjoy new characters being introduced late in the book. The ending was a satisfying wrap up for such a silly read.

Herman Gigglethorpe says

The Pirates of Ersatz features a protagonist who never fit in with piracy or civilized society. He tries to impress a girl and improve electronic engineering on the staid planet Walden. (Why is it called Walden if the people aren't Transcendentalist?) Instead, he is blamed for an accidental death and has to flee to a feudal planet full of bloodthirsty customs about honor and looting. He is tricked into fighting for the cunning Lady Fani, and he succeeds, though he accidentally gives away her father's secret plans concerning a monopoly on stun guns.

Eventually he assists a group of colonists who fell for a scam, and launches a raid on Walden. Walden is so boring that people throw treasure at him because the pirate attack is the first interesting thing that has happened to this planet. They get a spark of creativity and write stories about piracy. Nedda turns out to be sickeningly nice, and the hero settles down with the more interesting Fani.

Take a drink every time the phrase "said [blank]ly" is used, since Leinster is a bit too fond of adverbs. Another issue is the Harry Turtledove-style repetition. Yes, we KNOW the hero wants to marry Nedda, now shut up about it. We KNOW the residents of Walden need tranquilizers to stay sane.

Even with its flaws, it's a decent book. It's on Project Gutenberg for free! :)

Timothy Ferguson says

A short novella of a very early type: the monsters on the new world are giant Earth creatures created by a failed terraforming project. Interesting to those who like the tropes of the Rocket Age, but a problematic text in many ways. Why is the female crewman in charge of cleaning the rocket? I was kind of hoping, since she was the love interest, that Crewman Carol was going to turn out to be a Polish man, like the recent Pope also named Carol. Alas, the twist was that even in the future, the love of a good woman, a large sum of money, and a convenient rocket will make any criminal good.

This review originally appeared on book coasters

Jesi says

I actually really enjoyed this book, and would suggest that everyone who enjoys humorous sci-fi to read it. But, it's not Great Literature, which is why I'm only giving it three stars. It's light, fluffy reading and enjoyable.
