

The Gap Series by Stephen Donaldson

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The Gap Series, Gollancz, 2008:

The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story (1991) and The Gap into Vision: Forbidden Knowledge (1991) ISBN 978 0 575 08334 9

The Gap into Power: A Dark and Hungry God Arises (1993) ISBN 978 0 575 08336 3

The Gap into Madness: Chaos and Order (1994) ISBN 978 0 575 08337 0

The Gap into Ruin: This Day All Gods Die (1996) ISBN 978 0 575 08338 7

Stephen R. Donaldson is perhaps best known as the author of the Chronicles of Thomas Covenant. However, he is a very versatile writer, who between 1977 and 1997 was honored with many popular writing awards including the John W Campbell Award for Best New Writer (1977) and the President's Award, The International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (1997). After many more such awards, he won the World Fantasy Award in 2000 for Reave the Just and Other Tales.

In 2008, Gollancz re-released Donaldson's epic five-volume science-fiction space opera adventure, The Gap Series, combining the first two books, The Real Story and Forbidden Knowledge into a single volume. According to Donaldson's website, this was done at his request. The Real Story together with Forbidden Knowledge is followed by A Dark and Hungry God Arises, Chaos and Order and finally This Day All Gods Die.

It has been a real pleasure to read the acclaimed series back to back. There are real advantages and pleasures to reading the series as one. There is a greater sense of continuity gained in this way. And there is something thrilling about seeing the grand sweep of space woven into a seriously engaging story. This science fiction epic is set in a future where humans have colonized deep space in an attempt to gather scarce resources. The "Gap" of the title refers to the vast distances in space that must be crossed using FTL (faster than light) drives.

The story follows two concurrent paths. The first path concerns an ensign in the United Mining Companies Police (UMCP), Morn Hyland, who must fight to stay alive after being captured by a marauder named Angus Thermopyle and later by the unscrupulous Nick Succorso. The second path follows the political manipulations and intrigue in the power structures of Earth and space, through, Warden Dios, as he attempts to thwart the schemes of his boss, Holt Fasner, who is the CEO of United Mining Companies (UMC) and the most powerful man in human space.

Each of the stories takes place against the backdrop of a threat to human survival from an alien species called the Amnion, who use genetic mutation as a weapon in a war against humankind. In some ways, the series can be seen to be a part reworking of Wagner's epic music drama The Ring Cycle. In the Afterword of the first volume of the series, Donaldson specifically refers to this mythological epic tale of how the gods were brought down by a bitter curse and an act of unselfish heroism.

At times, the betrayal and violence that Morn Hyland suffers seems to go on forever, perhaps unnecessarily so. It is not that the future power structures of Earth and space could not be nasty and vicious, but the repetition of this in so many varied ways eventually becomes a bit onerous.

A feature of Donaldson's considerable writing output is the provision of "Ancillary Documentation." In these appendices, Donaldson explains the scientific background of the plot. This is a fine advantage for readers who may not be up to speed on the technical aspects of space travel and weaponry.

Donaldson is a writer who is able to write either fantasy or science fiction. (There is a full listing of his impressive oeuvre in the Wikipedia article under his name.) Because of this, it hard to compare his works with each other or with those of other authors, but if you liked, for example, Peter Hamilton's epic novels, then you will fully appreciate this series by Stephen Donaldson.

Donaldson has an official website at <http://www.stephendonaldson.com/> and there are useful articles on each of the episodes on Wikipedia, starting with a series overview at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gap_Cycle.