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Pushing Ice



Synopsis

2057. Humanity has raised exploiting the solar system to an art form. Bella Lind and the crew of her nuclear-powered ship, the Rockhopper, push ice. They mine comets. And they're good at it. The Rockhopper is nearing the end of its current mission cycle, and everyone is desperate for some much-needed R & R, when startling news arrives from Saturn: Janus, one of Saturn's ice moons, has inexplicably left its natural orbit and is now heading out of the solar system at high speed. As layers of camouflage fall away, it becomes clear that Janus was never a moon in the first place. It's some kind of machine - and it is now headed toward a fuzzily glimpsed artifact 260 light-years away. The Rockhopper is the only ship anywhere near Janus, and Bella Lind is ordered to shadow it for the few vital days before it falls forever out of reach. In accepting this mission, she sets her ship and her crew on a collision course with destiny - for Janus has more surprises in store, and not all of them are welcome.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Alastair Reynolds's novels are reliably fascinating at the "big idea" level. He's got a truly first rate hard-SF imagination, and the chops to take cool ideas and reveal them via action plots, often hiding the really neat ideas convincingly until the end. He is a "light speed limit" author, and fascinated with Deep Time. And all this describes *Pushing Ice* quite excellently. The novel opens with a curious prologue set 18,000 years in the future, describing an ambitious plan to celebrate the legendary Benefactor who started humanity on the road toward expansion into the Galaxy. Then we get a flashback to 2057, and the story of this Benefactor, a woman named Bella Lind. Bella is the captain

of an ice mining spaceship, the Rockhopper. This ship is diverted to chase a moon of Saturn, Janus, which has suddenly accelerated and headed out of the Solar System: clearly, it's an alien artifact of some sort. Bella, however, must convince her crew to go along: it's a highly dangerous mission, and their corporate bosses do not inspire confidence. One of Bella's key links to the crew is her close friend, engineer Svetlana Borghesian. Svetlana originally supports Bella, but when she later discovers that they have less fuel than they thought, and that the corporation seems to have been hiding this fact, she begs for a turnaround, and turns against Bella when she refuses. This sets up the central human conflict of the story, between Bella and Svetlana, who oscillate as leaders of the expedition over time. And what about the expedition? Eventually they reach a point of no return, and they are forced to essentially colonize Janus, while trying to unlock its secrets. Janus is traveling towards a Structure around the star Spica, 260 light years distant, which means a long journey is ahead of them.

After his hugely successful debut quartet (Revelation Space, Chasm City, Redemption Ark, and Absolution Gap) Alastair Reynolds has begun widening his range. Century Rain and his latest, Pushing Ice, are set in different universes from each other, and from the shared universe of the first four books. And whereas Century Rain takes place at a time intermediate between the present and that of Revelation Space, Pushing Ice starts in the near future - 2057, to be precise. As to where it ends... well, that would be telling. The action begins when Janus, one of Saturn's moons, mysteriously leaves orbit and accelerates towards the edge of the Solar System. The only vehicle in position to intercept its path is the nuclear-powered mining ship Rockhopper, with its crew of 145 captained by Bella Lind. At the request of Deepshaft, the owners, Bella asks the crew if they are willing to take the unknowable risks involved. Swayed by the promise of huge bonuses, a majority votes to go for it, and the chase is on. But instead of three days of high acceleration, a week of observation, and laughing all the way home to the bank, they soon find themselves fighting for their lives. It would be wrong to give away any more of the plot, as its effectiveness rests largely on a series of surprises that go on right to the end of the book. Suffice it to say that, while slowly but steadily building up the tension and introducing us to a wide cast of characters, Reynolds weaves in some fascinating technical ideas - from an effective method of freezing dying people for future resuscitation to the potential implications of femtotech (a step beyond nanotech) and relativistic time compression.

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