



## Farside

*Ben Bova*

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Six-time Hugo-Award winner Ben Bova presents *Farside*.

Farside, the side of the Moon that never faces Earth, is the ideal location for an astronomical observatory. It is also the setting for a tangled web of politics, personal ambition, love, jealousy, and murder.

Telescopes on Earth have detected an Earth-sized planet circling a star some thirty light-years away. Now the race is on to get pictures of that distant world, photographs and spectra that will show whether or not the planet is truly like Earth, and if it bears life.

Farside will include the largest optical telescope in the solar system as well as a vast array of radio antennas, the most sensitive radio telescope possible, insulated from the interference of Earth's radio chatter by a thousand kilometers of the Moon's solid body.

Building the Farside observatory is a complex, often dangerous task. On the airless surface of the Moon, under constant bombardment of hard radiation and infalling micrometeoroids, builders must work in cumbersome spacesuits and use robotic machines as much as possible. Breakdowns—mechanical and emotional—are commonplace. Accidents happen, some of them fatal.

What they find stuns everyone, and the human race will never be the same.

"Bova's latest novel is one of his best, and a classic use of the old sf theme of humanity reaching out for immortality among the stars."—*Booklist* (starred review) on *Farside*

## **Farside Details**

Date : Published February 12th 2013 by Tor Books (first published February 5th 2013)

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Author : Ben Bova

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## From Reader Review Farside for online ebook

### Chris Friend says

Good lord, this story was offensively and shallowly written. Any time a new character appears, we get a brief description of that character's clothing, followed by an assessment from another character of the newcomer's potential as a sex partner. And no, it's not subtle suggestions, either. The men are brazenly crass, and the women are sheepishly coy. Writing to stereotypes is bad enough. Writing to old stereotypes that people are working to move beyond, then expecting that to pass as characterization? It's counter to the progressive views generally espoused in Sci-fi, and it's offensive to read.

The action, though not as stereotypical, is unfortunately just as trite. Events happen because the author needed something to talk about, not because they're necessary to let the story progress. What's painful is the pacing. Between minor events, we're stuck with the shallow characters and their repetitive thoughts. All they do is worry about the same goddamned things every time we see them. For some, it's a Nobel prize. For others, it's job security. For Trudy, the damsel in distress, it's whether she looks good for the "hunky stud" (actual phrase) who's more interested in impressing those in power than being a real person we can care about.

And that brings me to the crux of the trouble with this book: after the climax (such as it was), I found that didn't give two shits about anything that happened to any of the cast of characters. But I suppose that brings balance: twice during the story, Bova described characters dealing with defecation. I guess they gave theirs on behalf of the readers, knowing we'd be empathically constipated.

What an awful book.

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### L Morgan says

10 word review: horny middle school personalities conspire against each other; the moon

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### Mark says

It's been a while since I read, never mind reviewed, any of Dr. Bova's novels. In fact, the last one I reviewed was the Ben Gunn anthology, *The Sam Gunn Omnibus* (2007) back in, erm... 2007.

So what do we have here, eight years on? For those who don't know, for over two decades Ben has been creating his own series of novels (The **Grand Tour** series) which explore different planets (and in this case, satellites) of the Solar System.

Here, in *Farside*, the spotlight is on the development of a huge radio-telescope array being built on the far side of the Moon, shielded away from any of that annoying radio-wave chatter from the Earth. As this is a solar system built on private enterprise and profit, then part of the novel's tension is created by the race to completion between the Moon-based Cyclops array at Farside and the IAA creating a just-as-big interferometer out in space. Whichever finishes first and gets data on the recently discovered 'New Earth',

Sirius C, will get the media attention and glory, not to mention the associated research contracts.

The cast list of this cinematic escapade is appropriately multinational, and as befitting a space opera, each bringing their own personal issues to the plot. We begin the book by meeting Canadian Trudy Yost, the new young assistant-astronomer being sent to the Moon to help with the construction of an optical interferometer on the Farside. On her journey there Trudy meets her object of lust, American Carter McLintock. Carter is the administrative manager for the project leader at Farside, there to help, but also to determine whether his wealthy family should invest into the observatory project.

Trudy and Carter's arrival at Farside leads us to meet others in our list of characters there. Austrian Dr. Jason Uhlrich is the driven project leader, determined for a last chance at achieving a Nobel Prize for his work at Farside. We also meet Grant Simpson, a South African construction manager on Farside, another character who finds Trudy attractive. Anita Marie Halleck is a character that has been in earlier books in this series, and is the Australian Director of the competing IAA project. Dr. Kristine Cardenas, the world's leading nano-technologist is a character brought in to assist with solving a mirror problem.

Life on the frontier is tough. The moonbase at Farside, we are repeatedly told, is cramped, oppressively small and uniformly grey, both in colour and design – functional, rather than luxurious. The whole project is developed with the idea of keeping costs to a minimum, with no frills – as was the American frontier towns of the Wild West, something which Ben is keen to point out:

*“Space is where the action is, boy,.... ‘It’s the frontier now and the frontier is where new fortunes are made.”*

This idea of ‘expanding the frontier’ fits the template I first encountered back in books before **The Grand Tour** series, with *Colony* in the 1980’s. What we have here in *Farside* is the continuation of a number of themes from earlier books and throughout the other **Grand Tour** books, which creates a consistent background to the series. Climate change has flooded much of Earth, (see *The Precipice*, 2001) which has led to increased exploration out into the Solar System, often pushed forward through private industrial funding (see *The Asteroid Wars* series, 2002-2007). However, expenditure is constantly monitored, for the risk of flagrant overspending means the closure of the projects. Science is rather regarded by many with some suspicion as we have the abolition of stem-cell techniques and nanotechnology research on Earth (see *Moonwar*, (1996) and *Moonrise*, 1997). The effects of constantly living in this rather dangerous environment are also raised again, with many of these explorers of the new frontier are dependent upon drugs/narcotics/alcohol for their survival (see also *The Trikon Deception*, 1992)

With such a broad background set-up, in *Farside* the plot here is all fairly straight-forward. There are no major surprises here. Ben sets an *Analog*-style mystery (scientists put in jeopardy and have to solve puzzle though investigation and research) and then gets his characters to solve it. Much of the book sets up what will presumably be the next book, for we are constantly reminded that this book is just one element of many and has a background and a foreshadowing of things to come.

Have things changed much in these books in the last eight years? Not really. *Farside* is a comfort read, rather than something that pushes the genre. The reader knows what they are getting and the story provides it. But then I suspect that that is part of their charm, as Ben interweaves the different characters and plots into his own Solar System series. The chapters are all fairly short – two or three pages – and this allows Ben and the reader to follow the plot without too much effort.

*Farside* is a book that you can read quite happily without reading the earlier books, and I suspect that if

readers have managed so far in this series, then I think they will want to continue, to see where it is going. This creates both a comfort and a limitation. Whilst the sense of credulity is rather stretched at times to fit the convoluted plot, the dialogue at times can be a little creaky and the characterisation is rather slim, it must be said that I found it entertaining. It is stridently solid, and determinedly un-flashy or over-written.

In the end, although I enjoyed *Farside* a lot, I can see why many more recent converts to SF wouldn't be impressed with its old-school tone and style.

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### **Kris Sellgren says**

This hard SF novel about building 100-meter size telescopes on the far side of the Moon caught my attention. I'm an astronomer so I enjoyed the astronomy and the mirror and telescope construction. Bova's thorough research into telescope mirror construction shows. The characters were cardboard, and evaluated everyone as potential sex partners rather than future colleagues. The astronomer heroine was irritatingly passive. But I enjoyed the central mystery of why an engineer asphyxiated in his space suit with a full oxygen tank, and where the answers led.

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### **Mirek says**

Reads like a book written by some teenager.

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### **Crooky says**

I gave this book one more star than I think it ought to deserve, simply due to the interesting scientific concepts presented. The story itself isn't particularly good though. The characters are extremely one dimensional... insultingly so in some cases. As others have pointed out, there are some lazy stereotypes floating around, and the main female character is infantilised to a degree which is completely unbelievable for an astronaut/scientist.

Also, as others have pointed out, early on the book takes a brief foray into the topic of date rape. This was handled with extremely bad taste, wasn't necessary to the story and is never even mentioned again. I share the horror of many reviewers that Ben Bova even thought it was a good idea to include this section.

I did enjoy the book, however, despite its many flaws. Reading speculative fiction about scientific endeavours is always a pleasure, it's just a shame that the human element doesn't live up to this.

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### **Clark Hallman says**

Farside is another very good science fiction novel by Ben Bova, a six-time Hugo-Award winner. This novel takes place on the Moon, where a huge state-of-the-art optical interferometer telescope is being built on the farside of the Moon, i.e., the side that always faces toward outer space and never toward the Earth. The lack of an atmosphere and the emptiness of the Moon make it an ideal platform for such a telescope. The farside of the Moon is an ideal location for the observatory equipment because the Moon itself serves to block light; radio, television, microwave, and other transmissions; and atmospheric interferences from Earth. Previously, an exciting discovery using a smaller more traditional telescope on "Farside" revealed an Earth-sized planet, named Sirius C, orbiting a star that was less than nine light-years away. Furthermore, Sirius C appears to have an atmosphere, prompting the popular media to refer to it as "New Earth." This story focuses on the small group of scientists, engineers, technicians and their support personnel who are constructing and using the equipment to study "New Earth." They live and work under Spartan and harsh conditions on the Moon. In fact, the conditions can be dangerous, life-threatening, and unforgiving. Nanomachines, microscopic entities (machines) that can be programmed to construct at the molecular level, prove to be a great help in the construction project. However, they can also be very dangerous if not used properly. The team must work carefully and cooperatively to get the job done without sustaining injuries or deaths. Unfortunately, human nature includes political motives and individual desires and prejudices that can be a hindrance to progress and safety. Like all of Bova's science-fiction books, this one includes much interesting and credible science. Remarkably, he is able to present it within a very interesting story that is also populated with knowledgeable, intriguing, and very human characters with actions and motives that most readers will understand. He also provides gripping and alarming action, and an appeasing ending. I was not surprised that I liked this book very much. Bova writes terrific science fiction with a focus on the relationships between the science and the people in his stories. I recommend this book to anyone who likes science fiction.

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### **Mike Howells says**

Tedious dialogue, dull description, predictable plot, ridiculous characters... not very good, really.

The characters act like truculent adolescents, throwing tantrums and trying to be Mr Big Guy. Nothing like any scientist or engineer I've ever worked with.

Most of the text is dialog, with many conversations that seem to add nothing to the story. There's very little room given to description of the moon bases, vehicles, or technology in general. The most we hear about is the depressing nature of the corridors!

The villains are pretty obvious early on, and there's no twist. And do we really need a cheesy romance in a sci-fi story?

Really struggled to get through this one.

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### **Carol says**

I might have liked this, but I quit very early when the female lead recounts a drugged date rape, her first sexual encounter, where afterward she "rolls up the bloody sheet and decides to look on the bright side. At

least that's out of the way." (I listened to the audio, so excuse an errant word.) I can't imagine any person - male or female - who would react that way. It's very offensive, and I couldn't read any further.

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### **Michelle says**

I do not understand the high marks this book seems to be getting. I had forgotten my Ban on Bova when I put this book on hold at the library. But when faced with two-page chapters and nearly more white space than prose, it all came back to me. Once again, this is a novel that should have been marketed as a novella. Each chapter is at most four pages (and most are around two), which is intensely irritating. The story is a run-of-the-mill moon adventure, and frankly I've read better prose by people self-publishing on Amazon.

But what irritates me almost beyond reason is the characters who seem to come straight out of a 1950s pulp novel. The main female character, an accomplished astronomer, on meeting a fellow traveler to the far side of the moon, has only one thought: "He's an Adonis!" And later, when this man, of course, seduces her because she, of course, has terribly low self-esteem because: girl scientist, and then snubs her at a meeting, she wonders whether she "was hot enough in bed." OH FOR THE LOVE OF GOD. Everyone is first described by their looks: the women of course by chest size and the men by degree of dashingness. This has no place in today's SF.

If I ever decide to read another of this man's books, somebody please kick me.

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### **Tamahome says**

No one's got the arc??

I hear Scott will read it.

It's out now. Does anyone care?

pg 114/367: I can read 45 pg/hr in this thing. It's a pretty easy read for a hard sf novel. It's mostly a 'moon drama', almost like a weekly tv show, with short chapters, but with nanotech. At first I thought it as YA, since the first POV character was a young woman worried about her looks and the handsome man she was with. But then other characters enter the scene. Is it really just a race of who can see a faraway planet through telescopes first? There doesn't seem to be a lot of buzz about this book. The female characters could be better.

How come B&N doesn't stock it? Did he say Ben Bova liked Amazon in a tweet or something?

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### **Hal says**

DOSSIER: The author does some worldbuilding to develop his characters, then is so fantastically lazy he inserts the information in a chapter entitled "DOSSIER".

The sad part is, the Dossiers contain more conflict than the actual story itself. This book has awful writing, with the author reminding us over and over again of the characters' eye colours in a world where everyone is a slim, trim sex object. Usually stories written in this manner get by on the merit of the SF ideas they contain, but this one lacks even that. The details given in the research of the telescope are terrible, demonstrating that Ben Bova knows very little about optics. The ideas are hopelessly out of date -- so much that I thought the publication date was maybe somewhere in the 1970s, when in fact it was published in 2013.

I very rarely skip ahead in books, being doggedly stubborn to try and believe and trust in the author's skilled hand. This is the first book I remember skipping in the last ten or more years, and I'm sad to say I didn't miss anything. The ending is predictable and anticlimactic, with hazel and green-eyed characters you're guaranteed not to care about.

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### **Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says**

Yech.

For a further review: <http://susannag.booklikes.com/post/21...> .

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### **Pam says**

["Her first sexual encounter came during her sophomore year, with a bearded, slouching assistant professor who smoked a pipe and taught the Introduction to Planetary Astronomy course. He invited Trudy to his apartment off-campus after they had had dinner together, dropped a popular pill into the glass of wine he offered her, and carried her slim semiconscious body to his bed. In the morning she awoke

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### **Fred Hughes says**

Ben Bova is one of my favourite authors. His stories flow effortlessly and the characters are believable and relatable, so with that taken care of, your only task is to read and enjoy the book. After all isn't that why we read ?

The far side of the moon represents a golden opportunity for Dr Ulrich and his staff to build three giant mirrors and capture more detailed images of a planet called Sirius C. It's nickname is New Earth as it appears to be in the goldilocks orbit (not too close, not too far, just right) around it's sun and may have an atmosphere.

It's not visible from Earth as the telescopes are not powerful enough to over come the effects of the Earth's atmosphere. But on the far side of that Moon that is not even a consideration.

The only problem is that another group on Earth are considering building a telescope in space to also try and capture better images of Sirius C.

Dr Ulrich is of the opinion that if he gets the images first there will be a Nobel prize in it for him so he drives

his staff relentlessly to win the race to get the first images.

Add in his Operations Manager who is a drug addict, a billionaire as an opponent, a billionaire's son who monitors every thing Ulrich does, a surprise attack from an enemy banned on Earth, and you have a wildly successful thriller set on the far side of the Moon.

Highly recommended

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