



Furious Gulf (Galactic Center)

By Gregory Benford

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Few writers have successfully blended hard science and speculation with fully realized characters as Gregory Benford has in his critically acclaimed novels. Now he draws us into a vortex of mystery and danger at the heart of the galaxy in his dazzling epic drama, *Furious Gulf*.

Containing the remnants of humanity from the planet Snowglade, the spaceship Argo hurtles toward its uncertain destiny, the bold and brilliant Captain Killeen at its helm. But he has grown increasingly isolated and anguished in command. The ship's gardens are failing, its voyagers face starvation, and there are dark whispers within, talk of mutiny. Killeen's will, however, remains as strong as ever, his determination to reach the True Center of the galaxy bordering on obsession.

Amid a mad swirl of incandescent suns and ghostly blue clouds of galactic dust, beset by hostile worlds controlled by the mechs – a vast and violent artificial intelligence whose only meaning, only mission, is the complete extermination of the human race—Killeen pursues his desperate search, convinced his people's one hope of survival lies in the True Center. The crew has followed him this far on faith, a faith now being tested to the limit. Even his own son Toby, groomed for leadership, is beginning to question his father's command.

As the Argo undertakes a perilous quest into the unknown, Toby faces his own journey into the mysteries of adulthood. Like the others in this Family of voyagers, Toby's spine contains microchip implants holding the memories – the legacy – of his race. But just as the technology designed to save his people may tear Toby himself apart, so his father's desperate gamble to save the Argo may plunge the ship and its inhabitants into a cosmic pit of all-consuming fire.

In this extraordinary novel, part of an interconnected series of novels that began with *In the Ocean of Night* and continued in *Across the Sea of Suns, Great Sky River, and Tides of Light*, Gregory Benford explores the fundamental nature of human development and discovery. Across the gulf that stretches between fear and faith, past and future, we watch in wonder as an age-old question continues...the quest for the fulfillment of an individual, for the evolution of a species, for the immortality of the soul.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This fifth installment (after *Tides of Light*) in Benford's "Galactic Center" series, set thousands of years in the future, finds the remaining humans from the planet Snowglade fleeing the genocidal Mechs in the spaceship Argo. As the vessel speeds toward the Galactic Center, the refugees verge on mutiny as food becomes scarce, Mechs close in and Captain Killeen grows ever more determined to discover what lies at the Core. Even Killeen's adolescent son, Toby, begins to question his father's fitness for command, particularly when he discovers that his nervous system has been used as a repository for the skills and personality of the captain's slain lover. Meanwhile, unknown to the Argo crew and passengers, bodiless, perhaps egoless, intelligences muse none-too-benignly on the action at hand and whether they should destroy the shipbound humans as part of their "ancient task" of wiping out humanity. If the first half of the narrative is a chase, the second half is a discovery: an exploration of the universe that lies within the human heart, as well as a study of nonhuman beings and of the artifacts of space and time that Benford's fevered imagination has strewn through eons of human history. The author's fans won't be disappointed with this tautly plotted entry in the series, which by now has eclipsed even Asimov's Foundation saga in ambition, and which still has one more book to go.

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From School Library Journal

YA-This science-fiction novel is the fifth in a series that began with *In the Ocean of Night* (Bantam, 1987). Except for the cliff-hanger ending, it stands on its own, with the background story filled in smoothly and mostly unobtrusively. In a future tens of millennia away, humans have been driven nearly to extinction by the metal-and-steel "mechs." The last humans live aboard an ancient spaceship, speeding toward the monster black hole at the center of the galaxy. This book focuses on Toby, 18, son of the ship's increasingly unstable "Cap'n." Stranded with an ambiguously allied alien just above the horizon of the black hole on a bizarre worldlet made of compacted spacetime, Toby must survive attacking mechs and a "Personality" implant that's threatening to take over his mind. His change from boyish hesitation and dependence to mature uncertainty and strength of will make this partly a coming-of-age story. He is a strong character of some depth, as is the believable alien. The Cap'n, a major figure in previous novels, in this one is more of a tortured foil to Toby. The writing is good, although the attempts of Benford-a physicist- to describe the forces and matter around a black hole sound like descriptions of magic in a fantasy novel. While wordy and slow-paced at times, this installment is packed with enough excitement and strange concepts to bend the minds of curious YAs.

Chip Barnett, Rockbridge Regional Library, Lexington, VA

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From Library Journal

Pursued by hostile "mechs"-sentient machines bent on destroying human life-the spaceship Argo carries a small group of survivors to the center of the galaxy in search of sanctuary. The latest in Benford's "Galactic Center" novels combines hard sf with the very human story of a young man caught between his love for his father and his need for independence. Most libraries should own this title.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Matilda Greiner:

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