



The Man-Kzin Wars

Larry Niven , Dean Ing , Poul Anderson

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Once upon a time, in the earliest days of interplanetary exploration, an unarmed human vessel was set upon by a warship from the planet Kzin. But the Kzinti learned the hard way that the reason humanity had given up war was that they were so very, very good at it. Thus began the Man-Kzin Wars.

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From Reader Review The Man-Kzin Wars for online ebook

Carl V. says

Everyone has their favorites, and author Larry Niven is one of mine. Although I have read comparatively few of his numerous short stories, novels and novel collaborations, I have a special connection to Larry Niven: he has the distinction of being the author of the first science fiction novel that I walked into a bookstore as a young man and purchased for myself. That novel, *A World Out of Time*, is one of my favorites, a book that I re-read every few years.

In Larry Niven's Known Space universe, made most famous in his award-winning novel, *Ringworld* and its sequels and prequels, mankind's history is marked by multiple wars with the bloodthirsty, carnivorous cat-like aliens, the Kzinti. I've often been curious about those wars, hinted at but not detailed in Niven's work. Over the years I have seen the various Man-Kzin Wars volumes, currently numbering fourteen, but have not been compelled to pick one up.

That changed when a visit to Half-Price books last week, with the buzz of Alastair Reynolds' Galactic North collection still stirring my imagination (a series inspired by Larry Niven's Known Space stories), yielded the first copy I have ever seen of volume one in this series, beginning with the first story Larry Niven ever sold, and the first appearance of the Kzinti: "The Warriors".

I came home, laid aside my current reads, and lost myself in Known Space.

In his introduction, Niven writes:

"I've never been in a war, nor any of the armed forces. Wars have happened and may happen again in most of my series universes, including known space, but you'll never see them. I lack the experience. Here are a couple of centuries of known space that are dark to me."

An automobile trip with Jim Baen to a Nebula Awards banquet resulted in a conversation that opened up the years of the Man-Kzin wars to other authors, this being the opening chapter.

Volume one of The Man-Kzin Wars kicks things off with Niven's aforementioned short story, and two longer works of fiction by authors Poul Anderson and Dean Ing. Three solid tales written in the style of stories that made me fall in love with science fiction as a young teen kept me up late turning the pages to see how it would all play out.

My Rating: 8/10

In Larry Niven's 1966 story, "The Warriors", readers experience the first ever contact between mankind and the Kzinti. A Kzinti warship encounters what they see as a primitive spacecraft and determine to kill its inhabitants in order to scavenge material from the ship. The story alternates between activities and conversations taking place in the Kzinti vessel and those happening in the human ship. This, the shortest of the three stories in this volume, teaches a valuable lesson: don't underestimate humanity's capability for war.

In the far distant future of Known Space, mankind has matured beyond the need for war. When the presence of another warrior race becomes a reality, that race comes to understand that one of the reasons that mankind gave up on waging war is that we were so good at it.

Poul Anderson and Dean Ing's stories, perhaps accurately described as novellas, share the page count that many science fiction novels had in the days where 200 pages was a long novel. Anderson's 1987 story, "Iron", takes place during a time when humans and Kzinti are in a period of peace after protracted wars. Robert Saxtorph and his wife Dorcas, along with a scientist and his protege and a couple of additional explorers, set out on a journey to investigate a distant red dwarf star and the possibility of planetary bodies in its orbit. Upon arriving they find fascinating scientific discoveries...and a Kzinti presence. In their desire to stay alive and perhaps outlast their enemy, the team splits up, learning more about the various planets orbiting the dying star while doing their best to survive.

In "Cathouse", by Dean Ing, a civilian named Locklear becomes the sole survivor of a Kzinti attack on the military vessel he had hitched a ride on, supposedly to travel to a more safe and secure location. Using his wits, and his study of animal psychology, Locklear convinces the Kzin Commander to leave him on a planet strangely akin to the Kzinti homeworld, until it can be decided what to do with him. The planet turns out to be a zoo of sorts, with cordoned off sectors filled with a large variety of creatures held in stasis fields. Locklear knows that his only chance at staying alive is to gain an upper hand while the Kzinti warship continues its mission. When they return, he needs to be ready for them, and to be ready he must awaken a Kzinti female and convince her that his cause—survival—is one worthy of her assistance.

The current Kzinti race have modified females to be little more than breeding stock. Upon awakening the female Kzin in stasis, whom he eventually dubs "Kit", Locklear discovers that she was captured many, many ages ago when female Kzinti had a limited role in society, but were no less intelligent or ferocious than the males. "Cathouse" provides a great deal of background information about the Kzinti race and their history, all woven into the story in such a way that it keeps the reader engaged in the story unfolding. The story is told from Locklear's point of view and largely features these two very different beings who must work together for a common goal. By the end I felt that Dean Ing did a great job of making me care about the characters and their fate, making "Cathouse" a nice closing chapter in the anthology.

The writers present in this volume are known to write "hard" sf, science fiction with a goodly amount of real/plausible science and scientific theory. While science is strongly present in each story, and admittedly I am not very scientifically minded, it did not bog down the story, nor did it take me out of the flow of the narrative. I have found that to be the case with every Larry Niven story I have read, and was pleased to find that happening with Anderson and Ing.

If you are already a fan of Niven's Known Space stories, this is a worthy chapter to explore. If you have not tried Larry Niven (or Poul Anderson or Dean Ing, for that matter), these stories are a great introduction to their work and to the Known Space universe as a whole. While Larry Niven's entry is noticeably short, the other two stories are of sufficient length to do some solid world building while fleshing out the featured characters enough for readers to be engaged in their fate.

Robert says

Excellent series and I am so glad to see it is still active over 40 years since the Kzin appeared in The Slaver Weapon animated Star Trek episode. These books have some of the same aspect as Wild Cards - multiple authors contribute, polish, ret con, and expand.

Every book in the series has at least one story that really stretches the mind and requires some rereading. Every one has at least one very humorous story. The format allows some philosophy (where did we come

from), fantasy (talking cats? not too farfetched), social commentary (do successful societies take others over?) and history (overcrowded earth). Good reads indeed.

Kyle says

Utter crap.

Kevin says

Kitty cats with rayguns and space-helmets fuck some shit up. Much as I love Niven's books, this is about the most unnecessary series ever, and it peaks here.

Niven's original story is decent but dated (the premise of a utopian humanity that has learned to suppress its aggressive instincts isn't one we worry about much anymore, is it?). Poul Anderson's story is pretty good, and Ing's is a wretched one-man-army type story that leans heavily on the cat puns.

Thistle says

What a confusing book. The ebook version I have has the cover of Book 4 of this series, yet the stories inside belonged to Book 1. Anyway! There were three stories in this book. The first, by Niven, was so amusingly dated. Published in 1966, though written long before that, astronauts on a spaceship smoked. The story's whole view of the future was so... cute? That humans would be so detached from violence that they couldn't even make themselves use words like 'war' anymore, they physically got sick and had to go into therapy if they did. I finished the whole story, but it did nothing at all for me.

The second story, by Poul Anderson, completely didn't work for me. Too hard science fiction-y, too dry, I skipped much of it. The third story, by Dean Ing, was more interesting (a human was captured by the cat-like Kzin and left as a prisoner on an empty planet), but still didn't hold my attention well enough to continue. Gave up on the book at the 74% mark.

Timothy Boyd says

A set of three novellas set in Niven's Known Space universe during the period of war between humans and the catlike Kzin. "The Warriors" by Larry Niven, "Iron" by Poul Anderson and "Cathouse" by Dean Ing all are excellent stories set in this shared universe. Great SiFi stories by three masters of the genre. Very recommended

Ross says

Short stories set in Niven's "Known Space" universe, in the time after Humanity and the Kzin meet and begin their wars that are completed by the time of most of Niven's novels.

This was a mixed bag - I enjoyed Niven's first, short short story, and then nearly fell asleep during Poul Anderson's piece. Just didn't grab me - in fact, I can't remember what it was about and I finished the book just today. Dean Ing's story was enjoyable but nothing extraordinary. Overall, this book is a borderline 2.5 stars but not worth rounding up to 3 stars.

I'll stick with Niven's work. He said he couldn't write war stories and so left that part of the Known Space universe for others to fill in. I don't have enough interest in this period to follow up with any of the other Man-Kzin War compendiums to see if they get better than this one.

Rodzilla says

Most teachers grade on a curve. For that matter, most evaluations (IQ, GPA, movie ratings) are expressed as some variation of a bell curve. So why in the world isn't that the case for Goodreads? Or, for that matter, Netflix?

That's because most people rate only that about which they are truly enthusiastic. That's the only reason I can explain the Man-Kzin Wars series having a higher average than 3.0 stars. You see, the initial story isn't even original: it was published long ago, in multiple places, and in this book was tapped again to do service in the name of inflated earnings. In and of itself it is an excellent story (though it pales in comparison to Niven's other best short stories). It is accompanied by mediocre additions from other writers.

So let me ask anybody who gave this story 5 stars: is this collection really as good as the best SF you've ever read? Consider Dune, The Forever War, Childhood's End. Consider Ender's Game. Consider "Who Goes There?", which was the basis of the John Carpenter film The Thing. Heck, consider Niven's other short story collections. This is as good as "Neutron Star" or "Tales of Known Space?"

If the answer is no, then why are you rating this 5 stars? In what universe is that defensible? You save the best ratings for things that are absolutely mind-blowing, and give a three star rating to somewhat swashbuckling action that isn't particularly good.

Perry says

Didn't age as well as I remembered.

Loved the first contact story, but the others were a bit more of a miss on a reread.

Will continue to see how I feel about it as things go along.

Kevin says

Chicks get to read trashy romance novels as a guilty pleasure.

Dudes get to read sentient 8' tall giant space cats at war with humanity novels as a guilty pleasure.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I like military science fiction.....this is not military science fiction. The book might better have been titled: "Events Peripheral to the Man-Kzin Wars." The opening story is an old one by Niven telling the first meeting and hostile encounter between the two races. Niven in the Intro says he wasn't in the military so he doesn't try to write military scenes.

Okay.

The second story (novella)by Anderson is basically a romance and the third by Ing is an odd little "relations between the species" tale (tail?) that seems to dance around the "boy we wish we were the same species plot point. Neither is a bad story, but neither actually is about the "wars" that are always sort of in the background.

I gave the book a 3 star rating for fair and serviceable science fiction stories, but don't go for this if you are actually looking for military type science fiction.

Ben Goodridge says

It's kind of a testament to how much I tried to like this book in how long it took me to read it. The best books compel you to complete them, so if a 289-page paperback is any good, it should be a quick study. Instead, it took more than a month.

I'm not saying I hated it; I don't finish books I don't like, and all the parts were certainly there. It might have been easier to swallow had the legendary antagonist Kzinti in these early shared-universe stories had more character complexity than "screaming ball of furry rage." However, this is mostly just evident in the story "Iron," by Poul Anderson. It's a rough story to start the series with - the cast is huge and complicated, the motives are unclear, and the Kzinti are hard to understand. The last story, "Cathouse," was a much smoother read.

The three stories in this first book all have the same theme: that a handful of resourceful humans can take down an army, provided that army hasn't really established a policy of "look before you leap, screaming, onto your enemy with your claws out and your dagger drawn." Dean Ing's badass nerd Locklear probably does it best, not only being a determined fighter but managing to form Kzin alliances that indicate some discipline and ethical diversity in the ranks.

Also, this is really the first time I've met the Kzinti in print. I have yet to read "Ringworld" or other Known Space stories, so it's probably unfair of me to judge the Kzinti on three stories written by other authors. Best to conclude by pointing out that this sole book in a huge anthology series earns only three stars due to the confusing narrative of a single story in it. As a series, the setting intrigues, and I expect to uncover more of these books in the future.

Carlex says

Three and half stars.

(My apologies for mistreating the English language)

So finally I have read my first Man-Kzin Wars book. In this case the contents are: an introduction and a short story written by Larry Niven himself, "The Warriors". A novelette, "Iron" by the master Poul Anderson and the novella "Cathouse" by an unknown writer (at least for me), Dean Ing.

Enjoyable science fiction, pre-information age style (the book was published in 1988); well planned and correctly written; space opera stories with a lot of details: they have a notable hard component, specially Poul Anderson's.

Actually I consider that Dean Ing's story is the best. "Cathouse" deals with the psychology of its characters: Carroll Locklear, a survivor of a space battle that has left to his fate among the Kzin, first as a captive and then as a companion on an unknown planet. To highlight the character of a female kzin, which Locklear calls Miss Kitty.

It was not the first alien-cat-like story that I have read. I am thinking about "Satan's World" (Polesotechnic League series) also by Poul Anderson and of course "Chanur", by C. J. Cherryh (Chanur saga), both they are good works. In our case, as I said I am also delighted by the very interesting and well depicted Kzin characters.

In summary, I enjoyed it and I want to read more of this series. By the way, the Man-Kzin Wars XV will be available in February.

Arlomisty says

I bought this book on a whim... I had seen it for years in the book stores and was always curious to what it was... as the years passed I forgot about it... until recently while browsing on amazon, looking at books. I thought I'd give it a try... (there are at least twenty books to this series)... and loved it! It's not a masterpiece or anything, but the fun value in the three short stories was great! It has the feel of old time sci-fi stories and what I like is that it has no real modern franchise built around it... (movies, cartoons, video games, etc...) but there is a vast universe of stories and adventure in the many books that have been written. The stories start in the middle of the war so there is no real explanation of how they really started and real no need to explain it... which was fine with me... I would recommend this book to sci-fi fans if they want something fun to read. I look forward to reading the next book in the series.... (also a book of short stories...)

Andrew says

I first came across the Kzin while reading tales of know space -(Warriors) and they have fascinated me ever since. I guess you could dissect and examine it all you like there are many reasons to appreciate and like them - huge feline killing machines which an alien outlook on life and the "hairless monkeys" who keep on failing to appreciate that they should have been subjugated by the Kzin years ago.

I think for me its their scream and leap approach - something that has stood them in good stead till now when Mankind appears to be totally underwhelmed by them and shows a resourcefulness that the Kzin need to appreciate and understand or they will be the conquered ones. The stories mesh with the other tales of known space even though very little of the Man Kzin was actually written by Larry Niven.

And so came about my other fascination - the shared universe where other authors were able to add their ideas and thoughts while building on the work of Mr Niven. The books themselves are a great read but to really appreciate them you need to see the bigger picture and go explore the Known Space at great length. One thing I would say if you are interested in how one alien species meets and then underestimates another Niven and Pournelles footfall is a great book to experience this - a book I will be shortly digging for.
