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Second Stage Lensmen Details

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Author : E.E. "Doc" Smith

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From Reader Review Second Stage Lensmen for online ebook

Gar says

This was a slog. Like most of the Lensman stuff, it's hard to rate as a whole, since each book was originally serial, and some bits are a lot less soggy than others.

Refresher on the landfill metaphor: being 1940s sci-fi pulp serial, reading it is an archaeological dig into a landfill. There are layers of quaintness, which any science fiction turns into with time enough. There are layers of rollicking awesome, where action moves along at a good clip. And then there are layers of painful awkwardness. The layers aren't distinct of course, they blend together and veins of them intertwine with each other. But you never quite know what layer's going to dominate in a chapter to chapter reading.

I started reading it last year, and the first half's really a one-star affair. The painful awkwardness dominates all the way through it. Our hero's investigation and tracing of the structure of enlightened Civilization's enemy has led him to a planet ruled by women, you see, an extreme matriarchy because the males aren't really people, but non-sentient breeding stock. Not even a Lensman can deal with such a topsy-turvy mixed up world, where women don't behave as women ought, because, well, just look at the last three letters of "lensman!" It stands to reason. But the planet must be dealt with, for Civilization's sake! Therefore, even though the womanly mind is simply not structured or capable of wielding a Lens, a (gasp!) female Lensman must come to be! So...yeah.

The whole sequence could have been the plot treatment for a very bad Roger Corman film, and it just broke me. Thus almost a year passing before I took a deep breath and resumed.

Luckily, I found out I'd already tunneled past the very worst parts, and the rest of it flowed rather more smoothly. There was an uptick of the good bits of giant fleets verily grimly triumphantly defenestrating vacuum itself through the coruscating, incomparable, unimaginable glass of their stacked adjectives and adverbs. Things move right along, the good guys kick ass, and then in the final chapter there's a final burp of outgassing in the victory chapter of Civilization's only possible Lenswoman squealing "Now I can go clothes shopping!" for a dozen pages.

Dayo Johnson says

Really enjoyed this, even the sloppy romantic sections didn't spoil the action.

Bradley says

I'm reading this mainly because it's on the ballot for the retro Hugos for 1953 and, incidentally, I've read the fourth in the series already because it keeps being put on the "best SF ever lists". (I don't think it should be, but I may be a minority.)

Moving on.

I cringed a lot while reading this. Mostly I just went intellectual and pointed at all the Kirk-like alpha gets the alien girls swooning for him, the pleasure planets that pretend not to be (nudist planet of women, anyone?), or the equally cringeworthy ugly-factor for competent women.

Okay. This was pulp SF of '53. Have you SEEN THOSE COVERS? Like, ANY OF THEM? It's interesting to note which Golden-Age SF actually HAS scenes of naked women leaning up against silver spaceships both IN the text and ONLY on the cover. :)

MOVING ON.

Despite all this, Toots, I was actually rather surprised to find some BIG SF going on here. Maybe it's all cliché now, with Star-Trek tractor beams and boarding parties and pirates in space as well as deep infiltration tactics so wildly implausible that it could only be the work of Bond, James Bond, but let's put this in its proper place. The early fifties. This kind of thing is POPULAR. Add super super super powerful telepathic abilities and a weakness for the ladies, and we've got a square-jawed hero that later becomes the Green Lantern.

No. Wait. He was never the Green Lantern. Just as powerful as, perhaps, and as a Corpsman devoted to justice with uber powerful aliens using these gene-sports as their proxy weapons...

Oh, wait. Well. Never mind. This is STILL 1953 and no one takes SF seriously. Except those who do. And those who did, back then, ALSO found a lot of decent and exciting action and adventure with super-heroic and courageous derring-do right here in E. E. "Doc" Smith's work.

I didn't hate this. I did want to tear my eyes out for the first quarter or so. Certain depictions. But once we went into the whole infiltration of the baddies' empire, using telepathy to cloud the minds of all the aliens to make them think he was one of them, I was pretty much hooked and rocking along.

The good. The bad. The action is always pretty awesome. Think Star Wars meets Babylon 5 meets Pirates of the Caribbean. Add James Bond with the powers of Voldemort. It can be VERY FUN, too!

All in all, I'd have to give it a 5 star on the one and a single star on the other. If you read this, manage your expectations and you might have a grand time or just find so much fodder for your ire that you'll have a different kind of a good time. :)

Mark Austin says

★ - Most books with this rating I never finish and so don't make this list. This one I probably started speed-reading to get it over with.

★★ - Average. Wasn't terrible, but not a lot to recommend it. Probably skimmed parts of it.

★★★ - Decent. A few good ideas, well-written passages, interesting characters, or the like.

★★★★ - Good. This one had parts that inspired me, impressed me, made me laugh out loud, made me think - it got positive reactions and most of the rest of it was pretty decent too.

★★★★★ - Amazing. This is the best I've read of its genre, the ones I hold on to so I can re-read them and/or loan them out to people looking for a great book. The best of these change the way I look at the world and operate within it.

Carl Palmateer says

Part of one of the first space operas. When you sit back and realize the staggering death count that slipped past you because the deaths weren't described in today's overly graphic terms....

Paul Magnussen says

I (and many others) believe the best place to start with Doc Smith's *Lensman* series is Galactic Patrol; and as I've said why, at length, in my review of that opus, I won't repeat it here.

Furthermore, if you've already read Patrol and Gray Lensman with enjoyment, you'll hardly need my urging to continue.

This is nonetheless probably the weakest of the four main *Lensman* novels, mainly because of Smith's often-noted discomfort with female characters. It is a curious reflection on his powers as a writer that he can make a thoroughly convincing — even likeable! — character of a thirty-foot, crocodile-headed, winged python with eyes that come out on stalks, but can't manage the matriarch of a tribe of human Amazons (from the planet Lyrane II).

We cannot, to be sure, be surprised that Kinnison's skills at handling females are so deficient: after all, he's spent his formative years galumphing around the Galaxy in search of the arch-villain Helmuth, not hanging out like a normal teenager. Military genius he may be, but socially he's still an adolescent.

(Although... perhaps he's not *quite* as inexperienced as all that? Exactly what *were* his experiences as a Cadet with that "bedroom-eyed Aldebaranian hell-cat", the stunningly beautiful Dessa Desplaines? Whatever they were, they obviously left quite an impression: Kinnison — normally unflappable even by outre developments like hyperspatial tubes materialising in the same room with him — is reduced to a jelly at the mere thought of meeting her again.)

Still, be all that as it may, Second Stage has many compensating pleasures, not least the exploits of Nadreck, the cowardly four-dimensional Palainian lensman.

And it leads into one of the strongest finishes of any science fiction series, as Kim and Clarissa's offspring carry the struggle to its climax in *Children of the Lens*.

NeilWill says

Second Stage Lensman kicks off just where *Grey Lensman* finishes; Kinnison is walking off into the sunset with Clarissa MacDougall and they're going to get married. Like a complete arse Mentor of Arisia interrupts them and tells Kinnison to think. He does and realises that because he lives in a universe designed for MAXIMUM SPACE OPERA he needs to do something first.

Turns out he hasn't defeated and destroyed Boskone and their next obvious step is to attack Tellus, the

somewhat idiosyncratic series name for Earth. There's a big fight and the good guys win. The enemy fleet destroyed, Kinnison then tries to track the bad guys through drugs and crime. He follows a lead which eventually takes him to Lyrane II, a planet inhabited solely by women. Logical, passionless women with no taste for beauty and a hatred for strangers, especially males (on this planet about one in a hundred births, are 30 inches tall, grow up in maletoriums until they reach about 20 when they mate a hundred times then are killed when they threaten to go crazy and fight everything. It's probably not a piece of social comment).

There he finds the only survivor of the zwilniks (drug smugglers) is Ilona of Lonabar, an exotic dancer who wears lots of jewels. (The women of Lyrane killed the men). Kinnison goes telepathically en rapport with uncounted lensmen to identify the jewels and their origin, coming into contact finally with the fourth Second Stage Lensman, Nadreck of Palain VII, a four dimensional frigid world monster indescribable to warm blooded oxygen breathers. After this Kinnison goes undercover as a jeweller turned fence; MacDougall goes to Lyrane to try and figure out why the bad guys are interested.

The bad guys having learned from the events in the previous two books have been hiding themselves by erasing their existence from the memories of their underlings. Nevertheless Kinnison uncovers the existence of the Eich (returning from *Grey Lensman*) on Lyrane VIII and more Overlords of Delgon (returning from both *Grey Lensman* AND *Galactic Patrol*) on Lyrane II. They destroy the Overlords and Nadreck uses a thought screen drill to spy on the Eich, giving them a clue to the enemy headquarters in the Second Galaxy.

They launch an attack on the Second Galaxy, defeat the enemy fleet and find an uncontacted planet called Klovia that they take control of and turn into a fortress. This, of course, is a distraction from the actual plan, which has Kinnison go undercover on the Boskone headquarters planet of Thrale while Nadreck goes to its frozen counterpart Onlo. Kinnison takes the place of one Traska Gennel, a second lieutenant in the royal guard and makes his way up the hierarchy to become Tyrant of Thrale. There he plots the destruction of Klovia while enduring the suspicion of Prime Minister Fossten, the power behind the throne.

The final battle begins, Fossten and Kinnison have a mental duel that Kinnison wins discovering that Fossten is a giant brain, like the Arisians. Mentor misleads Kinnison, claiming that there was an insane Arisian that they thought was dead and perhaps that's who this is*. The Boskonian fleet defeated by the Patrol, he returns to Thrale and begins the long task of turning it into a civilised planet. In the meantime Nadreck has tried to get all the Onlonians to turn on each other and very nearly succeeded but is mortified to have to admit that three of them held out and he had to kill them in person. Having finally defeated the bad guys Kinnison retires into the role of co-ordinator of the Second Galaxy and marries MacDougall.

Read This: If you've read the previous ones and want even more twists and turns, some of which are pretty good. In addition the book makes a turn away from the "Boskone vs Civilisation: no quarter!" of previous novels as the Patrol avoids mass genocide by occupying and converting the enemy. It's possible that this is a reaction to world events during the period it was written.

Don't Read This: If weird ideas about a planet of women aren't your thing; also if space battles of various sizes from single ship to gigantic don't do anything for you; or if increasingly bizarre undercover roles leave you cold.

A Personally Gratifying Development: Is that the classic nature (classicness? classicity?) of the lensman novels has been confirmed recently as Second Stage Lensman has been nominated for a Retro-Hugo, an award for years in which the Hugo awards were not awarded. Confused? This link may help.

* Actually Gharlane of Eddor, the second in command of the Eddorians.

RICK FORREST says

Great spiraling space opera. Awesome.

For lovers of old classic sci fi do thrills. Precursor to star wars. Great villains and intrigue with mental powers as the extra sauce.

The Fizza says

This is it, the penultimate book in the Lensman series, a series almost as famous for being the first Epic Space Opera as it is for how marvelously exciting and inventive it was.

First published in the pages of Astounding magazine back in 1941, this book mainly focuses upon the exploits of the "Second Stage" Lensmen: those who have gone through the advanced Arisian training in Galactic Patrol. These four superior Lensmen - Kinnison, Worsel, Tregonsee, and Nadreck - are armed with mental powers far in advance of other Lensmen which allows them to control the minds of others and to see/hear/feel without using their physical senses... powers they use to tip the balance against that enemy of civilization: The Boskone.

The story picks up immediately where Gray Lensman left off as Kimball and Clarissa are heading off to get ready for their impending marriage. When Mentor of Arisia stops them by commanding Kim to 'think before he acts,' whence Kim immediately realizes that the Boskonian organization has probably not been destroyed.

Like Galactic Patrol and Gray Lensman (books 3 & 4 respectively) Kim Kinnison, and the Lensman, are shown as amoral, willing to do whatever it takes to make the galaxy safe for 'Civilization.' Yet Kinnison begins to doubt the methods he's used in previous books, causing some actual character growth which is a pleasant addition. All while Second Stage Lensman spends more time, than any previous book, on the non-human Lensman.

Once again the Lensman series shows us why it was touted as 'The Famous' for so many printings in this action-packed step up to the final stage with its mix of awe and adventure. While the the climax is as big as the previous books it's the perfect example of the non-stop entertainment and boundless imagination this series has to offer.

If you've made it this far into the Lensman series I don't know why you would need a recommendation on this book. Just read it and if you've LIKED the previous books you will LOVE this one.

Thomas says

Though not the finest of the Lensman novels, it's close. And the first one I ever read. While outrageous and big in every sense, it still manages to channel a sense of amazement on its every purple exposition. Bold adventure! Ray Guns! Space axes! Horrifically alien sadists! A planet of naked ladies! And all wrapped up in

the charming argot of long long ago. All Space Opera since owes a considerable debt to these bigger-than-life adventures. Great, garish fun!

Wanda says

"Kim Kinnison, Number One man of his time, had faced challenges before - but rarely one as daunting as this. To him fell the perilous task of infiltrating the inner circle of Boskone, stronghold of galactic civilization's most deadly foe. Kinnison had to become a local Boskonian in every gesture, deed - and thought. He had to work his way up through the ranks of an alien enemy organization, right into the highest echelons of power. Then it would be he who issued the orders - orders that would destroy his own civilization..."

If you can ignore the most obviously dated parts of this book, the story will still pull you along. However, Smith does like to go into the details of space flight as he imagined it and I found myself speed-reading those sections just to get by them. Not a computer in sight, of course, since this series was written in those misty years before computers became such a part of our society. I was somewhat disappointed that none of the engineers in this yarn pulled out their trusty sliderules!

What absolutely amazed me was Smith's depiction of a matriarchal planet—and the degree of vitriol which he put into it! In a previous book, a woman was sent to Arisia to become a Lensman, but was turned down by Mentor or Arisia (letting the aliens be the bigoted ones). In this one, Kinnison's fiancée achieves Lensman status, which you would think meant that women were doing okay. However, while on the planet of the Matriarchs, Kinnison couldn't be more contemptuous—Smith depicts these women as completely unconcerned with their own appearance. Free from the male gaze, they are completely ignorant of any form of beauty, even natural beauty such as water falls, rainbows or mountain ranges! Smith's depiction of an outraged Kinnison seems extreme. He says far worse things about these women than he does about the whole Boskonian organization! Apparently the concept of capable women, who can run a planet just fine, thank you, really flipped a switch in Doc Smith. Very revealing of the tone of the times.

Worth a read if you are into the historical roots of science fiction or if you are interested (as I am) in the evolving role of women in the genre.

2.5 stars.

Thomas Haynes says

Great book, too many typographical errors

Second Stage Lensmen, along with the rest of the Lensman series is space opera at its best. I've read and re-read it many times since I was a young teenager.

Unfortunately, this edition is riddled with typographical errors and transcription mistakes to the extent that it distracts from the story. It's obvious that no effort was made to proofread the transcription before publication.

These errors are the reason I did not give it 5 stars.

Trystan says

Hope the finale isn't a let down. This was an adventure.

William Rood says

This one lacked the page turning cadence of the first four, as the repetitive nature of the plot, simply expanding upon the previously established story elements. By the end, Civilization controls both galaxies, the evil threat has been extinguished, and the Red and Grey lensmen settle down for a new life. All the while, the Arisians manipulating the chess pieces of the Civilization to achieve the ultimate goal.

There are very cool elements, the ever present increasing technology (they are now using null spheres, planet busters, mobile space stations that are in fact planets, and sun beams that feed directly off of a local star. Cool stuff.

Michael says

The Lensman series simply keeps getting better with each volume. This one is just relentless.

Robert Morganbesser says

At times, a yawner

I really feel this series peaked with galactic patrol. It's kind of repetitive and the characters are fairly two dimensional. Worsel the Velantian is my favorite.

Anne says

I like the ending. Romantic.

Warren Dunham says

ok this is the books i was reading the series for(hugo nomination). Some of the things i write here are for the series as much as this book, but I wanted to write my thoughts down.

This book (and series) is the height of the pulp era. its entertainment with all fluff there are only black hats

and white hats, the science is all just for show. The Over the top galaxy spanning story (if relatively small cast) and metaphors and descriptive text really payoff.

The series suffers from mild racism and sexism that are typical of books from this time period. we do finally get a female lensman character and a matriarchal world run by woman that does not immediately lead off to exploitation, but the sexism is still there.

This is actually the best of the series so far it gets 5th star because I'm comparing it to other books in this time frame and is a great example of period pulp.

Roddy Williams says

‘Kim Kinnison, Number One man of his time, had faced challenges before – but rarely one as daunting as this. To him fell the perilous task of infiltrating the inner circle of Boskone, stronghold of galactic civilisation’s most deadly foe. Kinnison had to become a loyal Boskonian in every gesture, deed – and thought. he had to work his way up through the ranks of an alien enemy organisation, right into the highest echelons of power. Then it would be he who issued the orders – orders that would destroy his own civilization...’

Blurb from the 1973 Panther paperback edition

Kinnison’s wedding is rudely interrupted by Mentor of Arisia who enjoins him to ‘THINK!’ in big letters. The Patrol, of course, were a little premature in thinking that the forces of darkness (i.e. Boskonian) had been defeated.

Kinnison, having thunk, comes to the conclusion that the Earth will be attacked via hyper-spatial tube, and sets up defences in the nick of time. Then, following a zwilnik trail he discovers the planet of Lyrane, a matriarchy of powerful telepaths whose males are aggressive mindless animals.

Nadrek of Palain VII appears here, a character of whom Smith did not make enough use. As a child I was totally captivated by Nadrek’s outlook and philosophy, which was one of avoiding danger whenever possible.

Clarissa McDougall becomes a Grey Lensman and is posted to Lyrane to report on zwilnik activity.

There is another battle with the fiendish overlords of Delgon, some of whom are hiding out in Lyrane’s polar regions.

Kinnison, going undercover again, works himself into the retinue of Alcon of Thrale and eventually supplants him as head of Boskonian activities. However, behind Alcon of Prime Minister Fossten, who is revealed to be none other than Gharlane of Eddore.

What is interesting, given America’s recent policies on dealing with problems in the rest of the world is the Patrol’s idea of dealing with alien cultures.

‘Let’s文明 ‘em!’ as I think one of the military commandos puts it later in the novel. The US has, it seems, always been keen on forcing its culture on the rest of the world which, by the time of the Galactic Patrol, it has, since Earth has a world government which is very much US-controlled. Of course, one has to look at this from a historical and social viewpoint and not really expect Smith, revising and updating work from the Nineteen Forties, to be overly concerned with the future of the rest of the world, given that he considered his fan base to be young American men.

However, if one considers SF to be to a certain extent, the subconscious of the culture at the time at which it is written, it says a lot about the arrogance of US culture, an arrogance which sadly persists in some authors to this day.

The whole series, after all, is an ideological struggle between two cultural models, neither of which can tolerate the existence of the other. It doesn’t take Freud to work out what parallel models were in operation at

the time.

It's also worth noting that the Kinnison wedding is an unashamedly Christian one, the implication being that, with the exception of the alien Lensmen, all his human colleagues, family and friends are Christian also. No Jewish Lensmen then?

Nicholas Whyte says

<https://nwhyte.livejournal.com/3028741.html>

I got two thirds of the way through Second-Stage Lensmen before I realised that I was appalled by the prose, didn't care about the characters and was not even slightly excited by the plot.
