



The Phoenix in Flight

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The first in a SF/adventure series that glitters with intrigue. As a 20-year-long plot for revenge comes to fruition, the sons of the ruler of the Thousand Suns are murdered, and he is taken prisoner. But the usurper's vengeance is incomplete. For one son was missing at the ceremony where the fatal blow was struck. And now the hope of the Thousand Suns rests in his hands.

The Phoenix in Flight Details

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From Reader Review The Phoenix in Flight for online ebook

Jacob Proffitt says

At about the 1/3 point, I realized that this just wasn't my cuppa. I like *some* sci-fi, but I really don't appreciate space opera so much and this is an exemplar of the form. Indeed, this seems like a great tribute to space opera and something of a modernization/resurrection of the form (originally published in 1993, but significantly updated more recently). I greatly admire Sherwood Smith so I went against my preferences to give it a shot, so I'm torn that I just couldn't get attached to the book.

I think my main disconnect is that the Panarchy needed to be destroyed and I was kind of happy to see it go. When your designated heir in an absolute monarchy is deeply evil and given a free hand by the Panarch to oppress his brothers in the worst ways imaginable, I have a hard time having any sympathy for the destruction of the system. It might have been better if I could think Brandon (the youngest brother) would be an improvement, but a) we didn't get to see much of him in that first third because there were so many different perspectives and b) what we did see had him either completely clueless or remarkably irresolute. Once I realized I was being setup to root for restoration of an absolute monarchy that we had already seen produce the worst sort of oppression and human degradation, I just couldn't continue.

Bronwen says

The Bad guys are into torture and other nasty stuff, and the King badguy attracts all kinds of minor nasty characters. Was interested in the "good guy" characters enough to keep reading into the second book. But the nasty stuff just got worse, so I will not finish the series. skimmed the endings of all the books to see if it was worth it to get the final book. Nope, not going to read the rest.

Nobbynob Littlun says

This review is for the whole series.

What stands out to me the most in this space opera is that not just technology has advanced, but society as well - and it focuses on the society. "Words used as weapons," the phrase goes.

To reflect this, the characters use psychological and sociological jargon as a matter of course, which can make it difficult to read at times. However, if you just file this away under the same heading as the technological jargon found in most sci-fi you can hand-wave it away, and then you've got a good - if slow - read.

The other thing I should note is that this series does not shy away from sex any more than it does violence. I wouldn't call either a feature of the series, but there's some scenes...

David says

I wanted to like this book so much more than I did, but it's emblematic of my ongoing ennui about space operas. I used to love 'em unreservedly, and now and then I still come across one that blows me away, but lately, most of them are either kind of 'meh' or I just can't get past the cheesy juvenilia of "ADVENTURE! AMONG! THE STARS!"

(He says as he works on his own Adventure! Among! The Stars! novel...)

Maybe this is what happens when I start reading more literary and classic fiction - my standards for SF have gone up accordingly.

Phoenix in Flight is an old-school space opera that's the first in a series. It's a big epic "clashing empires" story full of space battles and super-tech and ancient artifacts and really, really evil villains. The protagonist is Krysarh Brandon nyr-Arkad, the playboy-playing-hooky son of the ruler of the Thousand Suns. Some twenty years ago, the Thousand Suns squashed an empire called Dol'jhar when the Dol'jharans got too uppity, and Jerrode Eusabian, Lord of Vengeance, Avatar of Dol'jhar, has been plotting his vengeance ever since. Yeah, it's one of those settings, full of lots and lots of hyphenated and apostrophized names.

So, like all highly intelligent rulers of spar-spanning empires, the good guys let an enemy full of psychopathic torture-happy space-orcs keep their homeworlds and a battlecruiser, and as the book begins, Brandon is running away from his big coming-of-age party because he's nursing resentment over how his best friend got shafted years ago while they were both attending starship officer school. As it turns out, his runaway stunt is well-timed since that's when the Dol'jharans basically take out the entire royal family and their space fleet and subjugates their former conquerors. Brandon spends the rest of the book on the run with a bunch of "Rifters" (space pirates).

There are running battles in space and in the royal palace, lots of planets, aliens, artificial intelligences, a fair amount of quippy dialog, and a large cast of characters, about half of whom die by book's end. It's fun but rather overburdened with all those hyphens and apostrophes, chapters hopping around between minor characters' POVs, planting seeds that evidently won't sprout until later in this five-book series, and tons of sci-fi jargon and made-up swearing.

I think most SF fans will like *Phoenix in Flight*, but it's not deep or stretching the genre in any way. Although it was entertaining enough for me to maybe read the follow-on volumes someday, I can't say they're going to bump any other books on my TBR list out of their current slots.

Vincent Stoessel says

Would love to read this series again in ebook format. Very complex but rewarding Space Opera before it was a genre. Very hard to find now.

Anne Osterlund says

The attack on the Thousand Suns has begun. Few will survive. Not the much hated heir to the monarchy. Nor the much loved second son. Solely one heir, Brandon nyr-Arkad, has a chance, and that only because he fled his home planet rather than attend the ceremony meant to confirm his role as heir. Of course, the Lord of Vengeance has other plans.

Phoenix in Flight is a sci-fi tale of a deadly assault on perhaps the most powerful government in the universe. Multiple planets. Multiple narrators. A challenging read. But with an imperfect hero, 100% nonstop action, and a sense of humor, I think you'll have zero regrets tackling it. Just suspend the need to understand every detail for about fifty pages and plunge into the adventure.

Brenda says

Oy vey. OK, this book has one very redeeming characteristic, which I'm going to put first to explain why I continued reading something I am (about) to excoriate. It kept me wanting to know what happens next. I suppose that, at the end of the day, that is what makes a successful novel. And it did that.

But sheesh. Nearly every point-of-view character in the entire story gets offed. Some live on for several chapters of guilt-wracked existence before buying it. Others - memorably a guard outside a torture chamber who isn't enjoying the sounds from within - are introduced to us only so that we'll feel worse when their brains are summarily exploded. And it's gratuitous. One chapter-long POV character is only introduced so that we can feel lousy when we find out she's pregnant! And... um, dead! Kaboom! With her just-introduced fetus! And her loving husband getting to watch the whole thing! Because that's, um, literature? The only characters that live are evil or obnoxious. Hell, they killed off one character who is constantly referred to and central to the plot ... a few months before our narration gets there. We arrive and wham! He died a while back!

I guess this is the failing of a YA author who breaks free into adult books. The bits that weren't over the top violence were sex. Siiiiigh.

But yet I kept reading.

And it's book 1 of 5. Part of me is like, "Well, you were very entertained while you yelled at it" and it WAS compelling and there were some interesting parts. But still, I think I'll be better off finding something else to read, and leaving the complete canon of Sherwood Smith un-plumbed.

Estara says

This revised edition (I was never aware of the original because I only discovered Sherwood Smith in 2004?/2006?) of a projected television show that never came to be - and from the scope I think they would have needed Gene Roddenberry's or George Lucas's clout to do it justice - stops exactly at the point where you want to read more because things are really taking off.

Having read the Inda series before this I was aware that when Sherwood Smith does epic, any characters may die no matter how much viewpoint we have gotten before, unless they are the title character: Brandon, the last surviving son of the Emperor, doesn't die, but many people who help and hinder him - and some who don't even know him - do.

The first 150 pages will be a litmus test of whether you love the setting and the various and diverse plot threads enough to persevere, because so many people and previous decisions have an influence on the eventual plot that we only focus on a smaller group of characters and their adventure after that.

I loved that even those characters that had very little screen-time came alive in such a way that if they died this was really felt and regretted - one of the brothers never even is seen, only described (as is Brandon's only real friend, Markham), but the memory and feelings of the characters that knew them really make their loss and personality felt.

In this book there is occasionally a mix of horror and humour that so far I have only found in this vein in the Godstalker Chronicles of P.C. Hodgell. (view spoiler)

After the first 150 pages, this was a one-sitting read and I didn't see the end coming at all, I just suddenly ran out of pages O.O

There were one or two spelling mistakes, but other than that the edition is perfect.

Kes says

"Ruler of all, ruler of naught, power unlimited, a prison unsought."

That is a really pretty piece of rhetoric.

This is a space opera novel. I didn't intend to read it (accidentally hit the wrong "borrow" button) since it's not my genre, so that might colour my impression.

I found it hard to get into, at first - too many characters, different culture that was not clearly explained (e.g. concept of honour and hierarchy was clearly important, but items like "paliarch" was not explained at its first use, the use of family name as an insult), not very sure where the book was going - but it turned out pretty well. I enjoyed (view spoiler)

In a sense, it's kind of thoughtfully written - there's a bit where Gelasaar says that as a ruler, he only gets thirdhand information, at best, from people picked by other people. That was a nice bit about "ruler of naught", I felt - his own recognition of his powerlessness. We see that, again, in one of Brandon's interactions - he's kept isolated, in a sense, from the Rifiers, and it is only in these circumstances that he gets out of his bubble/prison. Sure, he has power - but the exercise of his power might not be the most efficient/equitable use of it.

As an observation: the characters tend to lack nuance - they're good, like Brandon (view spoiler) - or bad, and therefore embody petty traits. Barrodagh's foibles, for example, felt a bit too comedic (view spoiler) (and

rarely added much to the plot).

It's not bad, but it was a bit of a drag getting to know everyone.

Sherwood Smith says

Forgot to add this in when we re-released it.

On August 13, 1977 Dave Trowbridge and I sat down at his cool little carved table, with wine and other substances to inspire us, candles to write by, and began the Exordium saga. What a long, strange trip it was!

We talk about the process of writing and rewriting at John Scalzi's Big Idea.

The short version is: we rewrote it in omniscient narrator, which it should have been in the first place, but in those days everything had to be limited third. So the first hundred pages, which are basically a simultaneous attack, were rough sledding.

Since then we'd learned a great deal about writing, and also Dave added in more cool tech, though he was prescient about a lot of things. We kept all the fun stuff. I mean, space opera. There has to be fun stuff.

Margaret says

Sherwood Smith and Dave Trowbridge's five-volume space opera, the Exordium series (of which this is the first), is out of print, which is a shame. As the series begins, Jerrode Eusabian, Ruler of Dol'jhar and called the Lord of Vengeance, has set in motion a plot to assassinate Emperor Gelasaar of the Thousand Suns, along with his three sons. However, Gelasaar's youngest son, Brandon, escapes, and it's up to him to restore the House of the Phoenix to the throne Eusabian has usurped.

The universe Smith and Trowbridge have created is large, complex, and fascinating: the interplay between different cultures (the Panarchists, the Dol'jharians, the Rifters), the alien species, the religions. The plot is equally intricate; the authors keep the different threads going nicely and are adept at picking up threads left alone for a while -- for instance, the reappearance of a minor point-of-view character from the first book in a larger role in the fifth book surprised and pleased me. The characters are well thought out and engaging; even the "bad guys" are often sympathetically portrayed (with the exception of Eusabian, a villain through and through).

Sherwood Smith says

This one has a long history.

Basically, this storyline was first begun in 1977.

Onni says

This is a fun read: good sci-fi tech and flight sequences, aliens, power struggles, politics, space pirates, and interesting characters. It definitely earns it's "space opera" qualifier! Four more in this series to go...

Lorena says

Wow. I read these books I guess in the 90s and stupidly sold them (I was a huge used bookstore user). I've been looking for them since, but they were out of print. The authors are actually re-writing them as they publish them as ebooks. "This was to be Dunnett in space," Sherwood Smith wrote about the books, and I can see that. Space opera on a grand scale...

Nick says

This first volume of the 5-volume Exordium series won't be for everyone, but it is a rich, well-planned story about a distant empire with roots on faraway Earth. The society's split between upper and lower classes that is shown in this volume is at the core of the overall story, and applies to the real world as well, with the differences between the ultra-rich and the rest of the world become more visible.

This first volume includes political intrigue, assassinations and space battles enough to kick things off, and if you like the writing style, there are four more volumes to read.

Sadly, the series is currently out of print, but turns up in a lot of used book stores. After finishing this series, Sherwood Smith spent several years working on collaborations with the late Andre Norton and on a set of authorized Oz books, as well as on her own projects, so after these five, there have been no spinoffs or sequels.
