



Pandora's Star

Peter F. Hamilton

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The year is 2380. The Intersolar Commonwealth, a sphere of stars some four hundred light-years in diameter, contains more than six hundred worlds, interconnected by a web of transport "tunnels" known as wormholes. At the farthest edge of the Commonwealth, astronomer Dudley Bose observes the impossible: Over one thousand light-years away, a star... vanishes. It does not go supernova. It does not collapse into a black hole. It simply disappears. Since the location is too distant to reach by wormhole, a faster-than-light starship, the *Second Chance*, is dispatched to learn what has occurred and whether it represents a threat. In command is Wilson Kime, a five-time rejuvenated ex-NASA pilot whose glory days are centuries behind him.

Opposed to the mission are the Guardians of Selfhood, a cult that believes the human race is being manipulated by an alien entity they call the Starflyer. Bradley Johansson, leader of the Guardians, warns of sabotage, fearing the Starflyer means to use the starship's mission for its own ends.

Pursued by a Commonwealth special agent convinced the Guardians are crazy but dangerous, Johansson flees. But the danger is not averted. Aboard the Second Chance, Kime wonders if his crew has been infiltrated. Soon enough, he will have other worries. A thousand light-years away, something truly incredible is waiting: a deadly discovery whose unleashing will threaten to destroy the Commonwealth... and humanity itself. Could it be that Johansson was right?

Pandora's Star Details

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From Reader Review Pandora's Star for online ebook

Rachel (Kalanadi) says

3.5 stars, rounding up

Quick pros: complex story, huge cast of characters, and it was cool to see how people crossed paths. I love that it's very, very hard SF. With huge stakes!

It's easier to spew about the cons than pros with this one, honestly. I just really enjoyed the story and the worldbuilding and really need to know how it ends!

Quick cons: Um. The sexism. Yeah. Paula is the only main female character who doesn't get a sex kitten moment. Probably because she's written as a man. And just - wow - Hamilton's portrayal of women constantly using sex to manipulate men was gross. And if they're not having sex and in a position of power, they're a "ballcrusher". I don't want to dig into this further... there's a lot. (Good god, harems?!)

The only other con is the sheer length. Hamilton describes a lot of stuff - planetary geography, city layouts, every single thinv a character does, etc. - in excruciating detail when it's really not necessary. I like more balance between description and actually moving the story along at less than a ponderous pace.

I want to finish the story, so I'll be checking out Judas Unchained soon. Hopefully Hamilton ditches the harems and sex nymphets and angry men calling their wives whores. I can take the verbosity... but the perpetuated sexist slant? Not so much.

William says

Superb, Awesome! The first-half of The Commonwealth Saga is 988 pages. The second half "Judas Unchained" is 1,236 pages and completes the "2,200 page single book". Don't be scared off! This is an incredible value!

This is very Good, hard sci-fi, many many characters, so it takes a while to get into the book. When I started the first book, I felt there were far too many, too wordy descriptions of the local scene. Creative often, but perhaps the whole saga could lose 100 pages.

The evolution of the aggressive alien species is truly Brilliant.

See rest of review in Judas Unchained.

Radu Stanculescu says

Don't be fooled by the separation of the "Commonwealth Saga" into two books (this one and "Judas Unchained"). It's just a big-big book, so know that if you're starting this one you'll have a total of about 2000 pages to read. :)

More "mature" and with a more refined style than the "Night's Dawn" trilogy, the "Commonwealth Saga" is still a mix of a good number of different story lines that flow towards a (very distant) convergence point. It's got some pretty "alien" aliens, good humour and interesting ideas to keep you company throughout the story. I've yet to read "Misspent Youth" (set in the same universe, only much earlier) and "The Dreaming Void" (first book of the "Void" trilogy, later in the same universe), but I'll definitely give them a try.

Kat Heatherington says

What a mediocre attempt. I somehow managed to slog through all 989 pages of this, and it never completely lost its narrative thread, in spite of an astonishing redundancy in unnecessary description. It is also significantly hampered by a lack of imagination; my suspension of disbelief cannot withstand the idea of the year 2380 basically looking **just like** the year 2010, only with extra planets, and a small handful of cool new tech. By the end of this tome, Hamilton has **almost** managed to put together enough plot elements to sucker you into picking up the equally-hefty second volume. Except I can already tell it's not worth it. So what if the alien Starflyer really exists. I have better things to do than wade through 300 more pages of irrelevant description that does nothing to move the plot forward, does nothing to shape or contextualize any characters, and does nothing to enhance the reader's experience.

It has moments of clarity, and moments of being a good story, but not enough to justify the page count.

Michael says

At the end of the day, I liked *Pandora's Star* enough to finish it and continue with the second half of the story (*Judas Unchained*). However, this book took a loooong time to get going, and there were quite a few times when I was about ready to give up on it. There were also so many subplots that didn't seem to start connecting until near the end of the book, and were then finally realized in the sequel. I found it very easy to put down and forget about for a while, but I also found myself still picking it back up to read it.

On the positive side, Hamilton certainly has a rich imagination! A lot of the technology he envisioned was very interesting, and the alien species - particularly the antagonist - were very different and quite interesting. For some folks who are interested in visions of future technology, it might be worth a read just for that alone.

The bottom line for me is that this is worth a read, but be prepared for a very long book that ends - literally - halfway through the story when things are finally starting to get good. So just plan ahead to pick up *Judas Unchained* to find out what happens.

Ben Babcock says

We begin at the beginning, because the beginning is awesome and foreshadows the epic quality of *Pandora's Star*, as well as the sense of humour, levity, and gravity that Peter F. Hamilton uses to create an incredibly compelling and vast narrative.

Wilson Kime is the pilot of the first manned Mars lander. The mission crew steps onto the surface and raises the United States flag, only to be interrupted by a stranger in a home-made space suit. That suit is attached to

a pressure hose providing a breathing supply, and the hose runs through a wormhole back into a college physics lab on Earth. Nigel Sheldon and Ozzie Isaac have just successfully demonstrated their invention of wormhole technology in front of the entire world, making manned spaceflight obsolete in the process.

I did not appreciate the brilliance of this opening at first. Don't get me wrong: I liked *Pandora's Star* from the start, but my enjoyment slowly ramped up from, "this is good" to "this is *good*" and then it plateaued somewhere around, "OMG, why didn't I know about this book earlier?" But it was slow at the beginning. The cast is almost as large as the book itself, and for the first several chapters (almost a hundred pages in this paperback edition), we do not return to any previously-established character.

In a similarly sprawling, nonchalant fashion, Hamilton introduces a cornucopia of subplots. Many of them seem irrelevant to the main plot at first, and it is easy to wonder what purpose they serve. The murder of Tara Jennifer Shaheef and Wyobie Cotal was like this for me. Even when one of the main characters, Paula Myo, was assigned to the case, I still didn't think its role in building her characters was sufficient to justify its inclusion. Then Hamilton surprised me by taking the shallow, self-centred, immature Mellanie and turning her into a much more important figure. And suddenly it started making sense.

Hamilton surprised me a lot in *Pandora's Star*. This is the first book I have read by him, so I didn't know what to expect. Although the slow pace at the beginning of the book disappointed me at first, the rest of the book more than makes up for it. If you are willing to invest the time required to read it, *Pandora's Star* has so much to offer.

For instance, there is the Sentient Intelligence. I have a thing for implacable, neutral, powerful artificial entities. The Eschaton from *Singularity Sky* qualifies as one, and I like the SI even more. Artificial intelligence in general intrigues me. More than that, there's just something so *fun* in watching an antagonist realize he or she is up against the SI and its sheer *ability*. It makes me giggle aloud, to the delight of people around me. During a terrorist attack on the facility where the faster-than-light starship is being built, something starts breaking through the firewalls a terrorist techie has set up around the systems they've hijacked:

"It's going to fall, oh man, half the format codes have been cracked already. No way. I mean no fucking way! Do you know what kind of encryption I used for that thing? Eighty dimensional geometry. Eighty! That should take like a century to break, if you're lucky." He seemed more angry than worried by the event.

Rob was starting to get a real bad feeling about the mission. "So what can crack that kind of encryption?"

The tech became very still. "The SI." His gaze found a ceiling camera that was lined up on his console, and he looked straight into the tiny lens. "Oh shit."

The SI is supposedly neutral in the sense that it is independent of humanity, and human affairs do not concern it, although it likes getting data from us. However, one of the themes of *Pandora's Star* is how the unknown causes different groups to work together to explore and push back ignorance for mutual edification and survival. The SI is curious about the mystery of the barriers around the Dyson Pair, and it won't let any terrorists interfere with a starship that might actually go visit the barrier.

Once the *Second Chance* arrives at the barrier around Dyson Alpha, the barrier inexplicably deactivates, revealing a thriving civilization in the enclosed solar system. And the Prime civilization, as it calls itself, is even more alien than the SI, the Silfen, the High Angel, or any other species Hamilton has introduced thus far. It's easy to populate your science-fiction universe with vague, humanoid-like aliens. In books, which don't suffer from a make up and digital effects budget, one can even describe improbable and nonhumanoid forms. It takes real skill, however, to portray truly alien thought processes. Hamilton succeeds when he describes the development of MorningLightMountain, an entity that eventually becomes the entire Prime civilization.

As an antagonist, MorningLightMountain is scary. It is essentially a meme. Prime society consists of intelligent/sentient but immobile entities known as immotiles. They are tended by motile units under their control in a sort of queen/drone fashion. The immotiles expand in networks of discrete immotile units, and the overall immotile personality is a kind of collective mind formed from the memories and senses of its member immotiles. MorningLightMountain is the Napoleon of its kind, swiftly gaining swaths of territory on the Prime homeworld. When the Primes develop space travel and colonize the nearby Dyson Beta system, they discover that the time lag in communications means the immotile copies of themselves sent to Beta have diverged. They are now *alienPrimes*! This gives us our first glimpse into the true depth of the Prime revulsion for the Other, and indeed, MorningLightMountain's xenophobia for *anything* other than itself.

Then a quantum barrier goes up around Dyson Alpha, and MorningLightMountain and the Primes are cut off from the universe for a millennium. When the barrier drops and MorningLightMountain observes the *Second Chance*'s wormhole-powered hyperdrive, it starts thinking about faster-than-light travel, learns about the Commonwealth, and begins plotting its expansion into the rest of the galaxy. It's taking over, and it's killing everything that isn't it.

Yeah, humanity is in trouble. And it's not the most morally ambiguous of villains, but it is scary. Besides, Hamilton throws plenty of ambiguity—moral and otherwise—into his human characters. Those terrorists I mentioned earlier are the Guardians of Selfhood. Their leader, Bradley Jonasson, believes an alien called the Starflyer is manipulating humanity towards a malign end. At first, Hamilton portrays Jonasson as delusional and the Guardians as straight-up crackpot terrorists. As the story progresses, however, more and more rational characters begin believing the Starflyer might be real. Finally, we the readers have to accept the possibility that the Starflyer might be real. Suddenly the conspiracy theory is reified, and Hamilton has pulled off a very careful plot twist. Bravo!

But that's a result of great characterization in general. Consider Ozzie, the counterpart to Nigel Sheldon. He's a loner, a rich recluse with a personal wormhole, and that gives him considerable power. So Hamilton strands him in the wilderness with a backwater kid and no electronics on a quest for more information about the Dyson barrier. It's a great way to build the mythology of the character but limit his ability to just zap his way out of any situation. Hamilton balances the abilities of his futuristic society with real peril. When the Primes invade Commonwealth space, we get treated to an epic battle in which Nigel Sheldon, with the help of the SI, uses wormholes to collapse MorningLightMountain's wormholes. But even with the invasion curtailed, the Commonwealth loses several planets to MorningLightMountain's motile forces, suffering a terrible setback with no real way to defend itself against future attacks.

All of the main characters are involved in some way in the invasion drama, but the one that surprised me the most is Mellanie. I discounted her as a minor supporting character, one whose antagonism toward Paula Myo was supposed to make us dislike her. Yet Hamilton turned her into an ambiguous protagonist who, while opportunistic, is also intelligent, compassionate, and cool in a crisis. Thanks to a deal she struck with the SI to further her career as a journalist, she is the only one on Elan with access to the cybersphere after the Prime

attack. So she coordinates an evacuation of the remote Randtown, putting herself in danger multiple times to ensure everyone escapes alive. Hamilton then impresses me with his deft characterization by dropping gentle reminders that Mellanie has not suddenly become an altruist. She's still seeking an angle, still wondering how she can leverage her newfound abilities for her own advancement. She's complex, and I like that.

In addition to the SI and wormhole travel, there is an awfully long laundry list of technology that Hamilton shows off in his future society. For the most part, he does a good job addressing the moral implications such technology has. Unlike some science-fiction novels that progress from a single technology, like the ability to download into a new body after death, Hamilton doesn't quite focus on any one technology and its implications. In that sense, it is a little too broad to go into a lot of depth. Also, there is not a lot of exposition to be had in *Pandora's Star*; it took me a while to figure out what exactly the Sentient Intelligence or the High Angel were. However, Hamilton's broad strokes have the advantage of presenting an entire society with multiple technological innovations, and their resulting social ramifications, rather than extrapolation from a single technology.

Citizens of the Commonwealth can rejuvenate when they grow old, essentially making them immortal. This has interesting implications for family and relationships: marriage is a much less permanent; first-lifers are considered less emotionally mature in comparison to people who have lived for a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred years. Living three lifetimes can build up a lot of memories of course, so memory manipulation and storage is big in *Pandora's Star*. None of the questions this technology raises are unique to this book; rather, they are standard SF fare: is the clone with an upload of your memories a continuation of you, or is it just a copy? How does being able to edit out the fact that you murdered someone affect your culpability? And so on. Hamilton is not breaking any new ground, but he does manage to integrate these ideas into an interesting, dynamic society. To that he adds a story with an exciting conflict, a challenging enemy, and great interstellar politics.

Basically, *Pandora's Star* is space opera on crack. Like Charles Stross and Vernor Vinge, Peter F. Hamilton can come up with cool ideas and spin a good tale. Hence, even though this book weighs in at nearly 1,000 pages, that's 1,000 pages of quality storytelling. And yeah, there are wormholes and weird alien creatures and people getting killed and re-lifed. But science fiction is just a setting, and *Pandora's Star* is really about murder, revenge, and jealousy; it's about our relentless drive to explore versus the dangers of the unknown; and it's an epic tale of humanity's survival as we are threatened from an external force and our own internal ideological struggles. It's simply grand, and it's really good.

Sandi says

90% of *Pandora's Star* irked the crap out of me. First, it just goes on and on and on. It's seems like a bunch of stories pieced together with no real connection. Many of the storylines never even go anywhere. Hamilton does a phenomenal job of over-describing everything. It gets mind-numbing.

Second, the sexism really annoyed the heck out of me. I'm not usually one to scream "sexism", but Hamilton can't resist talking about any female character's looks and about how some male character would like to have sex with her. It seems that EVERY woman in the Commonwealth is beautiful, especially if she's recently undergone rejuvenation at 280 and looks 18 with hormones to match. Honestly, if every woman is beautiful and sexy, would anyone even notice? Wouldn't beautiful and sexy be just plain and ordinary? I notice that

Hamilton never describes the men, unless it's through the eyes of one of the horny women.

Third, the Commonwealth is way too much like 21st Century America. You'd think that human culture would be as different 300 years from now as today is from 300 years ago. As far as I can tell, everybody pretty much acts, talks, dresses and lives the same way we do now except they have wormholes to take them to other planets.

The last thing that really got me was the narration. John Lee is a very popular narrator, but he is as boring as anyone I've heard. He's just terrible at accents and he makes all the women sound like drag queens, except Paula Myo. Paula sounds like a man. The book skips back and forth between many storylines, but Lee never pauses in his narration so you know that you're on a different plot. In books, you at least get a page break.

The book did pick up quite a lot at the end. However, it ended in mid-stream with all the plots. I ended up downloading the sequel,

Judas Unchained to my Nook. It seems like it will be much better in text.

Apatt says

This book is *fat!*

That was my first thought upon picking up this book. Still with all the recommendations I have been getting from the good people at Reddit's science fiction books community ("r/Print SF") and other reviews I wanted to give it a go. With a book this long I would end up either rating it one star for wasting so many hours of my time or five stars for entertaining me for those many hours. I think I'll be magnanimous once again and go for the 5 stars option! This is not to say the book does not contain too many calories, or is entirely free of saturated fat. I believe it could have been somewhat thinner, there are superfluous characters and scenes here and there but generally book's length turned out to be one of its strengths. Considering the book's epic scope a 200 pages volume is unimaginable. Also, beside the epic sf plot the book contain elements of several genres of fiction: murder mystery, police procedural, a bit of courtroom drama, espionage, terrorism, fanaticism, a dash of soap opera, a smidgen of romance, and of course the entire kitchen sink.

From my discussions with other sf readers there are a number of detractors who criticized Hamilton for writing two dimensional characters. I feel this is understandable but not entirely justified. There are at least three characters that I care about or find interesting, and one of them is an alien incapable of speech or hearing as it lacks any faculty to handle sound and can only communicate through images, gestures or graphics. For all that he manages to be an endearing, lovable character. That said characterization is clearly not the forte of this author, there are far too many beautiful people walking about, though this is probably due to "cellular profiling" a sort of futuristic cosmetic surgery and other modifications.

Stylistically Hamilton's prose is utilitarian rather than elegant or poetic, but this is seldom a requirement for a space opera. His straight forward style does serve the material very well for propelling the story and communicating scientific details. There is one particular scene that I think is like a virtuoso sequence, a scene where a human being is described from an alien's point of view. While reading this I could suddenly imagine how strange a human being would look to an alien.

Unlike Iain M Banks' Culture books nobody is going to call Pandora's Star a literary work of art he is not a wordsmith in the way that Banks is but I think it is unfair to dismiss his work as simply "big dumb fun

adventures" as he has clearly put a lot of thoughts into the world building and intricate plots, I can imagine him plotting complicated graphs to tie the myriad plot strands together.

Unfortunately there is no closure at the end of this book the story continues and concluded in the next book Judas Unchained. Well, at least it's not a trilogy, though subsequent books are set in the same common wealth universe.

This book is *phat!*

(Actually at 991 pages this is one of Peter F's shorter books!)

Jason says

5 Super big stars

A new favorite read of mine. This massive tome has everything that a sci-fi lover would ever want...

Review to come

What a total waste...I never came back and wrote a review for this book which is now among my very favorite novels. This is probably the longest novel that I have ever read, but I never felt it. Hamilton creates a massive cast, places them in an epic adventure, and has it cover vast distances of space. This is truly space opera at its finest.

I wish that I had taken the time to write a real review on this book as it deserves massive praise. I can only say that this is one of my favorite science fiction novels of all time. Fans of the genre should not miss out on this epic ride. It is not a hard science novel and really would appeal to a vast crowd. There is a great mystery and adventure in this space opera.....

A MUST READ!!!

Andy says

From the other ratings, there are lots of people who like this a lot, so it may be unfair to review this book in comparison with the best "hard science fiction." Thus, this is a warning for the other people who don't know what "space opera" is and are looking for the next Asimov or OS Card. He's not here.

Space opera. According to Wikipedia, "New space opera proponents claim that the genre centers on character development, fine writing, high literary standards, verisimilitude, and a moral exploration of contemporary social issues."

That all sounds great but Pandora's Star is a drawn-out affair with tons of useless details, many intertwining sub-plots, and many less-than-engaging characters. The main problem is the feeling of being in a mediocre

TV series that "jumps the shark" in the first episode. The story is dragged out unnecessarily with plot devices that come off as cheap tricks or cliches (unexplained mystery cliffhanger, detectives staking out arms dealers, etc.). For a book about faster than light space travel, things move very ponderously.

Ryan says

I have very mixed feelings about this book, and of the experience of having read it. As a result, I'm not sure I can say that I truly 'enjoyed' it; it's well-crafted, overall, but at the same time not without its frustrations.

First, the good stuff: there's a hugely epic plot here, ultimately concerned with ensuring the continued survival of the human race; bold, three-dimensional characters who are intriguing, and draw you into their story; plot twists that you truly never see coming, and which are revealed with a subtle mastery that forces you to rethink everything you've read up until that point; and a fascinating, amazingly-thought out world that all of this is set in.

On the other hand, however, the book has its problems, chief of which is its length and pacing. This is a book that is almost one thousand pages long, which by itself I don't have a problem with. Some of my favourite novels and novel series feature lengths like that. While the length isn't a problem, the way the plot develops within that length was a problem for me - I remember at one point thinking to myself "oh, the action is starting to pick up and the plot's finally moving forward", and then looking at the page number and seeing something in the three hundreds. Then, after another four hundred pages of exciting outer space action, things slow down again for another couple of hundred pages, once again getting exciting for the last hundred pages before finally ending on a cliffhanger. Add to this chapters that were routinely over fifty pages long, and which didn't seem to have any strong internal structure to them, and you're left with a book that I strongly considered giving up on several times during the process of reading it. And yet, at the end, I was left with a strong desire to check out the sequel, which is another thousand page book and will no doubt have many of the same issues.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

First of all, let's get all the bad things about this book out of the way. Um... let's see. It's really, *really* thick. Oh, and it has a cliffhanger ending, because of the sequel. Um... surely there must be something else I can come up with?

Now, the **good**: and, boy, there is a lot of that. This novel reads like a *greatest hits* of everything that is cool about science fiction. Yes, it is a massive book, but that's because it's filled with all kinds of goodies. You want it? It's probably here. It actually reads faster than you might suspect too, mainly because it's paced so evenly. Even when the chapters of exposition started, I was glued to the pages. There is a *lot* going on here.

This is probably the shortest review I've written. Which is ironic, considering the size of the novel concerned, but I don't have time to linger, *Judas Unchained* isn't going to read itself.

David Sven says

It's been a while since I've read Sci fi this good. I've probably been making poor reading choices in this genre for a bit. But finally, I've hit pay dirt with an author who has hit the sweet spot with great concepts, epic landscape/world building, excellent plot, *AND*, very importantly, excellent *CHARACTERISATION*. The story is set some 300 years in the future where wormhole technology has allowed humanity to spread out to begin colonising other star systems.

This was a big book and a lot denser than I expected as well. At 200 pages in there were still new characters being rolled out. So we have a large cast with no central or main character. Yet very few if any felt "disposable." The stories range from detective mystery, to alien conspiracies, and throw in a love story that spans the stars. Puts a different spin on "star crossed lovers." All the arcs work together and interweave to form an epic tapestry of human exploration and endeavour. So after feeling a little daunted in the beginning at the epic scale of the world and cast, the book just kept getting better and better, even as the story got bigger and bigger.

What I really appreciate about this book, is how Hamilton introduces you to the technology and the wider Universe. He basically just throws you in with the nitty gritty of the character he's developing at the time and just lets you have it.

For Example let's spend a day riding shotgun with Intersolar police officer, Paula Myo. Fantastic. What are we doing today Paula? Today Paula has a lead on a case she's been trying to crack for a long time. How long? About 140 years. **WHAT!** But you don't look a day over 30. How's this possible? Rejuve...duh. Apparently, in the future, we have developed stem cell technology to the point that we can pay to have a "rejuvenation," a process that reverses the aging process at a cellular level. The process can be repeated as often as you can pay for making one virtually immortal. Of course, if you just want a bit of cosmetic surgery to get rid of some body fat, erase a few wrinkles, or get a totally new face and body shape there's "reprofiling." So, Paula, what happens if someone just shoots you dead, huh. Huh? Then there's "relife." Apparently we can have a memory chip that stores all our, well, memories, which can be extracted and placed into a new clone body. What if someone shoots you in the head?—AH HA. No problem, just revert to a backup held "off site," and pay for some counselling to deal with any resulting existential hang-ups.

Ok Paula so where's this lead taking us? Oh, that would be on a planet some light years away. Isn't that going to take a while to get to from here? About 40 minutes by car if the traffic isn't too bad. **WHAT!?** We are going from Paris to another planet by car? Actually, we aren't in Paris anymore. That tunnel we went through is actually a wormhole, one of many that connect all the human worlds into a single Commonwealth network making all the star systems virtual neighbours. Hang on, let me connect to my ebutler to let head office know we're here. You mean head office back through the worm hole? Welcome to the Unisphere rookie. And what's an ebutler? Is that some sort of smartphone? What size screen does it have? Actually I have inserts in my eyes that projects the screen/image directly onto my retinas. But...but...where's the cpu kept? **WHAT!?** You mean those tattoos on the side of your head aren't a fashion accessory? They're actually an advanced circuit board wet wired directly into your brain and nervous system? I guess you won't be too impressed with my new Iphone 5 then.

And pretty much for most the book **WHAT!?** And **WOW!** are pretty much how a lot of my experience can be characterised as I read this book. Even towards the end there were characters and events and discoveries that surprised me. Unpacking this Universe with its concepts and technology was really fun. We get themes of human exploration, artificial intelligence, immortality, alien conspiracy and more. And the action was

fantastic, whether it be the lone assassin whacking his target and erasing his memory chip, to small scale terrorist/patriot military action taking down installations, to epic full on space battles with combat drones packing EMPs to planet slagging Leviathans unleashing nuclear hell on entire worlds.

Fantastic - 5 stars. Can't wait to read the next book in the series (warning, this isn't a stand alone story).

Michael says

This is up there with the best of the best for sci-fi space opera extravaganzas. It's got world-building par excellance, brilliant projections of technology, and a great cast of characters. Set in 2380, Hamilton poses for us a Commonwealth of hundreds of planets colonized by different styles of humanity, made possible by wormhole technology. Immortalizing rejuvenation, artificial intelligence, and computer storage of human memories are standard fare woven into the saga in fresh ways. The few aliens encountered so far appear benign but mystifying. For example, the Silfen are friendly but boring to most humans in their simple hunter-gatherer lifestyle and hippie-like mystical outlook. But suddenly a dorky astronomer's discovery of the disappearance of two stars 100 light years away raises the spectre of incredibly advanced aliens in the galaxy who can put up a spherical barrier around a whole solar system. Does the event imply a civilization wanting to protect itself from other dangerous aliens, or does it instead reflect a fencing in of a dangerous species by a more powerful but benevolent alien race?

Hamilton orchestrates an array of stories that evolve in parallel before eventually linking up with each other. That takes some patience, and trust, from the reader. Fortunately, there are four colorful characters to bring life to the advancing threads of the epic. Nigel Sheldon, inventor of the wormhole, gets tapped to adapt the technology to propel an interstellar ship, using clues from a starship left behind with a space station by an elusive alien race, the Starflyers, apparently motivated to help and study other species. Wilson Kime, an early astronaut on his fourth rejuvenation, is engaged to manage the massive development project and captain the expedition to the cloaked star systems. Ozzie Isaac, the super-wealthy, pragmatic partner for Nigel's science, makes a personal quest to draw out the Silfen on anything useful they may know about the star-cloaking event and ends up on an epic journey on foot with a boy that mysteriously takes him to unknown worlds and survival challenge without the benefit of technology. Finally, we have the brilliant Commonwealth crime fighter Paula Myo, who for over a century has been obsessively pursuing the leader of a seeming cult dedicated to countering the evil and hidden designs of the Starflyer species. Her investigations of their terrorist activities eventually aligns with the narratives of the other characters when the group, the Guardians of Selfhood, make a well-orchestrated assault on the nearly complete starship and base.

The expedition gets underway and some exiting discoveries are made about the alien threat to humans and other sentients of the galaxy, as masterfully revealed in the thrilling orchestrations of the diverse plot elements. Hamilton deserves kudos for a side story from the mind a really alien alien, MorningLightMountain, and its successful directing of evolution of its sessile, hive-mind species with dumb motile elements into a one super organism. The author terrified me with the fate of captured humans from the expedition and the amplification of the alien's powers with the technology secrets it extracts. The idea that humans and all other species are a threat and must be eliminated fulfills well the paranoia that lurks at the back of our minds when we try to imagine the wonders of learning we are not alone in the universe.

This book was fabulous entertainment for me, reviving the same pleasures that led me to hard science fiction in my youth and satisfied in recent years by the likes of Alastair Reynolds, Iain Banks, and Vernor Vinge.

Before you consider taking on this epic, you should be aware that is not the beginning of a series of relatively independent stories but rather a 2,000 page plus novel that is split into two. I am not sure when I will pursue the second half sitting heavy on my shelf, *Judas Unchained*. That is because I got the gist of its events from a recent sequel set several hundred years later, *A Night Without Stars*, which I found to provide a wonderful and thrilling closure. Sincere thanks to Apatt for recommending this book. Very different from other works of this author I read awhile back, *The Night's Dawn Trilogy* and *The Nano Flower*.

Stephen says

6.0 stars. This one may make it onto my list of "All Time Favorites" but I am going to wait until I finish *Judas Unchained* as the two books should really be treated as one VERY LONG novel. This was an amazing read filled with mind blowing ideas and superb (and I really mean superb) world-building. Do not let the length of the book keep you from giving it a try. It is incredibly well-written throughout and I think the length is warranted given how much is going on. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED!!!**
