



Deepsix

Jack McDevitt

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In the year 2204, tragedy and terror forced a scientific team to prematurely evacuate Maleiva III. Twenty-one years later, the opportunity for scientists to study this galactic rarity—a life-supporting planet—is about to vanish forever as a rogue gas giant has invaded the planetary system on a deadly collision course with the world they are now calling Deepsix.

A superluminal pilot for the Academy of Science and Technology, Priscilla “Hutch” Hutchins is the only even remotely qualified professional within lightyears of Deepsix. With less than three weeks left before the disaster, she and a small scientific team—including Randall Nightingale a survivor of the original expedition who was made the scapegoat for its failure—must descend to the surface, and glean whatever they can about the doomed planet’s lifeforms and lost civilizations.

There is more to this strange and complex world, however, than anyone could have imagined: hidden predators; stone cities under the ice; remnants of a warlike primitive society, yet with inexplicable hints of an impossible technology buried in the rubble... and in orbit around the soon to be demolished planet. The deeper Hutch and her team delve, the more puzzles are revealed within puzzles and startling discoveries lead only to greater and more perplexing questions

But then the unthinkable occurs An earthquake destroys the explorers only means of escape As scientists and sightseers who have come to witness the spectacular end of Deepsix watch helplessly from miles above Hutch and her people must survive somehow on a hostile planet going rapidly mad. And with the clock ticking relentlessly toward an unavoidable apocalypse, they must find some way, any way to get off before Deepsix plunges like a pebble into the limitless depths of the rampaging gas giant.

Deepsix Details

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From Reader Review Deepsix for online ebook

Sharon says

I liked this book a little less than Engines of God. For the most part, I enjoyed the characters that were on the ground--though they were the only ones I could keep in my head (and only the core ones of that). Hutch remains really awesome, but I also liked McAllister--in terms of characterization and growth... and Nightingale was interesting but I don't think in the end he was handled well. Basically I don't like how his cowardice was ultimately presented. I mean...he fainted because of pain. So it makes him a coward? But you can't help what your body decides to do or how much fear you have.

Story wise it was interesting. I guessed to solution early on and because I knew the solution, I could sort of guess the problems they were going to undertake. That wasn't a bad thing and it did manage to surprise me in the end.

The parts that annoyed me was that, once again, it seemed, everything on the damned planet was trying to kill them. Or near enough. (and the birds never really did play that much significance) And they find natives? The crickets in the furs? Also trying to kill them? *Why* though? For a book cemented in archaeology there was no exploration of living people. Like why did the crickets come and try to kill them? Why did they have to?

Also, I keep reading this throughout the books-- but why do they keep saying that there is no intelligent alien life when the Nok are right there? Is it because they are pre-industrial and keep having wars? I mean it's human history practically but they certainly have culture. Language. Even war itself you have to be intelligent to do it so... /shrug/

On the whole, the little things that irked me in the last book, irked me a little more in this book and I'll read on because his writing is good and the pacing is great, but I sort of hope that, if I can't stop being irked, at least to keep it at the same level.

Clark Hallman says

Deepsix by Jack McDevitt is the second novel in McDevitt's academy series (or Priscilla Hutchens series, whichever you choose to name it). Maleiva III is a planet that is headed for a catastrophic collision with a huge gas giant named Morgan's World. Within weeks before the collision will occur, Priscilla Hutchens (Hutch) is recruited by the Academy of Science and Technology to lead a team to explore, record, photograph, and even collect artifacts of former civilizations (especially from advanced technological civilizations). An attempt to explore the planet about twenty years earlier had ended in disaster when several team members were killed by vicious indigenous creatures. Hutch and her hastily- assembled team are well aware of the danger, but there isn't time to bring in a well prepared team of experts, a well-armed protective force, or the equipment that would ordinarily be used, before the planet and everything on it will be swallowed by the gas giant. Hutch and her motley team, including a wealthy writer, a reporter, and others discover some ruins that suggest a nontechnical and unscientific society once inhabited the planet. However, they also encounter a very malicious environment, which is exacerbated by the effects of the approaching gas giant, and distinctly unfriendly wildlife. Both the members of the group and their equipment suffer casualties

and survival quickly becomes a constant desperate struggle to get off the planet before it is exploded by the approaching giant. As is usual, McDevitt includes a large number of very diverse and interesting characters in this novel. His characters on the planet endure a punishing struggle, hopeless fear, and the numbing loss of their team members. In addition, a large group of mostly untrained volunteers guided by a few knowledgeable and skilled leaders takes desperate actions in an attempt to rescue Hutch and her group. However, it is difficult and dangerous to attempt to control chaos. McDevitt also provides very interesting doses of future scientific accomplishments to satisfy the reader's desire for science in their fiction. This is a very rich and enjoyable science fiction novel and I recommend it to anyone who likes science fiction and/or adventure/suspense novels.

Mike says

This is an exciting story with a slew of interesting concepts. A life-bearing planet with fierce, interesting predators; remnants of an intelligent but not very advanced civilization; further remains of an advanced technological race; and a rogue gas giant about to collide with this planet. We meet up again with Priscilla "Hutch" Hutchins, 20 years after her last escapade in *The Engines of God*. Hutch leads a "pick-up" team to the planet surface to gather whatever archeological artifacts they can find before the planets collide. Then TSHF. An exciting chase across the surface as the team suffers losses while trying to get to a safe escape. People die, tension builds, rescuers strain to find a way to get the team off the planet, predators attack, mysteries galore. Read this one! **Four Stars**

Now I do have one problem with the book. On the highly positive side, McDevitt writes some great female characters into the story. (I'd love to hear from some women who have read the book on their opinions). So many of the female characters are heroic, smart, accomplished, selfless, strong, deep thinkers, etc. Really admirable, it was way past time for great women leads in scifi. On the negative side, virtually every male character is a real jerk. Cowardly, vicious, feckless, self-serving, manipulative, weak, shallow, etc. It went beyond belief.

Coni says

Secondo capitolo della saga dell'accademia. Di cui solo il primo e il sesto sono stati tradotti in italiano (Urania). E quindi L'HO LETTO IN INGLESE.

Sono incappato in McDevitt per caso. Nella bellissima biblioteca di Malcesine, nel mucchio dei libri in regalo, ci ho trovato il volume più recente pubblicato da Urania. Il sesto capitolo. Così ho iniziato dal sei. Purtroppo visto che mi sono praticamente spoilerato un po' di cosette.

Poi mi son letto l'uno, sempre Urania, e finalmente sono approdato al due, in lingua. L'approccio non è stato facile. Ci sono un miliardo di parole più o meno desuete o specialistiche. Ma gliel'abbiamo fatta.

Qua e là mi sono un po' perso. Il nostro pecca, come spesso accade nella SF di spiegazionismo, ma comunque è abbastanza funzionale nel dipingere un prossimo futuro di viaggi spaziali in cui però la questione medio orientale è ancora calda.

Era un bel po' che non leggevo qualcosa di SF, e per la prima volta è un contemporaneo. Una graditissima

sorpresa. Anzi mi domando perché non vi siano film e serie tv tratte (o ci sono e lo ignoro).

Venendo a noi, Deepsix finora è il mio capitolo preferito.

Se volete una fantascienza hardcore, seria, con: astronavi, pianeti, esplosioni, animali alieni, civiltà perdute, archeologia spaziale, misteri, iperspazio... Non cercate oltre, abbandonate a cuor leggero la paccosa SF per signora che spopola nei cinema oggi (dove non c'è più nulla di scientifico) ed è tutta una metafora del presente.

All'Accademia troverete razionale, spaziale, futuribile, coinvolgente avventura. Soprattutto PLAUSIBILE (ammettendo il concetto relativista secondo cui possiamo piegare lo spazio e navigare attraverso le distanze siderali).

Menzione d'onore per la protagonista della saga, Hutch, Priscilla Hutchinson: i personaggi femminili dominano l'azione, tirano avanti la carretta come e meglio dei colleghi. Ma non c'è traccia di pseudo-femminismo piacione e ipocrita.

Bradley says

The best thing I can say about McDevitt's SF is that it's always consistent, rich, and adventuresome.

While I never expect anything wild or any the pushing of the boundaries, I can always enjoy planetary exploration and the archeology of ancient, long-dead alien races. It's a mystery wrapped in interesting physical dimensions for worlds, such as this one. It's much more massive than earth but the density is still within the perfect zone... and yet we know everything has to go to hell.

Yep. More death, a planet set to be completely destroyed, and a crew of academics and explorers trapped on the surface by massively bad luck. Add other spaceships responding to the distress, instantaneous communications and a media circus thanks to a few well placed and vocal peeps in the crew, and everyone's tuned in to this exciting rescue.

Too bad the rescue is doomed.

I was reminded of the very best portions (and extravagant portions) of a certain Lost In Space movie. Only expanded, improved, made less stupid. :)

This novel was quite enjoyable. Exciting popcorn fiction full of great tech, standard humans, and a modern sensibility NOT reminiscent of the golden age SF mythos. It might be less spicy than most SF, but it's definitely some of the most accessible.

Especially for fans of adventure. :)

Glen Robinson says

If you read *The Engines of God* by McDevitt, this basically takes off right after that story, which is ironic, because I believe he wrote this story first. In any case, a rogue planet is scheduled to collide with another one called Maleiva III (also known as Deepsix) in a couple of weeks. In the meantime, a local spaceship that doesn't have a landing craft reports seeing ruins of buildings on the planet below. The Academy of Science and Technology decides to send Hutch, the hero of *The Engines of God* to go down to the planet and take pictures and salvage whatever artifacts they can and then get out before the disaster happens. Of course, the media hears about it, and a reporter and a famous author decide to go down to the planet's surface for an interview as well. An earthquake happens and both parties get stranded.

That's the problem. The rest of the story is coming up with a solution to rescue as many of the survivors as possible as the monstrous rogue planet comes closer and closer to destruction.

McDevitt has the characters come up with a logical solution, then when that doesn't work, try something else, and in the end they rely on luck, ingenuity and courage they didn't know they had to survive. Some of the science may bog the reader down a bit, and I found myself skimming the technicalities at a point or two. But at its heart, this is a died-in-the-wool adventure story that will appeal to pretty much everybody.

Jerry says

Good, but definitely not McDevitt's best.

Jessica says

The character, Priscilla Hutchings shines again in this book. I thought I would get tired of this "heroine who pulls miracles out of thin air" but really, she keeps you rooting for her. And I like her. She's feisty. What really draws me to these books is the idea that we might actually be alone in the universe because all our intellectual equals have vanished, dead or devolved. Makes something inside me feel very lonely indeed.

While not my favorite in this series, it's still very good. I only threw it across the room a couple times - mostly because I got frustrated with people's egos making decisions that risked lives. I like how Mr. McDevitt makes his characters change during the book...the shy ones come out of their shells, the bold ones learn a little more caution. There is progress. And I'll try not to ruin the ending by saying that there is always at least once heart-breaking death in every book (also a reason to throw the book...but then go get it). The ending is very gripping so make sure you have plenty of uninterrupted reading time before you finish it.

Guillaume says

2223. La planète Deepsix est menacée de destruction totale par une collision cosmique. Du coup, l'intérêt pour ce monde oublié et maudit, parce qu'une mission d'exploration y a été décimée vingt ans plus tôt, se réveille. Sans compter qu'en plus sur deux semaines avant le cataclysme, on découvre des ruines de vie civilisée sur la planète. Une expédition archéologique est montée en urgence pour essayer de sauver le maximum d'informations et vestiges avant que tout disparaisse. Mais quand l'expédition se retrouve coincée en surface, à une poignée de jour de l'apocalypse, une course contre la montre s'engage, au sol et en orbite, pour sauver les survivants.

On retrouve Priscilla "Hutch" Hutchins dans une aventure matinée de hardscience (légère). Et il s'agit vraiment d'une aventure épique, avec un suspens terrible jusqu'à la fin cataclysmique. Le tout assaisonné de personnages relativement complexes, de découvertes archéologiques plus ou moins approfondies, et de mystères pas tout résolus.

C'est extrêmement prenant et pleins de rebondissement. On s'attache assez vite aussi à l'ensemble des personnages. Bref, une lecture très plaisante, de la bonne sf intelligente d'aventure.

Elaine says

[i.e., people trapped on a planet with cataclysmic disaster looming (hide spoiler)]

Gary says

A very sturdy sequel to *The Engines of God*. In this second outing for Academy pilot Priscilla Hutchins, a rogue moon is hurtling toward Maleiva III, one of the few known planets in the galaxy capable of supporting life. Hutchins flies a team of scientists down to the surface to gather as much data as they can before the catastrophe hits, but an accident leaves them stranded and they only have one slim chance of escaping in time – if the planet doesn't kill them first.

The plot of *Deepsix* follows a similar formula to its predecessor, and even repeats a couple of story beats. McDevitt excels at both small character moments and grand-scale adventure, and his musings on alien life and civilizations are always captivating. The familiarity of the plot makes it no less a source of tension, excitement, and wonder.

Fred Hughes says

A great story about the results of an ad hoc mission to explore a doomed planet and the results when your resources are slowly lost and you are under attack. An innovative solution arises and then the countdown begins to see if they can be saved.

Dawson says

You can get a synopsis of the plot on the Amazon pages. So I am going to give my impression of the overall series.

I found this book engaging and just a good fun read.

If you've read one of my review of the series you've already read below.

Part of a 6 book (so far) series. As another reviewer said, the books have something of a mystery novel feel to it. Much more noticeable is the documentary/diary feel to this series. Overall though, it is good "hard sci-fi". A couple of things that stand out in the series to me:

- 1) His main character is a woman, not something often seen.
- 2) The universe of 2220 is highly believable. Earth has many of the same problems as it does today. Rather than being kitschy, it helps to make it easier to slip into that world.

All the books are very much in the action genre. In a few of the books I thought it was a bit over the top. But I still enjoyed each book. If you want a believable series that is strong on science and character I highly recommend all the books.

James says

I've read several of the "Hutchins" series of novels by Jack McDevitt. What strikes me about them has to do with a strong female lead, "Hutch", her adventures as a pilot for the Academy as they explore the ruins of what was once a thriving civilization across the galaxy but faded out when humans arrived.

"Are we next" is kinda the question the books imply in this series.

In "Deepsix", Nightingale ("Randy") leads a exploratory colony to the planet Deepsix. The life on this planet is deadly and soon makes short work of the people there. In typical overreacting, the place is shut down and quarantined for twenty years. Randy is despondent and blames himself for the disaster, and so does everyone else!

Several of the characters I really liked, such as "McAllister." If you want to see a Rush Limbaugh knock-off, it's McAllister. Opinionated and abrupt, writes for galactic news (I guess some things will never change in our future).

The other is Priscilla Hutchins, who is ordered to Deepsix to do some reconnaissance before the planet is met with a gas giant, the planet Morgan. She is strong, regrets not meeting her mom's goals and realizes she should make a few of her own. Some minor flashback from earlier books is briefly mentioned.

The book shifts drastically from archeology to planetary destruction, what despair and desperation will do to one, and how greed and power trump life any day. Quite a story.

Hutch finds herself stranded on the planet, with only a few people, as an earthquake destroys one lander and an inept "pilot", newswoman, destroys another and gets herself killed in the process. The rest of the book deals with the deadline, some not wanting them rescued, and the *deus ex machina* of an alien device that just might help them get off the rock before it is wiped out.

Bottom Line: I did not care for some characters, several needed fleshing out. The captain that allowed passengers to go to the surface just before the disaster, several and sundry crewmen and women, and a few die that I did not care for. The book builds suspense well and the pacing is decent.

Kindle Edition: The Kindle edition has several spelling errors that are really distracting. Clearly the scan did not go well from text to electronic font. Clean it up!

Recommended.

An Odd1 says

"Hutch", pilot Priscilla Hutchins, leads a team to explore just-discovered evidence of civilization, twelve days before planet Deepsix breaks apart, armed with laser cutters only "a notch or two more efficient" p66 than the first fatal expedition. Randall Nightingale is silent "small in stature, thin, gray, only a couple of centimeters taller than the diminutive Hutch" p37, reclusive and bitter after taking blame for deadly cardinals on visit 19 years before, some from Gregory MacAllister. The famous cynical journalist convinces cowardly convention-bound Captain Erik Nicholson to allow him down. His quotes precede every chapter. Kellie Collier, "head taller than Hutch" p66 is first mate to gentlemanly Captain Marcel Clairveau. Their ship *Wendy Jay* carries the Morgan Project, 45 prominent scientific researchers led by Gunther Beekman "small, bearded, overweight" p14. They restore an alien skyhook to rescue survivors.

"Red shirt" disposable characters are sketched briefly, bravely, kindly, so we care about who we lose. We get final warnings "last thought" x 2 p 134, p 265 (view spoiler). Survival "e-suits" keep them warm, dry, and oxygenated, rations keep them fed. Earthquakes take their landers and 3 lives. (view spoiler) Wildlife takes another life. (view spoiler) Flood takes equipment (view spoiler). Lightning storm zaps elevator shaft where Hutch dangles overnight. (view spoiler) Meteor storm takes casualties (view spoiler).

During natural disasters, Hutch's team finds evidence that tall "hawk"-like aliens rescued child-size "crickets", and six different languages in direction signs. Team waste time holding burial ceremonies for fellows soon to be consumed with planet. Artifacts and photos are detailed - and left behind. Huge miniature city and more are saved by "relaying the visuals to *Wendy*" p 277. Only Nightingale and Mac remember some lost Deepsixer across a lake could count light flashes p289.

Unwanted media attention was part of much I skipped. Gunther urges Marcel to abandon the team p360, "Never let go" motto when Nightingale grips Hutch's tether implies they get together romantically, but epilogue does not say so. "Now that she faced possible termination, her life seemed curiously incomplete" p317. One long goodbye. I thought "space opera" meant over-detailed universe-building, by definition more emotions than things. Maybe this book is more meaningful when read within the series?

Vincent Riddle says

2.5 stars

After finishing the disappointing novel, *Ancient Shores*, I wasn't in a hurry to read another McDevitt, but a friend went out of his way to hand *Deepsix* to me, saying it was a good sci-fi story.

The premise sounded exciting: Trapped explorers must escape an earthlike planet before the approach of a gas giant tears it apart. Will they have time to learn the mysterious origins of a long-lost alien civilization before all is lost?

What I got was mostly a dull read.

All but one of the characters are so flat and uninteresting that they seem to be the same person in different guises. Aboard the various starships, a person's role defines his or her character, and that's it. There are captains and pilots, corporate employees and journalists, tourists and ... I forget them all. The grumpy MacAllister and the pretty female journalist (whatever her name is) have a certain chemistry in the beginning, but the woman gets nixed early. So much for that.

There are moments of suspense scattered throughout this overlong book, but it lacks intrigue. It's like watching a dragged-out episode of Star Trek, without Kirk, Spock, and Bones to spice things up. (Or Scotty to fix the transporters, which are missing in this episode). Each stand-in character in *Deepsix* has a mundane back-story, but it doesn't matter. They exist simply to get the explorers off the planet.

On the surface of Deepsix, the quest for ancient civilizations has potential. But even that is tough to get through after a while. If not for natural disasters moving things along, I might have quit the book halfway through. And maybe I should have, because the big revelation at the end is a huge letdown.

The ideas are good, but the execution is ho-hum. I guess I wanted more space opera and less welding and laser cutting. In the hands of somebody like Baxtor, or even Niven, it would have been a page-turner. Sorry Jack.

Kate says

Deepsix is a brilliant sci-fi thriller. The ideas are fantastic, especially the premise on which the entire book is based which is that an earth-like planet will collide with a large rogue wanderer gas giant.

This of course is of very high interest to the scientific community of the 23rd Century, so they are gathered in that solar system to ogle at the upcoming spectacle of Deepsix being ripped apart. However, when the spectators arrive six weeks prior to the event, they find that the incompletely surveyed planet actually has ruins of a civilisation.

Hutch is piloting in the local area and is called in to do some basic xenoarchaeology before the planet and all its remains are lost in the fiery maelstrom. And that's when things start to go wrong!

Again there are some great characters including a misanthropic atheist journalist whose pithy comments bring some levity to a serious situation, although he's also an irritating b*gger too!

I thoroughly enjoyed Deepsix, highly recommended

Scott Holstad says

This is the second book in The Academy series and I loved it. Hutch, the space ship pilot from the first novel, is back, a number of years later, still piloting ships around for the Academy.

A back plot. An earth-like planet is found and a group of scientists found to explore it, but they're nearly all killed by bird-like creatures. One scientist named Nightingale remained alive. Fast forward twenty years. In the same system, this same earth-like planet is about to collide with a huge planet floating through space

destroying everything in its path and the smaller planet is going to explode. Naturally, the Academy had sent a team of scientists up to view this once in a lifetime phenomena and then the unthinkable occurs -- evidence of civilization turns up. A tower is found buried in ice. A scan is completed and entire cities are found buried beneath the ice. It's important to find out what civilizations lived there, what happened to them, what they were like, etc., before the planet explodes. Unfortunately, the scientific ship doesn't have a lander, so there's no way they can make it to the planet's surface. However, Hutch is in a ship nearby with a few other people, including Nightingale, and they're ordered to the planet's surface to explore and gather as much evidence as possible in their lander. So they do. In the meantime, another ship has appeared, carrying gawkers, including one insufferable Gregory MacAllister, a writer, editor, and all around snob, who agrees to a young writer's request to go to the surface to conduct an interview. So they join Hutch, who is none too happy to have them.

Hutch finds some really good stuff. But the big planet is approaching and wreaking havoc with the weather. There's an earthquake, and MacAllister's lander falls down a new crack in the ice, wrecking. He and the female reporter take off in Hutch's, only to crash land a short distance later. She dies, as does one of Hutch's crew. That's two landers. They need another one to get off the planet. An emergency signal is sent out and yet another ship is contacted by the Academy with instructions to go to their aid with their lander. However, they are sabotaged by a bigwig on board, who releases the lander so they won't have to go, and so he can go to his precious dig on another planet which is oh so much more important than people's lives.

What the hell are they going to do? Nightingale suggests their only chance may be to hike the 200 kilometers across difficult terrain with alien animals that want to eat them to find the old lander his old crew abandoned with the hope that it would still work. So they go off. And are attacked. And lose another crew member. And during this journey, MacAllister learns to become human, which is refreshing. And Hutch displays her exceptional leadership qualities. Meanwhile, the ship's captains are meeting with scientists to see if anything else can be done. Seems like there's one more long shot and it's got to work, because the old lander won't have enough power to get out of orbit. An alien object has appeared. It's many kilometers long and has a net at the end of it with an asteroid caught in it. They decide to cut it up and weld it into a scoop, so Hutch can literally fly into it and be scooped up in this object. So volunteers from the ships learn to weld and go out into outer space and do the job, all the while with time running down. The two worlds are about to collide.

Hutch and one of the girls make it to the lander and it still works, so they take off. They need some technical stuff left back at the tower scavenged from their old landers, so they take off for it. However, Marcel, their ship commander informs them that the tower is about to be completely submerged in water due to the planet's ongoing issues. They make it back and sure enough, it's submerged and they're screwed, so they head back to recover MacAllister and Nightingale. Then they head for a high area. They're told of the scoop plan and they hope, oh, they hope. But it seems so unlikely. They'll have seconds to do it before the scoop leaves the rendezvous area. To top matters off, the Academy has found another area on top of a mountain that they want explored -- with the worlds about to collide -- while waiting for the scoop to be completed, so the lander heads off to the mountain and they encounter a flat surface on top of the mountain and evidence of civilization. It appears that two life forms were on the planet -- hawks and crickets. It appears that the hawks appeared out of nowhere to save the crickets with their own scoop thousands of years ago. What happened to them? No one will ever know. Some stuff happens. The action is breath taking. Finally it's time, so they head off to meet the scoop. Only to have the net on the scoop tear when a meteor field rips through it. Man, will nothing work? Are they saved? I'm not going to say because I don't want to give away the ending. I want you to read it for yourself. But I thought this book packed a lot more action into it than its predecessor and I was glad for that because I got occasionally bored with the first one. I saw character development here, character depth, science at work, alien culture, space ships -- hey, it's good sci fi! I've already got all of the other books in the series and I'm already looking forward to reading the third one. Definitely recommended.

Curtiss says

This is the second Priscilla Hutchins novel, also known as Academy series #2, for the Academy of Science & Technology, which employs Hutchins as a super-luminal (i.e. faster-than-light) starship pilot and part-time explorer. Despite living in an era of highly advanced technology in the fields of anti-gravity, personal force-fields, and medical longevity treatments, it still takes weeks or even months in hyperspace to travel between star systems, and complications are inevitably encountered when exploring new worlds to look for evidence of alien civilizations.

In fact there is only one other known “living” alien civilization, the Nok, who are stuck in a warlike era comparable to humanity’s 19th-20th centuries. However there is ample evidence of numerous other alien civilizations – all of them long vanished: one race has even left literally monumental relics on numerous worlds, others have apparently been exterminated by the mysterious “Omega” clouds which emerge from the central region of the galaxy at semi-regular intervals and target planetary constructions characteristic of civilization, as in straight walls or geometric shapes.

An abortive exploration of the planet Malieva III, nicknamed Deepsix, was terminated by the loss of six crewmembers to alien fauna, and nearly fifteen years later ships have gathered to observe and record a unique event, the collision of two planets: a Jovian supergiant called Morgan with a rogue orbit is on its way to a ‘head-on’ collision with Deepsix. With bare weeks to spare, the observers discover evidence of a primitive civilization on Deepsix, and the only Academy vessel within reach, piloted by Priscilla Hutchins, is directed to divert to Deepsix to record and preserve as much of the alien culture as possible in the limited time remaining before the utter destruction of Malieva III.

Through a calamitous series of events and unfortunate coincidences, the only two surface-landers at the Malieva system are destroyed, and the landing team members are faced with the dilemma of surviving on the rapidly deteriorating surface of Deepsix, with steadily increasing tidal surges, seismic activity, and raging atmospheric storms, as well as orbiting meteor showers preceding the onrushing supergiant Morgan. Meanwhile, an enormous alien artifact has been discovered in orbit above Deepsix, a 700-km long shaft and counterweight for a former ‘Skyhook’ elevator assembly, long abandoned, but clear evidence of an advanced civilization which had apparently used it to evacuate at least some of the primitive aliens from the surface of Deepsix, before abandoning the planet to a several-millennia-long age of glaciation.

When the possibility of rescuing the stranded exploration team via shuttle lander is eliminated, the team of observers come up with a bold plan: to salvage a portion of the alien skyhook and use it to dip deep into Deepsix’s atmosphere and literally scoop up the team flying a suborbital lander which had been abandoned during the original aborted survey of Malieva III.

There are a more outright coincidences than most other McDevitt novels, and the rescue becomes far more time-critical than makes for a wholly satisfying story. However the description of Malieva III’s destruction at the conclusion is appropriately awesome!

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I would like to see a story in which humanity at some later date encounters the starfaring 'Hawks' who built the Skyhook or the primitive 'Crickets' who were rescued by the Hawks, or both.

Melissa McShane says

I remember reading this for the first time and being unable to put it down, it was that action-packed and terrifying. Jack McDevitt does for space-age SF what Michael Crichton did for the earthbound kind: science as the background for what's essentially a thriller. A team goes down to the surface of a planet that's days away from being torn apart and absorbed by a Jupiter-sized rogue world, because naturally this planet turns out to have been inhabited by an alien race, only no one noticed twenty years ago when it was first surveyed, and then naturally they get stranded. This is not an unfamiliar setup, but then it's not supposed to be; thrillers work because they are built from the same set of plot elements that are guaranteed to make you stay up all night, in between going outside to make sure there's not a gas giant looming over the horizon. There are some inconsistencies, especially with Gregory McAllister's character, who is an abrasive and confrontational misogynist, except when he isn't. One minute he's thinking condescending thoughts about Hutch, the (female) team leader, and the next he's deferring to her expertise. His books are well-respected, but he destroyed the career of one of the team members by accusing him of negligence and cowardice, despite having no actual knowledge about the supposed event. By the end of the book, he's become humbler and less of a jerk, but that change comes about primarily by authorial fiat. As annoying as all this is, it's the plot that matters most, so I'm satisfied to accept the end result and see it carried forward into the rest of the series.
