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It's Not Over Til The Skinny Lady Sings . . .

Working off of a piece of intelligence from the alien Hexosehr, the *Vorpall Blade* is dispatched to investigate rumors of an ancient and powerful civilization that may have been the creators of the “black box” that drives humanity's only space ship. Any remnant technology would be nice but what the *Blade* finds is much more than they bargained for. Worse, the ship is infested by an alien species of scorpion-like arachnoids that has the potential to wipe out a world. Worst of all, instead of being Astrogator, Captain William Weaver is now the XO and he is *not* getting along with the new commander. And the new commander does not get along with Weaver, the ship's female savant-linguist or most of the rest of the original crew. And what *is* that weird noise the ship makes every time it's in hard maneuvers?

Leave it to the oddball geniuses of the *Blade* to sort it all out. And the Dreen are *not* going to like the answers.

Claws That Catch Details

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Parrot says

Okay, so this series has always been a little bit silly up until now. Cat people, hamster people, humorous acronyms.... but this fourth and apparently final book in the series really ramps it up, especially towards the end.

Now, I kind of enjoyed the extra silliness a little, but that's just the kind of person I am. I can totally see how other readers will say, "What the hell??", and I agree with them. You can't just completely change the tone of the series this late in the game!

I think the author basically just gave up on the series and just started putting out all the stream-of-consciousness crap he could think of just to get the book out. Admittedly, this way is more in character with the title of the series (Into The Looking Glass) - but if he wanted to have it that way, he should have been doing it all along!

This series was gearing up to be a huge saga of Earth's first forays into the galaxy and the war they were going to fight for their survival. Instead, it seems to have just fizzled out and flopped limply to the floor like a pricked balloon.

There were so many parts that seemed like they were going somewhere but didn't. The alien intelligence that took root in Miriam's head seemed like it was going somewhere, but all it did was give her small hints and she didn't even try to communicate with it further. The second warp generator that they didn't know how to work... nothing came of that whatsoever. Like I said, it all just fizzled out.

The scenes between Eric and his love interest were annoying in the last book. In this book they were EXCRUCIATING! I think the author wanted to virtually live out his ideal of having the perfect wife.

She basically worshiped the ground he walked on, and made sure to let him know that his career came first. She wasn't a skilled cook, but she was determined to be a good wife so she got a job where she could learn how to cook so that she could make good meals for her man when he got home. And, of course, it turns out that she was a virgin, because, as she told him "good girls wait until marriage!"

So after they have sex for the first time on their honeymoon, they start talking about how things are going to work, and how she wants to take care of the finances and blah, blah, blah....

The only thing that kept going through my mind in all of this was. "Yeah, that's the perfect time for you two to start discussing how your marriage is going to work... ON YOUR HONEYMOON!!" Because planning ahead and figuring out how you want to handle your relationship BEFORE you get married is for suckers, I guess.

And there was just SO MUCH of it! I was thinking, "C'mon already! Get on with the story! This is completely inane and lacking in any value to the story!"

Anyway, spoiler alert, during the battle at the end they're joined by the ship that they captured in the last book, which has now been crewed by humans. The thing is, though, that them showing up makes absolutely no sense. First of all, they would have had no idea that the Vorpal Blade would need reinforcement, but fine -

I can put that aside, maybe they just wanted to be better safe than sorry.

The thing I can't get past is that the ship would have had no way to catch up and be there in time! The Vorpall Blade was using an advanced warp generator that nobody else had! Any of the other FTL ships should have taken weeks or months longer to get to the system!

The only possible thing I can think is that they managed to figure out how to get the other wormhole generator working, but if that was the case they should have mentioned it. Like I said, I think the author was just trying to finish this book as fast as he could and putting down whatever came to mind.

I still generally enjoyed the book for what it's worth, but I thought it was a disappointing ending to this series.

Danny says

A mostly fun read, though it falls off into a bit of silliness in the end. Some of the characterizations in this series are way over the top (the crew sometimes all but laughs off losses). The odd numbered books in this series seem a little stronger for some reason. This latest one was published in 2008, and leaves the series hanging, making me wonder if there will be another at some point.

Michael Collins says

Basically space opera by this stage. Ridiculous plot complications thrown in with no regard for structure and then a rush to the ending that involves the most idiotic idea for destroying a space ship I've ever read. I blame the co-author (Travis Taylor) as I find Ringo to be an excellent writer. Pick someone else next time John!

Miles says

The humor that was notable in the previous books of the series overflows here. It was over the line for me, becoming both unbearably silly and distracting from the story. Read it if you're a completionist, I'd say.

James Rickett says

A good read, but Ringo might have at least acknowledged the debt to Alan Dean Foster's The Tar-Aiym Krang.

Ric says

In the 4th book of the Looking Glass series, the storyline's *undergarments* are starting to show. The formula of the third book (Manxome Foe) is repeated: first 60-80% of the book is about "they flew there" and "they

flew here" and the "marines made fun of the CO", then the final part is about a big space battle with **exotic ships and weapons**, alien allies and enemies and the hard-fought victory by the key characters, all of whom manage to survive and are in fact the heroes.

The final battle is probably worth the effort (to both writers and readers), although this probably could have been a short story rather than the novel length treatment here.

Hopefully, this marks the end of my military fiction binge as I am all *gung-ho*-ed out. Need to stop jumping to attention for *Semper fi*!

Donna says

The Vorpall Blade II is sent back on a mission of exploration. The new Captain insists that Miss Moon is going to be just a civilian linguist and will not be assisting the crew. Of course, equipment starts breaking down that only she can fix as the tech staff don't understand the alien repair manuals. Add in one begal mix kitty which she has snuck aboard and you get guaranteed chuckles. The crew covers by telling the Captain that the kitty is to catch the chee-hamsters rodents which have infested the ship since the last mission. Amusingly enough, purple spiders have infested the ship and Tiny is catching them. Turns out the spiders eat the Dree. The story is Convolutated, a little too scientific but fun.

Benjamin Thompson says

John Ringo is a sci-fi genius! If you are into sci-fi because you want an imagination expanding, mind blowing story that is filled with intelligent content and amazing action, Ringo is your guy. I'm personally also big on tactics and strategy. I love reading about the larger setting in a war, the scale of it, the battles won and lost as well as the in depth looks into the maneuvering of a single platoon or squad in the frey of a massive battle or short skirmish. Ringo does all of this brilliantly. To put icing on the cake he mixes in quite a bit of physics and cosmology in his writing. I always feel like I'm in a science class on the dynamics of sub-atomic-particle interaction, quantum field theory or nuclear physics while reading his works. But he still makes it readable and entertaining. John Ringo is to science what Harry Turtledove is to history.

Jim says

Product Description

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Working off of a piece of intelligence from our alien allies, the *Vorpall Blade* is dispatched to investigate rumors of an ancient and powerful civilization that may have been the creators of the "black box" that drives humanity's only space ship. Any remnant technology would be nice but what the *Blade* finds is much more than they bargained for. Worse, the ship is infested by an alien species of scorpion-like arachnoids that has the potential to wipe out a world. Worst of all, instead of being Astrogator, Captain

William Weaver is now the XO and he is *not* getting along with the new commander. And the new commander does not get along with Weaver, the ship's female savant-linguist or most of the rest of the original crew. And what is that weird noise the ship makes every time it's in hard maneuvers?

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About the Author

John Ringo is author of the *New York Times* best-selling Posleen War series which so far includes *A Hymn Before Battle*, *Gust Front*, *When the Devil Dances*, and *Hell's Faire*, as well as the connected novels *Cally's War* (with Julie Cochran), *The Hero* (with Michael Z. Williamson), and *Watch on the Rhine* (with Tom Kratman), and is the hottest new science fiction writer since David Weber. A veteran of the 82nd Airborne, Ringo brings first-hand knowledge of military operations to his novels of high-tech future war.

Travis S. Taylor—“Doc” Taylor to his friends—has earned his soubriquet the hard way: He has a doctorate in optical science and engineering, a master's degree in physics, a master's degree in aerospace engineering, a master's degree in astronomy, and a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. Dr. Taylor has worked on various programs for the Department of Defense and NASA for the past sixteen years. He's currently working on several advanced propulsion concepts, very large space telescopes, space-based beamed energy systems, and next generation space launch concepts. He lives in Harvest, AL with his wife Karen and their daughter.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is the fourth novel in the Looking Glass saga, a story of humanities first foray into interstellar space, the species we meet there and the one that sees us as...moles to be whacked...when we "pop our heads up".

Well, this book changed ratings along the way. When I started this series I really liked the first volume, rated it 5 stars. After that each one I gave 3 simply because I wasn't into all the mathematical and theoretical details and it slowed the novels down for me...wwwaaayyy down. They (for me and I would guess for some others, even a few hard science fiction fans) bogged down into theory about how FTL, gates, etc. would work, function and about life on a starship and so on.

This one seemed it was going to escape that, and it almost did. There was a point at which a long discussion on metallurgy almost had me screaming...but we got past it and it wasn't nearly so "slowing" as some of the details in the last 2 books. In those there were times when it seemed you'd need an advanced degree in mathematics and theoretical physics to follow the book. But as I said this one didn't slow down nearly so much.

Now, NOTICE.....NOTICE what I'm about to say here is my opinion and is completely subjective. There is a point about two thirds through the book where things get silly. And not in a good way. I won't put a spoiler, if you read the book you'll see what I'm referring to and SOME WILL DISAGREE with my take on it. I'm sure some of you will say, well they explain this or it's science fiction and that's just "imaginative". There will be some who won't be annoyed by the segment and some who will find it humorous, some may see it as a "brilliant addition" to the story. As I said I just found it exasperatingly silly and it (to reuse the word)

annoyed me. For the mild slow down in this book I'd have said, "no big deal" and it was on the way to a 4 but after this....idiocy, I dropped it to 3.

Let me say again, that's just me. I don't know why I found what the writer probably found funny so down right annoying that I almost put the book down, but I did. I stopped at the point "this" was going on and almost didn't go back. I finally picked it back up and did some skipping and skimming to get past the worst of it to see how they wound the series up. So: Good idea in the series, pretty good over all. This book? Another 3 star rating. Decide about some of it for yourself.

Roberta says

The series seems to be getting a little bit disjointed, and it ended abruptly, but the action is good even if it took a very long time to get to the battle scene in this book. It's clear that the series has a long way to go before completion.

If you like space opera with a bit too much hard science, but strong characters (and whacky ones)--give it a try.

David Pappas says

Can't believe the high ratings for this garbage. The writing isn't bad, but the character development is cookie cutter at best. The constant cursing is distracting, and by the 10th absurdly complicated technology fantasy explanation my attention began to wander. The cat was more fascinating than many of the characters and his role unfortunately was unidimensional. When the 'captain' regurgitated, and I mean regurgitation in the more repulsive expectorate way, nearly the exact same inane tirade to Weaver that Weaver had laid on the Capitan only a few chapters before I nearly put it down. But, I struggled a bit further since it was the only book to hand at that moment. It did not improve to say the least. Never made it to the supposed space battle at the end, something I normally tend to like if done well. Sometimes I wonder if anyone ever actually proofreads some of this drivel.

Per Gunnar says

I enjoyed reading this book and I did find it better than the two first books in the Looking Glass series but I have to say that I did indeed, after having read the third book in the series, have higher hopes for this one.

The book starts off well with the new Vorpal Blade II being made ready for a new mission. I'm so happy to get rid of this refurbished submarine crap. Naturally the ship ends up in one or two "situations" which require the marines to break out their "noise-makers" although these situations are much fewer and farther between than in the previous books.

Quite a lot of the book is spent in preparations and a fair amount of the book is spent on the tension between the new CO and the kind of new XO (our hero Weaver). Naturally the CO learns his mistakes in the end but the road there is sometimes a wee bit frustrating to read. I find it unlikely that a person so restricted in thought that he gets a fit at the mere thought of having a woman on board his ship would be deployed as CO

to the first ever human starship. Especially in such a dire situation. That was just silly. The guy is just plain stupid at times.

The thing that drags the book down the most however is this silly “entertainment system” stuff that they find on the alien artefact in the second half of the book. I cannot be more specific without spoiling some of the plot but I did not enjoy that silly idea at all. I really wanted to scream when reading it.

Otherwise the book is well written as one would expect from John Ringo. The, sometimes, dry humour and action scenes are quite enjoyable and I liked the surprise addition to the human “fleet” at the end.

Unfortunately it looks like this is a book series that John Ringo has abandoned and left hanging, pretty much in the middle of the main story arc, when there was much more to tell. The last book was published in 2008 so I guess it’s safe to say that no more are coming.

PCress says

As much as I loved this series, .. the guitar was probably an indicator that it was time to move on.

Mathieu says

Sad, sad, sad...

It's a fair to good series, but this book lets it down. Deus ex machina after deus ex machina (I counted four plot devices introduced for the sole purpose of saving the characters' butts, in some cases being the central plot point of large parts of the book), against which the cutesy tendency of Ringo characters to laugh in the face of horrifying odds is now, well, not so engaging anymore. Suspension of disbelief stretched to the breaking point and then some.

This is sad because usually, in a Ringo book, the characters have to work (and die) at it. Here they die, but who cares? The next deus ex machina is just around the corner to save the rest.

Unfortunately, this brings all of Ringo's faults to the fore as well, turning them from quirks to irksome distractions: quoting from the same songs and bands over and over and over in book after book, the obligatory dig at the French (now with 300% more Francophobia in this edition!), at liberals, at academics. Indulgent in-jokes, plot devices that seem like they will spin off a side-plot, but don't.

The capital sin, however, is how flat the characters have become. Caricatures of themselves (semi-spoiler: Literally, in one silly-as-late-Heinlein section), they taste like bad fan-fic.

IOW, very disappointing, and trust me, I did not have high expectations.

Leons1701 says

More Ringo/Taylor silliness and man, does this one get silly at times. I'm sort of hoping for more books in this series, but I'm not sure I could actually take a higher level of crazy and still enjoy it.

Alex Shrugged says

"Claws that Catch" is book #4 of the series. I would have given it a higher rating but toward the end it got too silly. John Ringo does this thing with music lyrics interspersed with the narrative that can translate well with people who know the tunes, but if you don't know the lyrics, or can't recall the tune, it is wasted effort.

FYI... John Ringo makes music lyrics work in his Dark Tide Rising series. It doesn't work here.

The story: The Vorpall Blade 2 is going out with a new captain that must be broken in along with a mostly new crew. This is a story of a ship attempting to come together and work as a team.

Any problems? Other than the ones already mentioned, I think the F-word was used once. No sex but a lot of sexual stereotypes. I don't mind stereotypes because they don't exist unless it is true on some level, but they can also be over-emphasized and I thought that was so here. I might not have noticed if other problems hadn't got in the way.

The ending was a little too much deus ex machina and silly.

I don't know if I'd read this book again.

Terry Brack says

I think this is the fifth in this series. There is an expansion of power and capabilities that the dauntless crew of the Earth's space navy vessel discover in each book allowing them to match the ever greater threats from the arch enemy species trying to take over the universe. This reminds me of the escalating powers of the lensmen in e.e Doc Smith's classic sci fi series. It is always great fun to see how the science develops in this universe as our very clever crew encounters yet another artifact from another advanced civilization and struggles to figure out what it does and how to use it. Of course, there is the requisite desperate space marine battle against the overwhelming and unrelenting enemy species. This battle does not disappoint with a new surprise biological weapon to use against aliens. Great fun as usual.

Tim says

Another fine story by John Ringo. My only issue is the somewhat quick and incomplete ending that cost him a star. All in all, an excellent Sci-Fi novel. 8 of 10 stars

Michael says

Just makes me sad that such a great start to a series ended so poorly.

