



Empire of Light

Gary Gibson

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The third novel in the Shoal space opera series featuring Dakota Merrick continuing from Stealing Light and Nova War

The nova war has begun to spread as the Emissaries wage a fierce and reckless campaign, encroaching on the area of space occupied by humanity and forcing the Shoal into a desperate retreat. While Dakota goes in search of the entity responsible for creating the Maker caches, Corso, left in charge of a fleet of human-piloted Magi ships, finds his authority crumbling in the face of assassination attempts and politically-motivated sabotage. If any hope exists at all, it lies in an abandoned asteroid a thousand light-years beyond the Consortium's borders, and with Ty Whitecloud, the only man alive with the skill to decipher the messages left behind by an ancient race of star travellers. Unfortunately Whitecloud is locked in a prison cell aboard a dying coresipadrift in space, awaiting execution for war crimes against Corso's own people. But if humanity has any hope of survival, Corso is going to have to find some way to keep him alive - and that's only if Dakota doesn't kill him first ...

Empire of Light Details

Date : Published July 2nd 2010 by Tor (first published June 24th 2010)

ISBN : 9780230706811

Author : Gary Gibson

Format : Hardcover 393 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Space, Space Opera

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From Reader Review Empire of Light for online ebook

James Cox says

This was good. I'm looking forward to book 4 and the last in the series.

Jamie says

Having bought the trilogy on a whim, I really enjoyed the first two books, but the final one, Empire, let the trilogy down massively. The ending felt disjointed, there was no sense of urgency towards the end, unlike the previous two novels, and the fact that Dakota died repeatedly kind of cheapened her death, for lack of a better term.

Also, the fact that Corso seems to have gone a complete 180 in terms of personality and then laments it for a few sentences destroyed his character development. He also doesn't really do much in this book despite the end of the second one setting him up as a leader of men against the Shoal and other species out there.

Ty had some of the best character development but was hastily killed despite the fact he could have had an extended character arc of redemption for his past sins, much like Dakota went through.

Lastly there's no real exploration of alien cultures unlike in the other books, which made the book feel really rushed compared to the others.

Disappointing end to a solid trilogy.

Liviu says

Empire Light was a very good ending to the Shoal trilogy with a hook for another book set in the same milieu some 3000 years later; the novel recreates somewhat the structure of Stealing Light, when after preliminaries, it comes down to Dakota and Julian to save the day again on a starship in enemy territory, while Trader is still around for his usual mischief

While the whole trilogy is a great example of new space opera and it allows one an introduction at 1000 pages rather than deliving in PF Hamilton 3000 pages epics, I still feel Gary Gibson undersells himself a bit; Stealing Light was awesome while the sequels were very good, but should have been more ambitious as depth goes; the scene, larger than life characters and narrative energy are there, but ultimately the world building is only partially there, sometimes going back to the 30-50's pulp hand waving of millions of x and trillions of y and this button destroys the enemy and...

On the other hand maybe 1000 pages is not enough for too much ambition in world building as the failures for me of both Humanity's fire/Cobley - this one terminal since I am not interested to read beyond the very mediocre volume 2 - and of Ragnarok/Meaney (so far - still very interested if the author can make sense of 7 or 8 stories as the series continue, since volume 1 was a jumble) - show.

As he showed in the considerably more complex Angel stations and Against gravity, plus with the narrative energy he brings, G. Gibson has the powers to write a monumental epic imho and i hope we will see it...

Gavin Brown says

After thoroughly enjoying books 1& 2, the 3rd installment of this trilogy was a real disappointment. So much so that I didn't finish it. I felt cheated by big jumps in the plot, and the complete absence of previously prominent characters.

It isn't badly written, but as the final installment of this trilogy, it isn't worthy. Maybe I'll come back to it, but with so many other books on my to-read list it can wait a while.

John says

Dakota and a small crew find and deliver to a certain well defended locale an ancient superweapon that just might stop the Emissaries from destroying much of the galaxy. I found myself skipping and skimming, because everything here is so predictable, and the characters seem to have done all their developing in previous episodes. Also, in grand cheating comic book tradition, Gibson keeps killing Dakota off and then miraculously reviving her. This volume finishes the sequence, and though there's a hint of further adventures for Dakota to come, I've read enough.

SciFi Kindle says

Like a lot of threequels, this read isn't for those who haven't already digested the previous installment novels. Not only do many of the background conflicts and events rely on an understanding of those books, but the history between the major characters is found there, too. This is no criticism, however. A lot of series these days try too hard to be a 'big tent' for an expanding readership, that early chapters drag with exposition and 'catch-me-up' material. If Tolkien felt compelled to do this, he would have needed another hundred pages. I personally prefer when authors treat the reader with enough respect to trust us to remember (or re-read) important previous material- that's what all the fan Wikis are for, right?

No, my peeve with this story is that it starts off extremely promisingly, with a collection of characters and motives that are all appealing, both new and returning, with those in the latter category having undergone substantial personal evolution between novels. They are drawn together and undertake a hero's journey in the form of an expedition into hostile alien territory, further outside of human space than anyone has ever traveled before. And then, with this spectacular set up, the remainder of the story devolves into a finger-pointing mystery among the characters to uncover the infiltrator in their midst. This would have been welcome in a moderated dosage; a sideplot that allows the greater focus to move on to more wondrous, alien, Space Opera, big concepts. However, the story really spiraled into one betrayal after another, and while this kept the tension and action quite high, I feel like it missed an opportunity to accomplish both of those things more engagingly using external threats. It's possible I feel this way only because of how stupendous the epilogue was in this regard, and it reminded me of all the things that later half of the story proper missed. While this bodes well for my enjoyment of the 4th installment novel, Marauder, it did cause my attention to drift at moments.

Mark Zieg says

This finale is a must-read, if only to cap-off the excellent Nova War, but unfortunately it was not the strongest of the series. It really needed a major new plot point in the middle third -- some new world or species -- to break up a rather tedious journey that added little interest and distinctly overlapped similar events from the first book. However, the first and final thirds were both pretty good, and Gibson continued to pull in additional ideas and concepts (most drawn from established sci-fi canon, but nicely implemented and integrated). Previous parallels to Dune were cemented with an epilogue wink to Duncan Idaho...but these are all good sources, and it was good to seem them told afresh.

Adam Whitehead says

The Shoal Hegemony and the Emissaries of God are locked in a devastating nova war between the Perseus and Orion arms of the Galaxy. Hundreds of star systems have been destroyed, billions slain. The war is starting to move in the direction of human space, but the Consortium is riven by in-fighting as the Consortium's rulers vie with the Peacekeeper Corps established by Dakota Merrick and Lucas Corso for control of the FTL-equipped ancient alien spacecraft. Merrick has uncovered a possible way of stopping the war for good, but it means forging an alliance with her greatest enemy and embarking on a lengthy trip into the very heart of the warzone.

Empire of Light brings the three-volume Shoal Sequence to a conclusion, although further books in the same setting are promised. Merrick and Lucas achieve their destinies, new characters are introduced and others are finally killed off as events reach a head. As a conclusion, the book works, but is not altogether satisfying.

It is an odd, unexpectedly quiet book, however. Given the vast, epic events set in motion by the previous volumes, it is surprising that most of the book is taken up with a single journey on a single, human-built spacecraft across the Galaxy, contending with internal factionalism and murder mysteries rather than the vast space battles and politicking of the previous books. As a result the book feels mechanical and anti-climatic: our heroes have to deliver a plot device to a certain location and it pretty much takes care of everything for them, at least until the epilogue (set centuries later, almost always a bad idea) informs us that lots more stuff is still to come and a bunch of interesting-sounding events have been skipped over (shades of Alastair Reynolds' troubled ending to *Absolution Gap*). As a result, although the immediate threat is addressed, many of the other narrative and character arcs are given short shrift.

Gibson's prose remains readable and entertaining and the book still has a page-turning quality to it, but there is definitely the feeling that this book didn't quite live up to expectations. Particularly notable is the fact that the cast is suddenly widened in this last book away from the tight focus on Dakota and Lucas in previous volumes, with the newcomers (particularly Ty Whitecloud) being intriguing and well-drawn characters, but given the limitations of space they are not as developed as much as one might hope. In addition, the oft-mentioned temptations to the dark side that Dakota's immense power has opened up for her don't particularly lead anywhere interesting, which feels like a wasted opportunity.

Empire of Light (****) is an entertaining book, but doesn't fulfil the ambitions laid out earlier in the series. Gibson has immense potential, however, and I look forward to his next project with interest. The book is

available now in the UK and on import in the USA.

Martijn Lindeboom says

Empire of light is een zeer vermakelijk sfavontuur met geweldige aliens, bedreigingen en een paar memorabele karakters. Maar er zijn ook problemen: af en toe is de stijl hakkelig, alsof er niet genoeg geëdit is, sommige ontwikkelingen duren te lang, andere te kort en ik werd wat grumpy van de 'a little while later' manier van voortgang in het verhaal houden.

Het is zeker geen slecht boek, maar een topper zoals Stealing light is, is Empire helaas niet. Wie weet herpakt Gibson met Marauder dat niveau.

Voor de goede orde: de Shoal, de Emissaries en de Atn zijn supercool en de ruimte-archeologie vind ik erg gaaf gedaan. Qua concepten zit het allemaal wel goed.

Robert Dietze says

Meh finish to a space opera. First book was nice, second book very interesting.

Think action packed Hollywood movie trilogy with heavy power creep.

What I liked about the trilogy: interesting world, innovative alien species, some passages really grip and do not let you stop reading.

What I did not like: forgettable characters, several plot developments that smell of deus-ex-machina / plot holes, last book was a chore to finish.

Aaron Anderson says

Lost interest about 20 percent in.

Rebecca says

This was good. I'm looking forward to book 4 and the last in the series

Coan says

While I enjoyed seeing the conclusion of the Shoal Sequence, the final book in the series more closely represents the 1st and seems to ignore some elements of the 2nd.

It is great that the book heads right into the action and keeps going from there (one of my problems with Nova War is the very slow start). However, the 'murderer on board' and 'Trader takes over person through their implants' is rehashed from the first book when really I was expecting more.

Also, where is Days of Wine and Roses? The insect people introduced in the 2nd book (and which take up a substantial part of that story), are entirely missing from this book except perhaps three mentions under the guise of 'yeah, those other insect dudes are also doing stuff but let's ignore them'. Hugh Moss (who plays a role in the 1st and greater role in the 2nd book) is nearly entirely absent in this except to handball a weapon to Dakota which she uses once and which is ineffective. So overall a bit underwhelming.

The romantic relationship between Dakota and Corso is also a bit strange. When Dakota first sees Corso she hops into bed with him and then things revert to their usual distrusting, dysfunctional relationship. This was fine in the 2nd book as it could be explained that after the sexual encounter they realised things weren't working out, but to repeat it? It doesn't ring true.

The plus for this book is the perspective of how the two main characters have grown and changed. There is also plenty of fight scenes and action as well as exploration of the unknown in space and hints at the ancient wars that even predated the current story.

While the book ends on a hint that another series may occur, I don't see it happening. Dakota (who I quite liked as a character), has run her course. I think Gary Gibson might have set his sights a little to high with this series, but it still has plenty of original parts and demonstrates good imagination.

Laurel says

If the previous two books were pretty large in terms of scale and scope, well, the series just got bigger with this one. This time Corso and Dakota are on the trail of the Mos Hadroch, some type of weapon that should stop the nova war between the Shoal and the Emissaries. And to get hold of it, they need one of the few humans who know anything at all about the Mos Hadroch, namely Ty Whitecloud. What's so special about him, you wonder? Like Corso, he's a scientist, or perhaps more of an anthropologist in this case. And he has heard of the Mos Hadroch, which immediately makes him invaluable. He's also part of the reason Dakota ended up killing Corso's people on behalf of the Uchidans... which puts him on both their hit lists. Enter suspicion and tension.

I liked the way Gibson brought Whitecloud into the story and enabled me to get to know him. He had my sympathy from the beginning - even knowing his history as a Uchidan. Trader once again features - but perhaps not quite so much as in the previous two stories. Or perhaps even more than one realises. I will admit to being a little disappointed that one of the main devices Gibson used in this story was a repeat of that used in Stealing Light. Nevertheless, he did up the ante on this one, and as a whole the story was very satisfying.

This book is the complete page-turner. I find it uncanny how, with almost clockwork regularity, I can gulp down eight pages at a time without barely noticing, then discover on checking that I am eight pages on from where I last took note of the page number. This is one of the things I really love about Gibson's books: I devour them. And it's a testament to how well he writes, allowing the story to flow without being hampered by words and extraneous images.

A must read for those who like hard scifi with nasty aliens.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

When he closed his eyes, all he could see was stars scattered across the void like diamond dust.

Something I found particularly interesting about this trilogy was how the ante was upped considerably with each entry. This novel, which concludes the original *Shoal* trilogy, is no exception, with its **bigger** explosions, **vaster** distances travelled and **greater** odds to defeat.

'I watched them use the energy of a nova,' she explained, 'just to power a signal to a swarm located in another galaxy.'

Both men stared at her in silence for several moments.

Yes, yes. The series does have its issues. But like I mentioned in my review of *Stealing Light*, I'm a sucker for a lot of what's on display here. Derelicts? Deserted planets? Alien ruins? More tech than you can shake a stick at? The whole galaxy as playground? Yes please!

At times, things did seem a *tad* too convenient. Need bigger weapons? No problem – there's a place I know... But this kind of thing, I suspect, is par for the course given the subject matter of the trilogy (which basically boils down to: seeded caches of alien technology causing all kinds of ruckus).

So: I'm not going to say a whole lot more about this series, or this book... other than:

- (1) It does read pretty quickly, and
- (2) I did enjoy it quite a bit

I will likely be reading more of Gibson's books!

We have to get out of here.

We have to get out right now.
