The Wars Of Terra, Continued

The war wasn't going well. The alien Arachnids were an enemy whose like no civilized race had ever confronted. Like some carnivorous cancer, the Bugs had overrun planet after planet . . . and they regarded any competing sentient species as only one more protein source. Defeat was not an option. . . . The Grand Alliance of Humans, Orions, Ophiuchi, and Gorm, united in desperate self-defense, have been driven to the wall. Billions of their civilians have been slaughtered. Their most powerful offensive operation has ended in shattering defeat and the deaths of their most experienced military commanders. Whatever they do, the Bugs just keep coming. But the warriors of the Grand Alliance know what stands behind them and they will surrender no more civilians to the oncoming juggernaut. They will die first—and they will also reactivate General Directive 18, however horrible it may be. Because when the only possible outcomes are victory or racial extermination, only one option is acceptable. The Shiva Option. And peace isn't always wonderful Once the enemy is defeated, the central governments of the Inner Worlds were anything but willing to relinquish their wartime powers. To insure that their grip on the reins of power remained firm, the bureaucrats are allowing the non-human beings of the Khanate in, while keeping the Fringe Worlds out, smugly confident that this will keep the colonial upstarts in their place. The Fringers have only one answer to that: Insurrection.

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My Personal Review:
The Stars at War II (2005) is an omnibus edition of the Starfire series, including The Shiva Option and Insurrection. The Shiva Option is the third novel in internal chronological sequence within the series and Insurrection is the fourth novel in internal sequence following The Shiva Option. This is the first hardback publication of Insurrection.
The Shiva Option (2002) is a continuation of the events described within In Death Ground. This duology describes a war similar in many ways to the Pacific theater of World War II. The enemy has the worst aspects of the Japanese military, but exaggerated to the ultimate degree. IDG has the desperate battles prior to Midway and the Coral Sea and TSO has the grinding battles after that, successively retaking island after island until finally Okinawa falls.

The Divine Wind is prominent in this book, but the amphibious assaults and ground combat of that war are mostly eliminated by the Shiva Option. Considering that the defensive phase of war in the Pacific took only a few months, yet the offensive phase took four and half years, it is obvious why this book is so long. If the enemy can be stopped, it most often must be done quickly or not at all; defeating the enemy, however, is long and hard.

The prologue occurs shortly after the failure of Operation Pesthouse. Fleeing the Bugs, Survey Fleet 19 encounters a new set of sentient beings, the Star Union of Crucis, who have already had violent contact with the Bugs. This new group joins with SF19 to destroy the pursuing Bug fleet and then both withdraw to the Star Union.

Meanwhile, back at Alpha Centauri, the Joint Chiefs of the Grand Fleet, and their staffs, meet to discuss strategy now that the Bugs have ended their current offensives. Naval Intelligence reports that a new class of warships, designated Monitors and even larger than superdreadnoughts, has been deployed by the Bugs. They also state that analysis of the Bug artifacts has shown five distinctly different construction techniques, probably indicating five separate manufacturing centers, designated as Home Hives. Moreover, the initial Bug contact was probably with Home Hive Five.

The remainder of the novel is a series of strategic offensives against the Home Hives. Like its prequel, this volume is full of spatial warfare. It also includes several nuclear bombardments of enemy planets -- the Shiva Option -- and one planetary assault with subsequent ground combat.

The Arachnid civilization in Starfire owes a lot to the Bugs in Heinlein's Starship Troopers, but the approach in this series is entirely different and much wider in scope. These novels concentrate primarily on naval combat and equipment; the only use of armored combat suits is by the Telikans in the above mentioned planetary assault.

Insurrection (1990) begins several generations after the Fourth Interstellar War against the Bugs. The Legislative Assembly of the Terran Federation has long been dominated by the Corporate Worlds at the expense of the Fringe Worlds. Now the Corporate Worlds have devised a plan to reapportion the Assembly by merging with the Orion Khanate, thereby reducing the Fringe World power base.
They are frustrated at the last moment by bad publicity generated when Oskar Dieter, a Corporate World leader, personally insults Fionna MacTaggart, leader of the Fringe Worlders. However, the leader of the Corporate World delegation, Simon Taliaferro, plots to assassinate Fionna in order to throw the Fringe Worlders into a fury so that they will resign from the Assembly. His plot works as planned, but the consequences are more that he reckoned with.

Terran Federation Navy Task Force 17 moves against Beaufort, Fionna's home planet, as a show of force, but it moves too slowly and the insurrection has started before it arrives. Admiral Forsythe is advised to go slowly and negotiate with the rebels, but refuses and plans to fire on opposed ships if necessary. This triggers a mutiny, with the Fringe Worlders taking or destroying all TF17 ships.

As the word is spread, other ships mutiny and flee to the Fringe Worlds. Tenth Cruiser Squadron is too far within the Federation to flee, so takes the desperate gamble of raiding Galloway's World to destroy the largest Federation shipyards. Overall, the Federation loses approximately half of Battle Fleet, about 80 percent of the Frontier Fleet, and most of their shipbuilding capability for at least 6 months. This bad news forces the fall of the current government and brings Oskar Dieter to power as prime minister.

This story is based on the political and economic situation between the British Empire and its American colonies prior to the Revolution. As with that situation, the Fringe Worlds are being economically exploited by the Federation mercantile class with the assistance of the Legislative Assembly. While Simon Taliaferro is not a king, he is just as mad as King George and just as dangerous to his own long-term interests. The ensuing military actions in this story are naval rather than military, but otherwise the results are much the same. Since the Khanate basically remains neutral, this story is greatly simplified compared to the Revolution by the lack of other major powers.

Von Clausewitz's On War is quoted several times in this book. The story reminds me of another axiom: "War is an extension of politics by other means". Politicians should be careful what they ask for; they may get it . . . and choke on it.

This book is recommended for all Weber & White fans and anyone who enjoys tales of realpolitik, naval combat, and politician bashing -- i.e., Heinlein fans -- and inside jokes (think Operation Bughouse).

-Arthur W. Jordin

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