The Stars at War (Weber, David) by Steve White

The Wars Of Terra

Three complete novels in the New York Times best-selling series, all in one generous volume. Insurrection: After the war against the Khanate ended in victory, the Inner Worlds found it hard to give up the powers they had seized over the Fringe Worlds during the conflict. So they invited the Khanate in to the Federation, to keep the colonial upstarts in their place. The Fringers have one answer to that: Insurrection! Crusade: Neither side in the Human-Orion war was strong enough to defeat the other, so it fizzled into an uneasy peace filled with hatred and mistrust on both sides. Then a ship appeared from the dim mists of half-forgotten history, and fired on the Orion sentry ship, igniting the fires of interstellar war anew, in a quest to free Holy Mother Terra. In Death Ground: The human race and two other star traveling races had warred with each other in the past, but now all three are at peace—a peace which is shattered by the discovery of a fourth race, the Bugs. The newcomers are mind-numbingly alien in their thought processes, have overwhelming numbers, and regard all other species as fit only to be food animals. There is no hope for peace with the invaders, and the galaxy explodes with a battle to the death. Kill-or be eaten!

My Personal Review:
The Stars at War (2004) is an omnibus edition of the Starfire series, including Crusade and In Death Ground. Crusade is the earliest novel in internal chronological sequence within the series and should be read first. In Death Ground is the second novel in internal sequence following Crusade. This is the first hardback publication of these novels.

Crusade (1992) begins fifty years after the Third Interstellar War, in which the Terrans and Orions formed the Alliance and exterminated the Rigellians. An Orion squadron in the Lorelei system is puzzled when an unknown fleet is discovered coming out of Charon's Ferry, the sixth warp point, since no ship had ever returned from there. Also, the bogies are using a very old Terran Federation Navy code in their transmissions. The
squadron commander speculates that these ships could be remnants of TFN forces that had fled the Orions 90 years before during the Second Interstellar War.

When the bogies identify themselves as TFN and refuse to believe that the Orions are allies, the TFN onboard liaison contacts them and explains the Treaty of Valkha. The bogies agree to parlay and, as the main party stands down, the vanguard comes to the Orions. Shortly thereafter, however, the bogies attack with missiles at minimum range and then with X-ray lasers. The Orions release their Omega drones and fight back, but three ships are soon lost. The Orion flagship is then boarded, but self-destructs before being captured.

After studying the available information, the Khanate of Orion decides that the invaders are Terrans. The Strategy Board wants to attack the Federation, but the Khan agrees with the squadron commander's idea of lost TFN forces escaping through Charon's Ferry. He tells the Federation Ambassador that Orion will not attack the Federation or the unknowns, but that the Federation must exact suitable vengeance upon their errant fellows. The Federation agrees and the politicians send a Peace Fleet to Lorelei upon invitation by the unknowns. Under secret orders, the TFN is subordinated to the diplomatic corps with disastrous results as the bogies repeat their underhanded tactics.

In Death Ground (1997) is the first in a duology with The Shiva Option. This story takes place 60-odd years after the Theban War. The enemy ambushes Survey Flotilla 27, destroying or severely damaging the survey cruisers and their escorts. The enemy then pursues the survivors through warp point after warp point. The Terran Federation Navy diverts two nearby task forces to reinforce the survivors of SF27 and sends all available freighters and transports to evacuate the colony planets.

TF58, under Admiral Anthony Villiers, is the first task force to reach the SF27 survivors in the Golan system. He holds the warp point for a while, bleeding the enemy and evacuating part of the population, until forced to withdraw to Erebor. TF58 has a month to prepare, receive reinforcements, and to start evacuations, but the enemy then attacks through the warp point with devastating tactics, mass, and a new weapon. Villiers is forced to commit his battleline to slow the advance, losing his battleships, and leaving Admiral Jackson Teller in command of the withdrawal into the K-45 system.

This story describes the desperate battles to stop the enemy advance. Since the warp points are bottle necks, the fighting is more separated than surface naval combat. Each warp point is defended and the TFN makes the Bugs pay dearly despite overwhelming odds against them, but more Bug ships keep coming through. TFN reinforcements are still arriving, but will they be enough to stop the Bugs?
These stories have many similarities to historical conflicts. The genocidal destruction of the Rigellian Protectorate in the Third Interstellar War parallels the actions of Rome in the Third Punic War. The actions of the Thebans reflect the fanatical behavior of both sides in the long conflict between Christianity and Islam, particularly in the Eastern Roman Empire and in Spain.

The Bug advance is similar in many ways to the Japanese campaign in World War II. After the attack on Pearl Harbor destroyed or severely damaged every US battleship in the Pacific, the US Navy was forced to rely on aircraft carriers and escort ships. Therefore, the strategy was to harass the enemy with destroyers, PT boats, and submarines, while the carrier task forces struck at enemy concentrations and tried to destroy the Japanese carriers. At the Coral Sea, aerial attacks by US carrier planes severely damaged three Japanese carriers and destroyed several escorts. Then, at Midway, the US carriers destroyed four of the remaining Japanese carriers. These two battles effectively stopped the Japanese advance.

This book is recommended for all Weber & White fans and anyone who enjoys tales of spatial battles with a touch of political intrigue.

-Arthur W. Jordin

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