



The Consuming Fire

John Scalzi

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The Interdependency, humanity's interstellar empire, is on the verge of collapse. The Flow, the extra-dimensional conduit that makes travel between the stars possible, is disappearing, leaving entire star systems stranded. When it goes, human civilization may go with it—unless desperate measures can be taken.

Emperox Grayland II, the leader of the Interdependency, is ready to take those measures to help ensure the survival of billions. But nothing is ever that easy. Arrayed before her are those who believe the collapse of the Flow is a myth—or at the very least, an opportunity that can allow them to ascend to power.

While Grayland prepares for disaster, others are preparing for a civil war, a war that will take place in the halls of power, the markets of business and the altars of worship as much as it will take place between spaceships and battlefields. The Emperox and her allies are smart and resourceful, but then so are her enemies. Nothing about this power struggle will be simple or easy... and all of humanity will be caught in its widening gyre.

The Consuming Fire Details

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From Reader Review The Consuming Fire for online ebook

Peter Tillman says

FIRE continues with Scalzi at his best, and he avoids middle-book slump in his new space-opera cum political-intrigue novel. You definitely need to read *The Collapsing Empire* first, and, as always, start with the publisher's summary at the top of this page.

"I was a teen-age Emperox." Grayland II comes of age early in her (unexpected) reign, and decides to publicize the coming disaster that losing the Flow will bring by..... having religious visions! It's not quite as nutty as it sounds, and usefully flushes out some of her opponents. And Cardenia Wu-Patrick (her alternate identity) discovers romance, which is fun, and unexpectedly tender. She (and we) make some unexpected discoveries on the history of the Interdependency, and Lord Marce the Flow physicist advances his (and our) knowledge with an expedition to a system lost 800 years ago after a Flow shift.

FIRE comes to a most satisfactory conclusion, as the Emperox prepares to address Parliament, leading off with what my favorite badass character Kiva Lagos calls the Best. Party. Ever. It's quite a bash. Don't miss it! And more to come....

Bradley says

Two things:

What this novel does right, it does very right. Namely, he's got some very tight prose. His barebones linear plot always manages to explain everything in crystalline fashion, leaving nothing occluded, and it shows in just how much he accomplishes in such a short novel. I'm reminded of some of the best short novels of the Golden and Silver age of SF in both the style and function with one caveat: there's nothing at all racist or homophobic or sexist about it. :)

Second thing: His underlying message about climate change deniers in terms of a collapsing wormhole network works fairly well. Hello, idiots, your house is burning down! :) Ah, alas.

BUT.

The soapbox is a thin veil. I'm trying not to mind but it is the vehicle for the whole novel.

Even so, it doesn't detract that much from my total enjoyment of the novel. Indeed, I almost gave it a 5 star just because I had a lot of fun and it turns out to be a super easy read. :) Between the funny moments, the alternately cool action moments, and a surprisingly sweet romance, I call this a sure bet. :) It's a great space opera by Scalzi! Looking forward to the next!

Mike says

Review for The Collapsing Empire

I always enjoy Scalzi's books. They are fast paced, witty, and reside in fascinating, well developed worlds; *The Consuming Fire* is no exception. Following hot on the heels of the events of *The Collapsing Empire*

Scalzi wastes no time in continuing the fast paced story of an Empire whose foundation turns out to be built in the equivalent of cosmic sand.

I think this book's strongest point is its story. Scalzi does a wonderful job both creating the framework for it to take place in as well as populate that framework with a good story. There are lots of moving parts and conflicting agendas as well as the looming collapse of interstellar travel, the basis of human civilization. Scalzi builds on this by killing off some characters and throwing some pretty important revelations by the end. It was a gripping read in that respect and makes me very eager to get the next book.

I will say, however, that the character work was a bit weak. They were good enough to advance the plot but I never felt like they were fully realized characters. Don't expect to get deeply emotionally invested in these characters, they are mostly just what the plot needs them to be in a given moment. But that's ok, the story moves along fast enough that the action and story can carry the reading experience and just let the characters serve as a means to that end.

So while not the most well rounded book, it was a heck of a ride and I can't wait for the next one.

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Prologue

Chapter 1 excerpt

Chapter 2 excerpt

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## **Lata says**

Scalzi's did not disappoint with this second Interdependency instalment. Grayland is working really hard to get everyone to take the Flow collapse seriously, Marce is talking to scientists about the Flow collapse, Kiva Lagos is going through House Nohamapetan's finances, and finding plenty of financial shenanigans, while the Countess and Nadashe Nohamapetan are busy scheming.

The story and language are zippy, and frequently funny, even while the plans against Cardenia grow wide and fast. And the Flow continues to degrade. I like the details Scalzi's introduces about an earlier Flow collapse. And I have to agree with Kiva; Grayland's party was the best.

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## **Scott says**

Let me start by saying that if you don't smile when I say "Kiva Lagos" then you are dead to me.

Loved this book as much as I loved the first book in the series.

Background: I read books for the characters and yes there should be a plot but characters are what really jazzes me and gets me "into" a book.

Scalzi can write.

I mean he can really write great characters.

Sure he has a lot of swipes at (let's just call them what they are...idiots) climate change deniers in this book so there are greater themes etc. etc. etc. but he just pulled me in to the story and did not let go.

There was a lot of politics and back room dealing and we're still dealing with the end of the "Flow" and who

know how many millions that will die and worlds that will end but I just loved the characters, their interactions, their growth, their dialogue, did I mention Kiva Lagos?

It's a good space opera with a good plot that unravels at a nice clip but similar to Stephen King, Scalzi just makes me feel what the characters feel and he makes me care about them in a subtle way that is just staggering in how effective it is.

On a side note: I read ALOT of fantasy. This book was a few pages over 300 and I feel and know more about the plot and the characters than I do from your usual 900 page doorstep of a fantasy (Sanderson, Martin & Weeks take note how to write).

Highest possible recommendation.

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### **Kevin Kelsey says**

I have to admit that I'm blown away. This is how you do a middle book in a series! I had a few misgivings about The Collapsing Empire (and some of Scalzi's earlier novels), but he has completely outdone himself with this second Interdependency book. It's fun to see his writing get better and better as he goes. The pacing is tighter, the story flows with more fluidity, the characters are much more distinct from one another now, the prose is drastically improved over the last one, and the payoff is massive. I may have actually thrown the book down and said "Yes! Wow, that was satisfying." when I finished it.

I've mentioned before that, thematically speaking at least, the Interdependency series is Scalzi's Dune. That still rings true, but The Consuming Fire also feels as dense and conspiratorial as A Song of Ice and Fire, or like a solid espionage thriller. It tells a compelling story while also blowing the worldbuilding wide open and fleshing out some of the concepts that were underdeveloped in The Collapsing Empire. All of this and it does a fantastic job of catching the reader up with effortless exposition, in case it's been a little while since you read the first in the series. I went back and reread the first book in the series just before starting this one in an effort to refresh my mind on the events thus far, but honestly, I think you could pick up The Consuming Fire as your first read in this series without really missing much. After 20-30 pages you're all caught up and good to go. It's impressively handled.

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### **Lindsay says**

A competent middle book of the Interdependency trilogy that has the new Emperox trying to consolidate her position and form a response to the imminent collapse of the FTL humanity relies on, all while her enemies marshal a coup against her.

Lady Kiva, Lord Marce and Grayland II all feature along with the cast of evil evil-doing conspirators of evil. It's a struggle between people who understand just how much trouble they're in and a group of characters who wish to maintain their self-advantageous status quo as long as possible (did someone say anthropogenic climate change?)

These books are light and amusingly written, but do cover important subjects around how a culture deals with a fundamental existential risk that's a slow disaster (climate change? is their an echo in here?) It also introduces some much needed extra plot intrigue with a bit more information about the collapse of the Flow

and what happens to societies cut off in the way the entire Interdependency is about to be.

For my taste, both of these books have been good, but I think I prefer most of Scalzi's other books, and particularly his other active series at the moment (Lock In).

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### **Joel says**

This is one of my absolute favorite novels of the year - it's vintage Scalzi, it feels like perhaps the most Scalzi-ish novel, if that makes sense. It's clever, witty, keeps you on your toes, and the ending is among the most "HOLY CRAP YES!" moments in a novel I've ever read. This was an outstanding read that I thoroughly enjoyed start to finish. Close to my favorite Scalzi novel.

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### **Roxane says**

I was excited for this second installment of the Interdependency series. Lots of fun and clever storytelling. Interesting characters. A true space opera. But damn. So much exposition. So many characters explaining various histories and technologies instead of finding other ways to get that information across. There is far more explaining than actual story and the story is so good! Leave the explaining. Give us more of the political and romantic intrigue of these characters. Still can't wait for the next book.

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### **Roz says**

First impression: WHY IS THIS BOOK SO DAMN SHORT?

2019, WHAT? HOW DARE HE??

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### **Gary says**

In his second Interdependency novel, John Scalzi picks up the threads he left dangling at the end of *The Collapsing Empire*: Kiva Lagos settles into her role as custodian of the House of Nohamapetan only to get a front-row seat to its matriarch's treachery; Marce Claremont makes a stunning discovery (or re-discovery) while studying the collapse of the Flow streams; and Grayland II uses every tool at her disposal to consolidate power and convince the masses that the Flow collapse is real and urgent. This sequel comes out of the gate swinging, with Scalzi's crunchy humor and hyper-efficient prose delivering a raucous mini-epic of a prologue that sets up Grayland II's use of her position as leader of the Interdependency Church to advance her agenda. Scalzi is at his best when he offers a heady but digestible mix of action, humor and philosophical inquiry, and his opening salvo delivers all three in spades. The rest of *The Consuming Fire* offers plenty of the first two but seems willing to leave us hanging with the questions it poses about the confluence of church and state and the role both play in civic life. Perhaps the problem is that it spends all its capital on the lives of the governing elite while the lives of the governed are little more than a blurry rabble taking up space in the background.

There are a lot of great action scenes and character moments in *The Consuming Fire*, and it has a "less talk

more rock” edge over its annotative predecessor. Two books in, the Interdependency is entertaining enough to satisfy Scalzi’s fans; here's hoping some of its still dormant seeds will germinate in the next book.

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### **Philip says**

4ish stars.

Didn't love it quite as much as the first, but still a lot to love. Like Emperox Grayland's monologue at the end? Fire. I still don't get a great sense of her character, but maybe it's because she needs to have so many different faces and it's hard to reconcile all of them as an outsider.

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### **Alex Givant says**

Such an awesome second book in the series, cannot wait to read the last one!

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### **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

3 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2018/10/25/...>

In my review of *The Collapsing Empire*, I wrote that while it marked a strong return for John Scalzi to the realm of space opera, ultimately it is the next book that will determine whether *The Interdependency* series will sink or swim. So now that I’ve read the sequel, what did I think? Well, I’ll be honest—I was hot and cold on it. There were moments where I felt the novel floundered, but others where things really soared to new heights. I’m going to say that, for the time being, we seem to be in a holding pattern.

*The Consuming Fire* picks up where the previous book left off, with the future of humanity cast in doubt as it is revealed that the extra-dimensional conduit known as the Flow—our species’ primary mode of travel between the stars, and the only system linking human colonies across the galaxy—is on the verge of collapse. Once it goes down, billions will be cut off and left to die, leading to the complete destruction of the Interdependency, the network of human hubs making up the interstellar empire.

The Emperox Grayland II, formerly Cardenia Wu-Patrick, is trying her best to prepare for the coming disaster, but unfortunately, distractions caused by bitter infighting with the other noble houses aren’t helping. House Nohamapetan, longtime rivals of the Wus, is up to its old tricks, conspiring with the Emperox’s enemies in the government to try and seize the throne. But Grayland, determined to convey the dire news of what’s happening to the Flow, has some tricks of her own. As head of the Church of the Interdependency, she reveals she has been having religious visions, styling herself after the first Emperox who was famously known to have been something of a prophet.

I feel so conflicted about this book. On the one hand, the world-building is compelling, and the majority of the characters are interesting to follow, but there were also times where I found myself almost dying of boredom, which is not something I thought I would ever say about a Scalzi novel. I love his work. I always have. But a knot of dread had been forming in my belly ever since I read in an interview that his Interdependency series would be paralleling the climate change debate, and I worry that my fears have come to pass. As a general rule, I could care less what an author’s political and social leanings are, as long as they

can write and tell a good story, and above all keep the blatant preachiness about real-world issues out of their books. Speaking as someone who reads SFF for the escapism, it's always disheartening to watch a novel all but become a thinly veiled opportunity for an author to stand on their soapbox. While I'm no stranger to message fiction, things tend to get dicey whenever ideas are elevated above story elements, such as plot and characters.

Some of which I suspect was happening here, because things certainly felt a little...off. Characters, which are normally Scalzi's forte, unexpectedly came across as flat and uninspired. A couple of them have been transformed into instruments of polemic, where their dialogue feels forced and scripted, almost in a grandiose and melodramatic "now, how do I turn this into a mic drop moment?" kind of way. Kudos to Scalzi for also trying his hand at something more cerebral, but his mistake might have been to force his usual snark onto this series, which reveals he has only one mode of humor. Nothing wrong with that on the surface—heck, some of the books that have made me laugh the hardest have been Scalzi's. But again, it didn't seem to work as well here. It felt like every time the moment called for some comic relief, inevitably it would involve Kiva Lagos walking in dropping a few F-bombs, because haha, that's one sure fire way to get a laugh, right? Apart from Cardenia/Grayland, who has become almost as unmemorable as Marce, Kiva's character was perhaps the biggest letdown in this sequel.

Still, credit where credit's due, when the story gets good, it gets amazing. It's probably no surprise that my favorite sections were all related to the parts about government conspiracies, assassination attempts, jailbreaks, and old Countess Nohamapetan being up to her usual wicked self. There was also plenty of intrigue as our characters are faced with significant questions following a meeting with an isolated remnant of a previously cut-off population, and I think this thread can lead to some consequential developments.

All told, *The Consuming Fire* suffers from an obvious agenda and a little of second-book syndrome, but I love John Scalzi too much to be writing *The Interdependency* off just yet. Everything now rests on the shoulders of the next book, which I hope will step up the storytelling and the character development, because in the end, those elements will be the key to this series' success.

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### **Allison Hurd says**

[ some body horror, prison violence, mild sexual coercion (hide spoiler)]

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