



# Exultant

*Stephen Baxter*

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## **Exultant** Stephen Baxter

When it comes to cutting-edge science fiction, Stephen Baxter is in a league of his own. His mastery of hard science, his fearlessly speculative imagination, and his ability to combine grand philosophical questions with tales of rousing adventure make him essential reading for anyone concerned with the future of humankind. Now, in *Exultant*, Baxter takes us to a distant future of dazzling promise and deadly threat, in which a far-flung humanity battles for survival against an implacable alien foe.

## **Destiny's Children**

### **EXULTANT**

For more than twenty thousand years, humans have been at war with the alien race of Xeelee. It is a war fought with armaments so advanced as to be godlike, a war in which time itself has become an ever-shifting battleground. At the cost of billions of lives, and with ruthless and relentless efficiency, the ruling Coalition has pushed the Xeelee back to the galactic core, where the supermassive black hole known as Chandra serves the Xeelee as both fortress and power source.

There, along a front millions of light-years long, a grisly stalemate reigns, until a young pilot, Pirius, faced with certain death, disobeys orders and employs an innovative time-travel maneuver that, for the first time in the history of the war, results in the capture of a Xeelee fighter. But far from being hailed as a hero when he returns to base with his prize, Pirius is court-martialed, disgraced, and sentenced to penal servitude on a bleak asteroid.

It is not only Pirius who pays the price. In flying into the future and back again, Pirius returned to a time before he'd left, a time inhabited by his younger self. And that younger self, by the pitiless logic of Coalition justice, shares the older Pirius guilt and must be punished. Not everyone in the Coalition agrees. Commissary Nilis believes that the elder Pirius, whom he dubs Pirius Blue, may have found a way to defeat the Xeelee. But Nilis can do nothing for Pirius Blue. Instead, he takes charge of the younger Pirius (Pirius Red), and brings him back to Earth, the capital of a vast empire seething with intrigue.

There Pirius Red will discover truths that will shatter his preconceived notions of all that he is fighting for, even of what it means to be human. Pirius Blue, meanwhile, will learn truths harsher and more discomfiting still. Yet the most shocking revelation of all is still to come, waiting for them at a place called Chandra. . . .

## **Exultant Details**

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Author : Stephen Baxter

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## From Reader Review Exultant for online ebook

### Daniel Roy says

I would definitely call Stephen Baxter's Exultant an interesting book, but I would be hard-pressed to recommend it to anyone. It has some very exciting SF concepts, but they are buried in a plot that makes so little sense and dialog that will make you cringe.

Baxter is a man of ideas, but it seems he is too busy pondering grand concepts to put them in the proper context of a good story. There are truly mind-boggling concepts; even too many, it seems, because some have barely a page or two of development. The most extreme was 'Concept space', a mind-boggling concept which is used merely to provide a deus ex machina solution to the protagonists.

If at least the hard SF was solid enough despite the weak plot... As it happens, some concepts are hastily thrown together, then conveniently circumvented when they are no longer required. The whole "FTL Foreknowledge" concept, for instance, at the heart of the story, can be waived by the author when he needs the protagonists to fool the Xeelee. Their solution? Use the time-honored but 'risky' 'anti-Tolman manoeuver', which is never explained nor used again. Sigh.

Another pet peeve I simply cannot let pass: Commissary Nilis. Nowhere is this guy made sympathetic, with his bumbling attitude, his obvious lack of oratory skills, his habit of walking barefoot everywhere and his smelly feet and armpits(!) Yet he is seen more often than any of the main characters, because he can send Virtuals of himself to annoy all of them at every corner of the Galaxy at the same time. Whenever he let slip a 'My eyes!', I was ready to gouge my own out of their sockets.

If you're wondering whether to pick up this book because it is the sequel to 'Coalescent', then don't. Only passing references are made to Coalescent, and the difference in quality between the two books is such that it seems Exultant was written by a 13 year-old who got excited at reading Coalescent.

If you must read a Stephen Baxter book, there are much better ones than this one. Coalescent and Manifold:Time are both excellent Baxter novels. This one is not.

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### Betsey says

There was a lot of really interesting stuff in this book! I don't understand all the reviews that say it doesn't tie into the first book of the series, Coalescent. It totally does! Lots of ways. I like the humans as insects analogies, all over the place. And the different types of social insects. The dark matter theorizing, and the idea of the monads was pretty cool. I also thought that Baxter really pulled out of his mold in this book. It feels much fresher and alive than the Manifold series, for example. I love the little links to his other books too. I'm starting to like him a lot more as a writer, the further along I get in his timeline. This guy's got a huge and roving mind, I can only imagine what having a beer with him must be like!

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### Florin Constantinescu says

Aaaa, so this is why the author had us read the boring "Coalescent" beforehand... No, really, we could've lived without it.

"Exultant" is back in force to kick-ass far-future starship battles, hard-science, warring empires, cool concepts, even some cool character dilemmas. The action time-wise falls somewhere in the middle of "Ring" and finally shows humans engaged in battle with the Xeelee. The speculations on black hole physics here are so very cool. Can't help but 5\* this guilty pleasure of mine.

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### **Omar Rivero says**

Any Stephen Baxter book with the enigmatic Xeelee automatically goes on my "must read" list. This book was no exception. I was very disappointed in the previous book in the series "Coalescent". The themes of that book didn't gel for me and I frankly found the subject matter disturbing. This book was an entirely different case. It took me longer to read than most of my books, simply because Baxter does not write what we would consider page turners. As with his other Xeelee sequence books, I would read a few chapters then take the time to absorb the science and how it related to the story and its characters. Overall, this was a very satisfying read. I love that the Xeelee are always off-stage, yet a huge presence which humanity is fatally obsessed with. Hands down, some of the best hard science fiction I've ever read. If you're looking for Star Trek/Star Wars like space opera. Baxter is not it, and thank goodness for that.

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### **Jack Pramitte says**

WOW! :o

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### **Svetlana says**

The third part of the book really saved it for me. It brought a lot of things together from previous Xeelee books and stories and I really liked that part. However I found it difficult to really engage with the main story.

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### **Russell says**

This sets up part of the bigger picture of the series. Unfortunately it also fails to bring readers from Book 1 along. There is some tie-in but it's difficult to recover when you spend the first third of the book wondering why you're reading it.

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### **Saul says**

After the digression of *Coalescent*, Baxter returns to his familiar settings of mind-bending physics and far-flung futures. This book reminded me a bit of *The Forever War*, but is a bit better done. Where *Forever* has relativistic effects, in *Exultant* we get full-on time travel shenanigans. Both feature the disfunctions of military life, cover-your-ass bureaucracy, meaningless wars and pointless loss of life. However, Baxter does a better job with the physics and ideas. Neither do a particularly great job with the protagonist, but I liked

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Baxter's supporting cast with the mysterious prophet, the hand-wringing Commissar and the bloodthirsty immortal.

The parts about the true nature of quagmites and Xeelee were familiar to me from other works, so their big reveals lacked some of the punch I think they were meant to have. I guess this is one of the problems with linking so many books into a grand saga like the Xeelee Sequence; there are only so many big secrets the universe can be hiding.

One thing I really liked was the careful descriptions of the Galactic core. I was almost done with the book by the time I realized all the locations were real. Arches cluster, Quintuplet cluster, IRS-16, baby spiral: all real; look them up, they're so cool.

One thing I didn't like so much was the physics of the gravastar shield. As a physicist, I can assure you that (view spoiler) But we can allow that when the rest of the story does such a fine job exploring the wonderful history of our universe and its physics.

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### **Pavel Lishin says**

I liked it, but "trench warfare in space" kept breaking my suspension of disbelief.

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### **Jean-Pascal says**

J'hésite entre lamentable et ridicule. On ne croit à rien, ni aux personnages, ni aux péripéties, ni aux motivations. L'auteur nous fait du grand copier/coller : à chaque nouveauté, une phase d'essai qui foire suivie de la réussite enfin (5 ou 6 fois dans le romans). Les personnages sont vides et pâles. Absence totale du moindre sens de la psychologie des héros de l'histoire. Du très mauvais Baxter. Dans le même genre, relisons Reynolds ou le cycle d'Ender.

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### **Chrissy says**

My husband got this as part of a white elephant gift and the only reason I read it was because I was snowed in from work and bored. I was happily surprised! I liked how he handled the complications and paradoxes of time travel as well as the emotions, struggles, growth of the characters. Good book all around.

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### **Falbs says**

Vast in scope, a ton of big ideas here, from time travel to FTL speeds, a fun read.

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### **Michel Meijer says**

For someone slightly interested in theoretical physics and space operas, this book is it. Stephen Baxter takes

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all kinds of physics theories and thinking and puts it to work in the story. The evolution of the universe and how it all came to be is a consistent plot in the books he made. This story plays at the end of time in his space opera, the big showdown fight between humanity and its big enemy in the Galaxy, the Xeelee. And somehow the fight is about sacrificing young soldiers on rocks in the center of the Galaxy. And although the plot of young people in war is a known subject in all types of fiction, here it feels awkward at the beginning. We are here, 20k years in the future and all we do is let us slingshot into battle fighting a superior foe. The ways of thinking and acting are stuck for eons and people do not want to change the status quo. And there is the difference between the "decadent" ruling class on earth and the young expendable soldiers at the front. Somehow, it feels a little bit too artificial, despite Baxter putting down several reasons to believe. Personally I would have thought that humanity's greatest (and most horrible inventions) are done in wartime, and the inventions the protagonist invent out of the blue would have been made thousands of years earlier.

Anyway. That was all theoretical rational thinking, since I liked the book a lot. World building is great and you are part of the war during story, you feel the stuck society and I liked the various players and their interactions: The old witch, the naive scientist, the youngsters the aliens. The writing sucked me into the story and this re-read was as rewarding as my first read years ago. Four stars!

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### **Ian says**

This is the second book of the Destiny's Children trilogy, and I quite enjoyed the first, Coalescent (see here), so I was expecting to enjoy this one too. But... oh dear. The earlier book had two main narratives, one set in the present day and the other in Ancient Britain. Exultant is set wholly in the distant future, when humanity is at war with the Xeelee, and has been for over a thousand years. A pair of teen soldiers become involved in a series of attempts to strike a final blow against the Xeelee, and destroy the huge black hole at the heart of the galaxy, called Chandra, which the Xeelee use as a base. The novel opens with fighter pilot Pirius escaping destruction by a Xeelee nightfighter through some "timelike curve" manoeuvre which results him and his crew travelling back in time several years. This is apparently not unusual on the front line – and because Pirius disobeyed orders, he is sentenced to serve in a penal battalion. His earlier self is also punished, even though he hasn't done anything. Er, yet. But visionary Commissary Nilis (isn't a commissary somewhere to buy food?) rescues the "innocent" Pirius from punishment and takes him to Earth to help with his crazy schemes to strike decisively at the Xeelee. Meanwhile, time-travelled Pirius experiences life as a ground trooper in the war against the Xeelee. This is science fiction as boy's own adventure, with a side-order of Big Idea cosmology. Baxter leaves his story for chapters at a time to explain how the universe began – and, in the process, created races like the Xeelee. The characters are drawn with the broadest of strokes – Nilis is a stereotypical dotty old professor, even down to the lack of personal hygiene; a female aide is a stereotypical beautiful but cold bitch; Pirius and his girlfriend, Torec, are everyman teenagers. The way the war is prosecuted doesn't seem at all convincing, the explanations for it and the Xeelee are dull, and the link with the preceding book is so tenuous it's a stretch to consider this book a sequel. Exultant is sort of liked distilled Baxter, but one where the distillation process has taken out all the stuff that makes most of Baxter's works interesting. I'll be reading the third book, Transcendent, but I'm not really looking forward to it.

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### **Walden Effingham says**

not at all bad- good space opera.....

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