



Forgotten Suns

Judith Tarr

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For five thousand Earthyears, the planet called Nevermore has been empty. Its cities are deserted, with every trace of their inhabitants erased. Only a handful of nomadic tribes remain, none of whom remember the ones who went before.

An expedition from Earth has been excavating one of the planet's many ruins, and attempting without success to find the cause of its people's disappearance. Now the expedition is in trouble, its funding cut; unless it makes a major discovery, and soon, it will be shut down. Then the United Planets will invade Nevermore and strip it of its resources, and destroy its ancient and enigmatic treasures.

Aisha, the daughter of the chief archaeologists, tries to save the expedition by opening a sealed tomb or treasury-and manages instead to destroy it. But one treasure survives, which may be the key to the planet's mystery. That treasure is alive, and deeply dangerous: a long-forgotten king and conqueror, sentenced to be preserved in stasis centuries before his world was abandoned.

Khalida is a Military Intelligence officer with a quarter-million deaths on her conscience. She has retreated to the near-solitude of Nevermore to try to come to terms with what she has done, but her past will not let her go. The war she thought she had ended still rages, and is about to destroy one planet and spread chaos through a hundred more. Her superiors force her back into service, and dispatch her to a world that may also offer a clue to the mystery of Nevermore.

With the alien king, the sentient starship he liberates from an unholy alliance of Military Intelligence and the Interstellar Institute for Psychic Research, and a crew of scientists, explorers, and renegades, Aisha and Khalida set off on a journey to the end of the universe and beyond. What they find will change not only the future of Nevermore, but that of all the United Planets.

Forgotten Suns Details

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From Reader Review Forgotten Suns for online ebook

Estara says

[and a visit from a character out of the first three Avaryan Rising books whom I had hoped to see be redeemed. (hide spoiler)]

Allison Henle says

A delightful blend of SF and fantasy, told by an experienced story-teller. I loved reading about a family of devout Muslims (plus an aunt who has rejected the religion). The story is blessedly free of rape, torture, and anything overly graphic. The author assumes a high level of intelligence from the reader - I say this as a compliment - and the story does demand thought and some level of attention being paid to the clues. But the narrative itself unfolds at a nice clip and the major plot points are explained by the end of the novel.

Micah Sisk says

Despite the fact that Forgotten Suns relies heavily on cliché tropes such as psi-powers, a Psycorps almost directly pulled out of Babylon 5, and an overpowered principle character, I found it to be an excellent read. Tarr simply writes characters very well, and wisely focuses most of her attention on character dynamics and personal interplay rather than on the magical mystical powers of psionics (although at pivotal points of conflict these do tend to rear up and grab center stage). The various characters are well drawn individuals, and the teenage protagonist is extremely well played: quite the strong character.

Forgotten Suns is still littered with some really good ideas and novel approaches. The plot is rather uncomplicated, but the central mystery is compelling enough to keep things moving along. All in all, I was entertained and found myself sucked into the story whenever I picked it up for another reading session. Full of sympathetic, complex, and admirable characters.

Ron says

Almost quit after five pages. Glad I stuck with it. Well-told, imaginative science fiction with bursts into new frontiers. Nice capture of the thrill of archeology and anthropology.

First book I've read with post-Islamic characters. No graphic language, violence or sex issues, though Tarr diminished one of her primary cast by having her go into heat over someone in almost each new world encountered.

If I was to quibble it's that Tarr was so busy being politically correct that it occasionally clashed with her story. Interestingly, that issue seems to have invaded the 2015 science fiction awards process: Wall Street Journal article "The Cultural Wars Invade Science Fiction." What is PC depends on "a certain point of view."

The cover art was pretty but had nothing to do with the story.

Still, a decent read.

Megan says

This was my first experience with Judith Tarr, and I'm not sure if I should have started elsewhere to get the feel for her writing, but this was a pretty great book anyway. My main problem (and this could be the fact that I'm struggling with *The Dumb* since getting pregnant) was that I had a really hard time figuring out some of what was happening politics-wise, and with the different factions that were in play, and even with Rama and his motivations. I'm not sure if they were meant to be murky or if I just was not getting it. I have a feeling it was my issue, because the rest of this book was pretty fun.

Quite a bit of adventure awaits the reader and we dive right in from the very first scene. All Aisha wants to do is explore a cave, it's not her fault she used too much explosive and blew it up, right? But she SAW something down there, just before everything caved in, she's sure of it. And of course being grounded has never stopped a teenager from doing something interesting. When she goes back to the cave to explore with her little brother, she's disappointed by the fact that it's empty and what she saw was gone. She's just telling herself that she was seeing things, when she finds a man outside who isn't exactly human - Rama.

Rama, the name he takes but which is not his real name, is dangerous and just like a tidal wave. He sweeps Aisha and her aunt into a massive cross-universe adventure in which they attract the unwanted attention of pretty much every military group in the system. Rama just wants to find his people, who disappeared 5000 years before. Aisha wants to help him, and her aunt Khalida can't seem to stay away from whatever it is they get themselves into.

The success or failure of all of their endeavors centers heavily around what they call "Psi," which isn't exactly magic but is how some of the characters attempt to understand it. Psi-masters are very powerful and can do a lot with their powers, such as manipulate the "worldweb," control ships, change their surroundings, get into other people's heads, feel what could happen in the future, etc. Aisha has this power but doesn't want it, and Rama is from the start a beacon to her because of his own tremendous power. He shields her, helps her, and in a way teaches her how to use it. But even by the end of the book she's still a novice and needs to be trained, which shows that it's not a question of simply having the talent, but knowing how to use it. Science and "magic" are directly related and linked in this book, which I thought was a really interesting way of going about it.

I also loved the incorporation of ethnicity - even though it wasn't the *point* of the book, the fact that the main characters were not white *and it was pointed out as such* made it very interesting. Aisha and her family are from Egypt, and they have darker skin. But even they are shocked by the sheer blackness of Rama, who they assume has been genetically modified to be so dark. His skin is described pretty much as an inorganic black, which surprises everyone he comes into contact with. Personally, I enjoyed picturing how alien that might look (because he's not strictly human really) to someone like me, who is white, and also to someone who has darker skin. But while skin color was a feature of the characters, the universe seems to have accepted just about every skin color anyway, so it ended up just being a curiosity, or an observation, once they set out on their journey. After a while, it didn't get recognized or commented on anymore. But as a reader, I did not forget. I loved it.

The only other thing I really took issue with, and it's not that I had a big problem with it but it just seemed

referential, was with the ship that Rama and Aisha pirate. (view spoiler)

This is a really good book and I am only knocking it down one star because I had the difficulties following some of the plot. The blend of science fiction and fantasy (something that is very difficult to do and not a ton of authors can manage it) was very smooth and interesting, and gave me a new way of seeing the two genres.

Morgan Dhu says

I must admit at the outset that I may not be capable of writing objectively about Judith Tarr's science fiction space opera *Forgotten Suns*. You see, Tarr is one of a large handful of authors I whose work I adore without reservation, and this book is the unexpected and completely amazing sequel to my very favourite of her many works, the double trilogy *Avaryan Rising* and *Avaryan Ascendant*.

If you are familiar Tarr's books, you may be going "whoa, what was that?" just now, because the *Avaryan* series is written as pure, epic high fantasy, and I've just described *Forgotten Suns* as a science fiction space opera. If you want to know how that can be, it's best if you read Tarr's own explanation, from her *The Big Idea* post on John Scalzi's *Whatever* blog [1]. I'll just add that, after you take a minute to rethink the story of Mirain and his descendants in the *Avaryan* series in the language of science fictional conventions and assumptions (and Tarr makes it easy to do this by laying out for the reader all the keys needed - the Rosetta stone, as it were, for translating fantasy to science fiction - on the text.

The story itself begins with an archeological dig on the virtually abandoned world that its newest inhabitants call *Nevermore*. There are ruins suggesting a large and highly developed civilisation, and a small population of illiterate nomads. It appears as though the original inhabitants simply left - but before so doing, they carefully obliterated all images of their people from the cities they left behind.

When Aisha, the daughter of the lead archeologists, seeks to help her parents find something spectacular that will revitalise their waning research funding, she unknowingly awakens a millenias-old sleeper left behind - who realises that he has been woken for a reason, to find out what happened to the people who have gone before, and save them in their hour of need.

The quest involves the sleeper - now called Rama - along with Aisha, her aunt, a traumatised Military Intelligence officer, the Galactic Pscorps, space whales who sing, an opera star, and a journey across space, time, and the multiverses.

It's magical and sciencefictional, it's a wild ride and a slow-unfolding love story, it's got everything you want in a space opera from pirates to mysteries, plots and betrayals, a rag-tag army and a nasty and corrupt galactic government.

It's just perfect.

[1] <http://whatever.scalzi.com/2015/05/07...>

Lis Carey says

Aisha Nasir is the thirteen-year-old daughter of archaeologists who've been working on the almost-abandoned planet of *Nevermore* for most of her life.

When Aisha, in an excess of enthusiasm, tries to blast open a hidden chamber in the mountain near their settlement, things go predictably wrong and she finds nothing useful--but a strange man turns up, apparently from nowhere.

He looks and sounds like the natives--but not exactly. He seems not to remember his name, and Vikram, one of senior staff of the expedition, dubs him Rama. He proves good with the horses, and Vikram hires him.

When their parents and others go off for annual offworld vacation, Aisha and her brother Jamal are left behind as the consequence for their unauthorized use of explosives, with Vikram and their Aunt Khalida to supervise.

There's a complex background here, that's not easy to summarize quickly without spoilers. Khalida is a Military Intelligence officer on leave after an assignment that ended traumatically. She's been "healed" mentally, except that it was a slapdash job, and another reason for her to distrust the already distrusted Psycorps. Meanwhile, with her official thirteenth birthday approaching, Aisha is awaiting her evaluation by Psycorps--which could result in her being involuntarily recruited into Psycorps, instead of being able to follow her parents into archaeology.

But neither Khalida, nor Aisha, nor even Psycorps knows what's really in wait for them. Rama is not just a wandering nomad. He's the Sleeper, an admired, worshiped, and finally dreaded king and emperor put in stasis and buried in a sealed fortress six thousand years ago. He's been sleeping ever since, and Aisha awakened him, unintentionally and for reasons that don't become clear till later. He's awake, he's a psi master beyond the imagination of Psycorps, and he has a mission foreseen dimly by the precogs of his time. It's time to face the danger his people fled, a thousand years after he was condemned to sleep until awakened.

Rama, Aisha, and Khalida are going to cross the galaxy and the barriers of space-time in an adventure in which the Psycorps Khalida hates and Aisha dreads is a minor obstacle on the path to the real enemy, and the secret of where Rama's people disappeared to. We have living ships, Psycorps agents as malevolent as Khalida thinks they are and Psycorp agents who really do mean well, and people on the edge of United Planets space who have their own agenda.

And there are the Gates, and the secret of where Rama's people went, and why.

It's a great adventure that I'm describing poorly.

In addition to the great adventure, this book has some interesting features. There's reason to think that the core of the story may have been written in the 1970s, when Tarr was trying to sell space opera and the publishers wanted fantasy from her. One of the things that becomes clear some ways into *Forgotten Suns* is that Tarr's 1980s *Avaryon* books are the pre-history of this story, tweaked to look like fantasy. This perhaps explains why I got a "seventies" vibe from the book, even while the basic social assumptions, including gender equality and same-sex relationships being taken for granted as just "how things are," are very much the social assumptions of the 21st century. And that's a bonus extra for me: the story-telling I loved about the seventies, without the sexism that frustrated me and the homophobia I was still learning to notice.

Highly recommended.

Karen says

I liked this one in particular because it's a science-fiction story with elements of one of my other favorite

interests, archaeology, as well as a mystery tied in with that that delves into the ancient history and missing peoples of the planet called Nevermore where a family of archaeologists has set up their dig. It's also very multicultural as far as the characters go, with Aisha, the young girl protagonist, and her archaeologist/scholar family originally being of Egyptian extraction from when the family came from Earth, and they still carry elements of their culture and religion with them. Without revealing too much, the plot kicks off with Aisha, who's getting to that age where's she's chomping at the bit to try to show how responsible and capable she is, tries to help her parents out with finding discoveries by excavating a dig on her own-- and of course since she is still young and inexperienced she winds up going a little overboard with her excavation efforts (let's just say that a fair chunk of explosives are involved), and almost winds up doing more damage than good when an entire hillside caves in; but the result of what she inadvertently uncovers and releases into the modern world winds up drawing Aisha, along with her PTSD-traumatized aunt Khalida (a former space-corp soldier who was supposedly "fixed" by extensive treatments to the point where her superiors want her back on duty again, but she knows she's not ready) and several others on a quest out into the furthest reaches of known space to solve this mystery that is tied into the ancient culture of Nevermore and the reason for its complete disappearance. Although the story can feel a bit slow in places (it did take me a while to finish it because I would put it down and not come back to it for a time, since it wasn't, suspense-wise, one of those I-can't-put-it-down-until-I-finish-it page-turners), the characters are interesting overall; Aisha's aunt Khalida was a believable portrayal of the soldier who has seen too much death and also carries the additional burden of feeling personally responsible for much of it, since she was put in the unenviable position of having to make the call on putting down a situation that had quickly got out of hand, thus leading to far too many unnecessary deaths that she now feels guilty for. Khalida is also an LGTB character, which can feel like a bit of a stereotype in her case since she's the typical tough, hard-bitten, butch-lesbian (even right down to the clipped-short, tomboy/soldier butch-cut style that she wears her hair in; I mean, really, all lesbians do NOT look like that, do they?) soldier-type, but since is written with a good, sardonic wry writ and an understandably curmudgeonly reluctance to get back into military service, it makes her feel like a more fleshed-out and sympathetic character. Aisha herself can also feel a bit TOO emotionally mature, intelligent, and wise for her age at times (like seemingly ALL precocious young protagonists in books these days, right? :D), but then again I guess that can also be explained in that she is supposedly a child-prodigy in certain areas of academia and abilities (linguistics, science, etc.), and after all she does come from a family of scholars/archeologists, so that makes it a little more believable given her upbringing around such intelligent, educated people. There's also some good worldbuilding details, especially when they get out into space and start visiting other planets, space habitats and colonies beyond Nevermore. Once they get to the end of their long quest, the final resolution to the mystery that's driven them seems almost too quickly and (despite the build-up of how dangerous/fatal it could be to all of them) too easily resolved, but it's still a good read overall (except, like I said, for the slow parts, which is why I knocked off a star).

Sherwood Smith says

For five thousand Earthyears, the planet called Nevermore has been empty. Only a handful of nomadic tribes remain, none of whom remember the ones who went before. Archaeologists have been excavating one of the planet's many ruins, but expedition's funding has been cut; the United Planets want to take over, strip the planet of its resources, and destroy its ancient and enigmatic treasures.

Aisha and Jamal, hyper-smart daughter and son of the chief archaeologists, are desperate to save their parents' site, which is the only home they've known. Aisha blows the top off a mountain, destroying the treasures she meant to find. Except one: a being in stasis.

Khalida, a Military Intelligence captain, has returned to Nevermore to come to terms with the quarter-million deaths lying on her conscience. But the war she tried to end is threatening to engulf the United Planets, and

she is yanked back into service. But with her goes the strange being named Rama--and also young teen Aisha, who is determined to save Nevermore.

The result is a high-octane mix of space adventure, psi razzle-dazzle, scientific euphoria in discovery that will change the future, archaeological euphoria in discovery of the past, and cool space stuff stitching it all together. But Tarr does not lose sight of the characters, whose complexities deepen as they are tested to the max.

Finally, for me, it is the characters that make a novel worth rereading, especially the females, and Tarr doesn't disappoint. She gives her brilliant young teen a realistic young teen emotional spectrum, which includes wailing breakdowns, misinterpretation of adult interactions, wistful homesickness for siblings and animals, especially her horses, while she is tested to the max and shaped into a hero.

Rama, the being in stasis is a mystery, and his relationship with Aisha is a pleasure to watch unfold. Same with his relationship with Khalida: in most novels Rama and Khalida would end up being a couple, as the tension crackles between them, and they each give as good as they get. But Tarr takes every relationship in different directions than the expected, with them feeling so very right when they get there.

So many side characters deserve mention, as no one is left to be a flat plot device or spear carrier: Captain Hashimoto, whose duty is done at the cost of emotional connection; Lt. Zhao of the sinister Psycorps who begins as a villain and goes through quite a character arc that reflects the astonishing arc that psi takes in this book. Jamal, Aisha's younger brother, who also gives as good as he gets, and Aisha's parents.

The book comes to a satisfying resolution while leaving certain very, very tantalizing threads dangling, making me long for a sequel.

Renay says

I really liked this book! I honestly didn't know what to expect, but this story is doing a really subtle critique of power and how people choose to wield power (or not). There are cool ladies, and it's operating on a coming of age axis and a coming into power axis. Although the central character seems like a "I am all-powerful and have no flaws" type of dude, it's way more complicated than that and I loved all the ways he was surrounded by wildly different women who he didn't treat any differently than anyone else, regardless of his own power. I mean, it's a small distinction that wouldn't ping for most people but that was a really important aspect of this book for me.

Also, there are sentient spaceships. And psychics! And everyone is pretty much POC, but it's not about race at all, it's just how things are. It sort of reminded me of what you might get if you took a portal fantasy, epic fantasy with magicians, and a space opera and tossed it in a blender with Stargate. It's pretty fun, but I meant the epic fantasy comparison: the book doesn't like to be rushed anywhere. It made it better for me, because more time with neat characters, but don't go in expecting a fast-paced space adventure (which is kind of what I thought I was getting, but am happy to be wrong).

Gary says

Forgotten Suns recalls the planetary romances of pulp era/golden age authors like Edgar Rice Burroughs and

Leigh Brackett. I wish there were more novels of this kind being written, just better novels than this particular one.

I thought the world building was interesting and the central mysteries intriguing, but the story is a bit of a jumble, and sometimes moves at a snail's pace. There are two protagonists, and the novel's perspective shifts erratically between third person omniscient and a tighter perspective of one or the other. There is no apparent rhyme or reason for these odd shifts in perspective, which sometimes happen mid-paragraph. There is too much awkward exposition. Though the novel is occasionally quite good and has some nifty ideas, I think it would have benefitted from more editorial oversight. The overall experience was a disappointing one.

C.E. Murphy says

Strong, appealing space opera.

It's space opera with YA sensibilities: only one of the main characters is actually a young adult, but all three of the main characters are on journeys of self-discovery. The character I felt was the lead (a hard call, as all 3 stories are insanely well balanced, but hers is the catalyst for all that follows), Aisha, is the 13 year old daughter of planetary archaeologists; this is a story of history's haunts and the actions we take to protect the future, with an interstellar war and psionic powers to boot.

FORGOTTEN SUNS is possibly the most immediately accessible book of Tarr's that I've read. Everything about it works beautifully, from Aisha's explosive introduction to the regrets and ambitions that drive the other characters. If you haven't read Tarr before and you like YA or space opera, I highly recommend discovering her through this book.

Jared Millet says

We may have to reformulate Clarke's Law for this novel so it reads: "Any sufficiently advanced psionic abilities are indistinguishable from magic." OK, psi powers are magical anyway since they don't really exist, but neither does FTL and we allow that in the SF clubhouse, so telepathy gets in too. *Forgotten Suns*, however, is a space opera that really plays with that gray area between science and fantasy. The book generally lands on the "really alien higher-dimensional science that we just don't understand" side of the line, but since many of the characters actively refer to themselves as mages and their powers as magical (with, I imagine, an occasional wink) that line stays thoroughly blurred.

This book hit a lot of sweet spots for me: alien worlds, vanished civilizations, xenoarchaeology, superpowered demigods with questionable motives, people flying around in spaceships having adventures, and likeable, relatable protagonists. The two point-of-view characters are a former intelligence officer still damaged and suffering from the trauma of her final mission, and her thirteen-year-old niece Aisha who doesn't think twice about stowing away on a spaceship and traveling the galaxy to help out her family. Even though it's an adult novel, having such a young protagonist (a modern-day Arkady Darrell) lets Tarr easily convey the wonder so vital to fun science fiction.

The third principal character, and the major actor of the whole shebang, is an ancient conqueror from the planet Nevermore who's been buried in stasis for 6,000 years until Aisha accidentally wakes him up by blasting into an archaeological site with a little too much dynamite. This is the "superpowered demigod" I mentioned earlier, and in his earlier life he was something of a Dark Lord that his own people had to lock away for their own protection. Now that his whole race has disappeared, he goes from supervillain to

questing hero as he travels across the universe looking for his lost civilization and the mystery of why they vanished. The answer is suitably epic and satisfying.

The novel isn't perfect, but the flaws don't get in the way. Tarr's characters have a habit of implying too much in the dialogue, and sometimes it's a chore to keep up with what's left unsaid in their conversations. One of the antagonist groups in the novel is an evil Psi Corps whom Tarr lifted directly out of *Babylon 5*, but since *B5* lifted the Psi Corps directly out of *The Demolished Man*, then I figure fair's fair. The universe of the novel is one that I didn't really want to leave at the end, and I get the impression that Tarr didn't either, since she takes about as much time as Tolkien to wrap up the story after the climax. Still, an excellent, yummy space opera.

Jacey says

On the deserted world of Nevermore, a family of archaeologists labours to uncover ancient mysteries despite the threat of funding cuts which will lead to the United Planets stripping the planet's resources in a legal invasion.

Nevermore presents a conundrum. If the people of this world had suffered a wipeout after some apocalyptic upheaval there would be evidence, but there isn't. The buildings have crumbled, but all the records, statuary, art and artefacts have all disappeared. There are no skeletons, nothing to say whether the inhabitants were humanoid or alien. While her parents struggle to understand the mystery of the ruins and fight to retain the funding that will protect the project, and the world, Aisha accidentally blows the top off a mountain revealing a strange being, a living treasure. Human in appearance, Rama is even stranger than he first appears. Dressed in rags, but wearing enough gold artefacts to stock a small museum, and quite mad in a compelling way, he begins a quest to find Nevermore's missing population. They've only been gone for five thousand years, so that shouldn't be too much of a problem.

Aisha's Aunt Khalida, a Military Intelligence officer is on leave after a mission that broke her. She's living with the burden of guilt too big for any one person to carry and Psycorps patent fix hasn't taken. Now both the MI and Psycorps want her back on duty. She's forced to return to Ariceli, the world where she committed the ultimate war crime, to negotiate a peace - at least that's what they say. It just happens that Ariceli is also Rama's first port of call... and Aisha is not letting him go gallivanting round the universe without her. She's desperately trying to find a justification for the continued funding of the Nevermore expedition and Rama is the likely key.

The question of who is Rama? turns into the question of what is Rama? Aisha may be the only person tying together disparate strands which all belong to the same puzzle.

Of course it's all a lot more complex than that. Everyone has their own agenda: Rama is still searching, following a trail of breadcrumbs; Khalida has to prevent one of the factions in her peace negotiation from blowing the whole planet of Ariceli apart; Aisha is searching for anything that will help her parents.

When they rescue an enslaved sentient ship a chase across the universe ends up as a journey through the multiverse. Rama must not only find his people but must also fulfil an ancient prophesy, one that's likely to kill him and anyone who helps him.

Psionic powers and magic mesh with science in this enthralling adventure. Characterisation, human and non-human, is complex and layered. Determined Aisha. Cocksure Rama. Damaged Khalida. They all have a part to play. The setting is a multiverse full of diverse worlds from Nevermore to Ariceli and Starsend via a free-

trader's hub in the company of a worldly wise opera singer, a renegade Psychorps lieutenant and a boatload of angry scientists. The writing is often lyrical without being overblown, the tension is well-wrought and the pace fairly rattles along.

Highly recommended.

Peter says

On a distant planet, a young girl in a family of archaeologists accidentally releases a man who looks human, but is an alien king with psionic powers, left behind in stasis by his people because he was too much of a threat... but now, he may be the only one who can save them.

I did not care for this book at all. It was a slog to get through.

Before I go into why, I should perhaps explain something about my life and reading history that might help you understand where I'm coming from.

I used to love psionic powers. Some of my favorite comics focused on characters with them, I imagined myself with them, I wrote stories about them, I ate up SF that had them in it. The Force in Star Wars was this cool thing I loved watching and wished I had, more than lightsabers. I loved the Vulcans in Star Trek because they were ultra logical and yet had these powerful telepathic abilities. I even enjoyed the Betazoid episodes. But at some point, I just got... tired of them. It wasn't that I read a particularly bad example that turned me off, I guess I just burned out... one day I read something I should have liked and realized that I just didn't care anymore, and it never seemed to lift on that topic, unless they were doing something particularly novel with them. I had a similar experience with vampires, incidentally, but I only mention that to point out that with psionics, it wasn't quite so absolute... I still liked them in, say, superhero stories, or if psionic powers were the one unusual element in an otherwise normal setting. But when I encountered space operas with Psi-Corps or aliens who were telepathic, by an large, it just didn't work for me anymore. It wasn't quite dislike, it was like they radiated fundamental particles of anti-interest that, once it got in contact with particles of genuine interest I had, annihilated both in a rain of 'meh' radiation. Sometimes, if the psionic element was small, there was enough interest left over to enjoy, but having it in a book was usually a bad sign for my enjoyment.

I heard a few descriptions that implied there was a psionics element to this book, but I was willing to give it a try (I probably wouldn't have purchased it on it's own, but it was part of an ebook bundle so it was effectively free at that point), there was an intriguing technological-looking artifact on the cover, so I had hopes that it was a grand SF story that had psi as a minor element. And it started okay, I guess. But the psi element grew quickly to be the driving force in the whole book to the point where by the end it was the only thing that mattered. And I couldn't bring myself to care, because (and the awareness of this fact might have been one of the reasons I burned out on this trope) everything worked under whatever rules the author needed at any given time. If she needed psi to overcome overwhelming force, it could do that. If the main characters needed a clue as to where to go next, psi could provide that. If it needed to be blocked by something, something could be produced or a stronger psi or will would just prevail. In general, psi doesn't feel, to me, like something that has independent rules and limitations beyond how the author wants it to work at a given moment, one of the essences of good SF. A FTL drive might be as imaginary as telepathy, but at least it has a limited context of usefulness and the rules are set up in advance. You don't set up a drive that takes a month to travel between stars, and then in the climax reveal it that just by adding a little more power and disabling some safeties, it can make the same trip in an hour, and incidentally can also heal the deadly wounds the protagonist suffered, because it would break that context we have accepted it within. But psi is potentially a

swiss army knife of universal applicability, subject to change at any moment. Used judiciously it might be okay, but it's far too easy to go overboard.

And in this book, the situation is only made worse because the character of Rama is such an extremely powerful psi, more powerful than anyone in the other character's society has ever seen before. So whatever the writer wants him to be capable of, he is.

The more I got into this book, the less I cared about anything that happened. The ironic thing is that a few of the characters I actually enjoy. The two women who are arguably the main character (Rama being less a character as a massive gravity source they orbit around) were fairly interesting and appealing (even though they had unappealing characteristics), and I connected with their personal stories to a degree. Even where their stories involved psi powers, there were some dynamics that I could have gotten into... the young girl who fears being dragged off by the Psi-Corps, the aunt who's own latent abilities were removed when she was rejected, but which seem to be coming back. Both were potentially good building blocks for a story. But then they were dragged along in Rama's orbit, an epic quest where only godlike psi could save everything, and their own stories didn't seem to matter, because it was all about this glorious warrior king with unimaginable psi power, and I just could not be bothered. By the end, they changed the galaxy, but I didn't care about the galaxy anymore because it failed as a story.

In the end, I just didn't give a damn about what happened. It felt more like a fantasy novel with a light papering over of sci-fi tropes, and worse, not even a particularly interesting fantasy novel, where characters make clever or difficult decisions in high-stakes situations, but rather one where characters are dragged along by destiny and prophecy.
