



Xeelee: Redemption

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Michael Poole finds himself in a very strange landscape . . .

This is the centre of the Galaxy. And in a history without war with the humans, the Xeelee have had time to build an immense structure here. The Xeelee Belt has a radius ten *thousand* times Earth's orbital distance. It is a light year in circumference. If it was set in the solar system it would be out in the Oort Cloud, among the comets - but circling the sun. If it was at rest it would have a surface area equivalent to about thirty *billion* Earths. But it is not at rest: it rotates at near lightspeed. And because of relativistic effects, distances are compressed for inhabitants of the Belt, and time drastically slowed.

The purpose of the Belt is to preserve a community of Xeelee into the very far future, when they will be able to tap dark energy, a universe-spanning antigravity field, for their own purposes. But with time the Belt has attracted populations of lesser species, here for the immense surface area, the unending energy flows. Poole, Miriam and their party, having followed the Ghosts, must explore the artefact and survive encounters with its strange inhabitants - before Poole, at last, finds the Xeelee who led the destruction of Earth...

Xeelee: Redemption Details

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From Reader Review Xeelee: Redemption for online ebook

Oy Vey says

Xeelee Redemption is a true science fiction novel with breathtaking story and classical sense of wonder. Baxter is back to his true high quality form.

I will not discuss the plot, the synopsis does a good enough job.

Do you like space exploration with that difficult to achieve sense of wonder, massive time scales, Galaxy spanning story and not least asking the question of what is to be human? - this novel is for you.

In an age where science fiction has been polluted by politics this is a breath of fresh air. A classic science fiction novel for the true connoisseur.

Note that this is part of Baxter's Xeelee Sequence comprised of many books and short stories. I have to add that you need to at least have read the previous book Xeelee Vengeance in order to "get" the story in this one, but I wholeheartedly recommend the entire sequence, it is among the best ever written in the genre.

Dance Morrison says

Its good to get back into the Xeelee universe. It looks like Baxter is pulling a "X-Men" movies move by creating an alternate reality so that all that has happened in the previous books is in another timeline.

I'm ok with this as long as we get a bunch more books!

Julian says

A neofascist abomination written for the age of Trump

So, suppose that you're some kind of technological super genius, and one day a mysterious, and apparently omnipotent, alien turns up and announces its intention of eradicating you, your species and your solar system. You're a bit upset right? You're a nice, liberal type of person, after all. So you try to co-ordinate some kind of resistance, and, because your dad happens to be a kind of Mussolini-wannabe, who takes the opportunity to make the trains run on time on a global basis, you find yourself with the full might of Planet Earth (oh, and its colonial possessions: never forget them) behind you. This is, after all, a fight against unjustified genocide, right?

Now suppose you discover that this alien came from an alternative timeline where humanity had, basically out of a fit of pique at discovering that, in the galactic pecking order, it was about as far from being number one as you can get, set about systematically eradicating every alien species it could find, and that only this alien's people, who were called Xeelee, survived. Moreover, in that timeline, humanity had remade itself as one huge army of indoctrinated child warriors, and spent tens of thousands of years fighting a 'war' against the Xeelee (because humanity had to be number one you see: just think of what those aliens might do to

human women if they were given chance?). The result was that humanity lost, pretty comprehensively, but, in the process, managed to disrupt the Xeelee's attempt to prevent a universal catastrophe, as a result of which everyone, apart from a few Xeelee, who managed to escape to other universes, died. The end. So, it occurred to this Xeelee that going back in time and wiping out humanity would be, at least from the point of view of all those racially inferior non-humans, something akin to wiping out the smallpox virus, i.e. a Good and Noble Deed.

So: you are a techno genius, hero, saviour of mankind, whose dad appears to have adopted Emperor Palpatine as a role model. How do you react to this alien's mission to save the universe from your species? Why, you announce that you intend to follow it to the ends of the universe and hurt it. Because of vengeance.

Fine, so that's pretty much what happened in this book's almost as noxious prequel: Xeelee: Vengeance. Pretty bad, eh? Now let's see what makes this book so uniquely awful in its own right.

Well, there's a lot of tedious bad-SF-style 'exploring strange new worlds' and taking pity on their inferior inhabitants, and killing as many as possible of those you meet who appear to be inconveniently non-inferior (because they must have been inferior because now they're *dead* and you're not). In the process the author arrives at a very odd interpretation of evolutionary biology, according to which our genome is a kind of reference library, full of the equivalent of those 'Make' books, one for each species in our evolutionary ancestry, and, if we happen to arrive in an environment where we don't need brains for *struggle for survival*, our genomes abruptly switch to a less advanced model. Thus humans, finding themselves in a nice, Earth-like environment, lovingly tailored for them by a benevolent alien whose name doesn't begin with an 'X' at all, will automatically dump their brains and revert to *Homo erectus*. This is not just wrong, not just entirely false, it is a reversion to the era when eugenicists and fascists alike preached their racist pseudo-Darwinism as an excuse for wiping out people they didn't like. Unfortunately, given this and that, it would seem that Baxter is that astounding thing, a Dawkinsian true believer, who actually believes that evolution is all about genes 'struggling to survive', and nothing at all to do with the animals they live in. Suddenly all becomes clear.

But let us turn away from Baxter's inadequate understanding of biology (while noting, for future reference, that Dawkinsians have other disturbing tendencies): what of his hero, and his mission of vengeance?

Well it goes on. For pages and pages and page, in fact, many of which could have been removed, or reordered, or pasted in upside down, without materially affecting the book or the experience of reading it (in other words: *boring*), and he remains square-jawed and determined to take revenge, on behalf of all humanity, for the terrible thing the Xeelee did in giving all these other inferior aliens he has been meeting a chance to have lives of their own, and not end up blasted into atoms by humanity's collective attempt to prove that it had larger sexual organs than the Xeelee did.

Finally, he catches up with the Xeelee. It has constructed a marvel of engineering, a kind of ark, intended to preserve at least some parts of every species it can find, protecting them from the coming cosmic catastrophe, and then rebuilding a universe fit for beings to live in, into which it will release them. It turns out that there even humans in there, which puzzles our hero immensely, for surely the Xeelee is *evil* and hates everyone unlike itself, especially humans. Or, as we call it in the trade, the pot calls the kettle black. So, what does he do? Well, what would any well-meaning super genius, hero who wishes to save life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, faced by an incomprehensibly powerful alien being who is intent on doing just that on a much larger scale, but which he personally has a bit of a snit at? He *hurts* it, of course. In fact he cuts bits off. And, that not being sufficient by way of hurting, he kills his 'lover' (the only description possible of their relationship, in spite of the fact that he refuses to ever have any kind of sexual or even

emotional relationship with her, for reasons which are not entirely well-explained, but which seem to come down to her being racially inferior to him in some undefined way), who is suggesting gently that maiming the potential saviour of all living things might be foolish, and only then does he stop. And then he decides to take advantage of the Xeelee's offer kind of a berth in the ark, in order to survive the coming catastrophe, so humanity at last has the opportunity to wipe everyone else out, and stand proud, in the safe knowledge that now *nobody* has bigger sexual organs.

This is, frankly, quite vile. Apart from the not very-well hidden fascist undertones (which I hope my summary above has made subtly explicit), we now come to the book's principal defect. Nowhere is there even a remote hint of any ethical, moral, or philosophical consideration of what is going on here. Baxter treats us to a flat, unengaging, workmanlike narrative in which there is plenty of derring do, but not much in the way of thought.

Now, in the Adrian Tchaikovsky's infinitely better *Children of Time*, we see a parallel evolution of spiders from creepy-crawlies to complex, ethical, civilised beings, and devolution of their former human overlords into little better than mindless predators (just like the spiders used to be). Tchaikovsky makes no explicit judgements, but he does not need to, for his subtle, highly literary, presentation of the narrative leads us to see the ethical issues for ourselves, even tricking readers into supporting the spiders in treating the humans to a bit of what we *think* is good old-fashioned hurting, but turns out to be something far nobler, far more altruistic, far more *human*. Baxter doesn't do that. He presents his characters' actions straightforwardly. One fears he considers them reasonable.

And yet, something could have been made of this book. Consider again: the utterly alien, incomprehensible, seemingly all-powerful Xeelee arrives and does things that are for the good of all in the universe, save the inhabitants of one small planet, and then shows a way that all, including even some from that planet, can survive the coming disaster, to be reborn into a better, cleaner world. And some of the humans, strangely enough, those with lots of power, don't like this, and denounce it, and attack it, and try to kill it, but fail. Does this remind you of something? It does me: chap called Jesus who got executed by his people's religious leaders, because they didn't like his message that rules and racism were not enough: you had to have regard for *everyone*, then somehow pulled off redeeming them anyway.

So, could this book be recast as a narrative about the powerful railing against a god who does not care for their power, but for the well-being of the totality of life and intelligence? Could it become a parable of evil, worse because it doesn't even realise it is, overcome by its contact with the divine, and, not necessarily made good, but at least made impotent? Of course it could, and it could be a fascinating book if it was, something like Charles Williams' 'theological thriller' *The Place of the Lion*, only this time on a genuinely cosmic scale. Unfortunately it is not. Baxter is not a sufficiently good writer to pull it off, but, more to the point, his deadly 'new atheist' dogma means he is so limited in his understanding, or in what he is willing to understand, that, though he could have given us a masterpiece, he has instead chosen to give us four hundred pages of monstrously immoral bad prose.

But the fanboys will love it, so who cares?

Elie Rivollier says

Believably unbelievable!!

The scope of this work is incalculable. Baxter's ability to create a mind-blowing timescale within a compelling, fast paced and coherent storyline is unparalleled. Hard science fiction at it's best.
