



Engaging the Enemy

Elizabeth Moon

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For fans of fast-paced adventure and compelling characters, the military science fiction of Nebula Award—winning author Elizabeth Moon is the perfect choice.

The brilliantly unorthodox Kylara Vatta, black-sheep scion of Vatta Transport Ltd., one of the galaxy's wealthiest merchant houses, is a heroine like no other, blessed with a killer instinct for business and for battle. Now, in the aftermath of cold-blooded assassinations that have left her parents dead and the Vatta shipping empire shattered, Kylara faces her greatest challenge yet.

There is a time for grief and a time for revenge. This is decidedly the latter. Placing her cousin Stella in command of the trading vessel Gary Tobai, Ky embarks aboard the captured pirate ship Fair Kaleen on a twofold mission: to salvage the family business and to punish those responsible for the killings . . . before they strike again.

Since the network providing instantaneous communication between star systems has been sabotaged, news is hard to come by and available information impossible to trust. But as she travels from system to system, with Stella a step behind, Ky pieces together the clues and discovers a conspiracy of terrifying scope, breathtaking audacity, and utter ruthlessness.

The only hope the independent systems and merchants have against this powerful enemy is to band together. Unfortunately, because she commands a ship known to belong to a notorious pirate—her own relative Osman Vatta, whom she killed for his part in her parents' deaths—Ky is met with suspicion, if not outright hostility. Rumors swirl about her intent, her very identity. Soon even Stella begins to question her cousin's decisions and her authority to make them.

Meanwhile, the conspiracy Ky hunts is hunting her in turn, with agents insinuated into every space station, every planetary government, every arm of the military, and every merchant house—including her own. Before she can take the fight to the enemy, Kylara must survive a deadly minefield of deception and betrayal.

From the Hardcover edition.

Engaging the Enemy Details

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From Reader Review Engaging the Enemy for online ebook

Ben Babcock says

I want to give this entire series 5 stars even though I probably won't give any of its individual instalments that rating. Does that make sense? *Vatta's War* is just such a fun and compelling space opera with a strong central character, and Elizabeth Moon is a great storyteller. I say this while simultaneously admitting that, even though I really, really enjoyed reading *Engaging the Enemy*, I don't think it's actually all that good of a book.

Yeah, this is going to be one of *those* reviews. Buckle up. (Spoilers for previous books but not this one.)

Engaging the Enemy opens with Kylara and Stella Vatta plotting their next move. Leaving Stella in command of the Gary Tobai, Ky departs for a system that is more likely to recognize her prize claim to the *Fair Kaleen*, which she wrested from her pirate uncle in the previous book. What ensues is basically Ky trying to get her prize recognized as legitimate while also forming a governments-funded space navy to fight the organized pirates that appear to be disrupting trade. Meanwhile, she leaves Stella mostly to fend for herself, which Stella doesn't appreciate. And back on Slotter's Key, Aunt Grace has to get all wetwork on government-sponsored assassins. It's pretty cool.

This book's strengths are similar to the previous books in the series. Moon does make anything easy for our protagonists. There are no convenient outs here, no crowning moments when someone waltzes in with exactly the right plan to save the day. If anything, the running gag in this book is that everything Ky does makes her situation *worse*—except that she continually manages, against all odds, to survive. I love these books because I love watching Ky struggle and agonize over her decisions, over the burden of command on her young shoulders, and most recently, the loss of her family. Moon sends her and her associates through the wringer, yet Ky still has only one thing in sight: stopping the people who started this mess.

On balance, though, I have to admit that there is little of note about this third book in the series. I mean, Moon basically relies on two things to stymie Ky: communication difficulties (or people not being in the right place at the right time) and other people being obstreperous buffoons. There is very little action here; most of the conflict comes from Ky navigating legal challenges, including dealing with the possibility that someone is going to accuse her crew of stealing a dog.

Also, not a big fan of the conflict between Ky and Stella. Its existence makes total sense, but the way Moon has written it makes it sound so contrived and really doesn't do justice to Stella. Her attitude towards Ky is totally justified, especially considering the stress that both Vattas are under after the deaths of their family. Yet Moon essentially hands Stella the Idiot Ball to drum up enough tension while trying to get us to doubt whether Ky is even actually Ky.

So, yeah, I can't pretend that this book is a masterpiece of plotting, conflict, and characterization. But I can't deny that it still satisfied every space opera bone in my body. I curled up with this over the weekend and just revelled in the atmosphere of this universe. That's the thing about science fiction: even the pulpy stuff (and, to be clear, *Engaging the Enemy* is far from pulp) *feels so good*. The very act of inhabiting a hypothetical future, of imagining space travel and space pirates and space ... uh ... legal wrangling ... is such a fulfilling, stimulating experience. And despite perhaps failing to create a truly compelling story here, Moon still has this fantastic world.

And even though her actions aren't all that interesting in this book, Ky herself remains a great protagonist. The major theme here is how to deal with having killed someone, with having *to kill* someone—and what you do when you discover that you liked it. Ky's brain is basically asking, "What if I'm a bad person?" on repeat, and you can see this weighing heavily with her *every* decision. There is some great psychological tension here, and I'm not talking about the paternity plot.

There is so much here that Moon could have done better, but in the end ... I just don't care. Totally a fanboy.

My reviews of *Vatta's War*:

← *Marque and Reprisal* | *Command Decision* →

Dan says

Reread..

Ron says

"If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs . . . you'll be a Man, my son!" wrote Rudyard Kipling. Well, Kylara kept her head and saved her crew, but it wasn't as if she had much help.

Moon's tried and true plot device of "Everything I done and not done has [given us trouble]" is getting long of tooth. Similarly everyone continually having concerns but delaying communicating them with others is getting too obvious as a plot device, too.

That said, the quality of Moon's storytelling continues to entertain.

A good read.

Maddalena says

After the partial disappointment of the second volume in Elizabeth Moon's *Vatta's War* series, I was eager to see whether that less-than-stellar book was just a fluke, or if the initial promise had really been so sadly reduced: I'm quite happy to share that the third volume in the series, *Engaging the Enemy*, rolls back on track in a very appealing way.

The story resumes straight from the point it had left off in *Marque and Reprisal*, making me realize that this is not exactly a series, but rather a long novel divided into five sections, and as such it might have its "down" moments, like it happened with book 2, while taken as a whole it creates an immersive story, one that deals with space opera themes from a different point of view [...]

Read the full review at SPACE and SORCERY BLOG

Liviu says

short review of the series (huge novel split into 5) under Trading in danger

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Cathy says

Quite good if you're willing to suspend disbelief in the outrageous competence of youth. I like the 3 major characters of Ky, Stella and Grace. I'd like to see more action in the big picture than in just a few isolated encounters/battles. And the action is very uneven; it's mostly talk and almost no action until the end.

Donna says

This one's enjoyable despite a relative lack of action, but Stella's parts were annoying. I was not in love with the way her character lost perspective and competence just to give the story a jolt of conflict. That episodic combat scene at the end also felt kind of skim-worthy.

The characters still have me hooked though; I'll grab the next one soon.

Lexxi Kitty says

1) I'm doing a reread of the series, shouldn't I be able to think of 'stuff' to slide into these review boxes after I'm done? Heck, I've been writing reviews for almost everything for at least 1 or 3 years now, even if it's a little as 'I loathe Jonathan' (Don't recall if that's the character's name, but that's the entirety of a review I wrote this year). But alas, not having as much luck doing reviews recently. I keep taking days, weeks to get around to them.

2) I'm in the middle of the last book in this series (yes Ky returns in another series, but that's another series; and yes, literally in the middle, well, okay, something like 51 or 54% into book 5), so any review here will be tougher to write. Though being there I can say: I liked the earlier books better than the later. And I think that's almost entirely due to the many many characters who have POV's throughout the series. Many of whom I don't really care about (like, say, Rafe, Toby, occasionally Stella - though she grew on me; not 'basically everyone but Ky', but many of the POV characters and story arc's aren't that fun for me to read).

I say 'almost entirely' but I'm not certain how much of another reason fits in that 'the rest of the reason', or if I'm hiding the size of that reason's importance to me. For, you see, people were constantly lecturing Ky on being a young woman and, as 'everyone knows' young women are susceptible to pretty faces, and Ky kept taking it like an asexual who thinks everyone's dumb to keep lecturing her like this - for assuming what should not be assumed. That's the early part of the series, of course, not the later (well, I'm in book 5 - people are *still* assuming things about 'young women' and 'pretty pretty boys'). In the beginning Ky had Hal, a

fellow cadet, and they'd exchanged class rings - but the reader never saw the two together, and later learned that - while there was 'something there', and while Ky thought she loved Hal, it had never advanced to fucking (or included it, depending on feelings about fucking and how much of an emotional connection is needed before fucking can occur, I'm not referring here using the word for profanity purposes, I'm literally talking about . . . sexual activities, but fucking is shorter than using two words). Men came, men went, Ky showed no attraction to any, despite people lecturing her (onto her ship, near her, etc., I don't mean into and out of her bedroom). In the middle of the series, this book here, Ky actually literally drooled over a gorgeous woman who boarded her ship - but alas, no, this isn't, way down in book three, the start of a romance; or lesbian fiction. (view spoiler)

3) And now I'm facing the problem of currently being in the middle of book 5 while trying to write a review for book 3. Hmms.

As the book description notes . . . bah, forget that.

Right, Ky, Stella and Toby had been flying together. Somewhere along the way they acquire another ship and Stella goes off on it while Ky & Toby fly off on a larger ship. Book three has all three land on the same overly and aggressively polite star system. Cascadia or something like that. Hmm, that . . . doesn't look right. Darn, name of system not in book description (at least the book description for this edition). I'll call it 'Tree-lover system'. Right, so, while the three Vatta's had been separated, they all now meet again in 'Tree-Lover system'. But there's a problem – Ky has the ship she acquired along the way and tries to do business in the system. But her 'old friend', that Vatta captain who was captain on Ky's apprenticeship year, turns up. And claims . . . that Ky is an imposter – the real Ky had died. HE KNOWS! *angry shaking fist* It becomes a court battle. Is Ky an imposter, or not? Part of the problem is that, while there is DNA evidence in system, the court can't use it because of legal rules (it's with the bank the Vatta's use, for identification – and that bank agrees that Ky is a Vatta and biologically closely related to the DNA sample on hand (Jo Vatta, Stella's sister).

So, a court case occupies part of this book. And questions of identity. And a very brief appearance (because of the question of identity) of a system Monitor (to keep Ky's ship 'locked down' from leaving) who is, apparently in Ky's words, super gorgeous woman. Oh, and 'Tree-Lover system' also wants the Vatta dog. For reasons.

Of the five books, or, at least, the 4 and a half I've read so far, book three turned out to be my favorite of the bunch. Not sure how that happened, but it did.

Right, so . . .

Rating: 4.75

December 5 2017

Shan says

The adventure continues. Ky Vatta's tiny fleet has grown; she's now on a bigger ship with more weapons, and her cousin Stella is in charge of the elderly trading ship. Ky bops from planet system to planet system, encountering problems everywhere, mostly arising from officials suspicious of how she acquired the bigger

ship; Stella trails behind, getting more and more irritated at Ky's treatment of her. No battles for most of the book; the engagements are in bureaucratic offices and courts.

There are some interesting planetary cultures, like the one where being rude is an offense that can earn you the death penalty. The pirates are more threatening, and we learn more about the source of the Vatta family's troubles. Elderly aunt Grace has a bigger role here - one of the things I really like about this series is the way Moon portrays old people, not as feeble has-beens or tented-fingered villains; I think I remember some similar characters in her Herris Serrano series.

Another thing I like about this series is the way it reads like one big fat novel. The main plot in each one is resolved, but the endings all lead to the next book in the series - not in a cliffhanger style, but still I'm buying the next one as soon as I finish each one. I'm glad I discovered this when the series was finished so I can do that.

Kara says

“Engaging the Enemy (Vatta’s War #3)” continues the military scifi adventure story of Ky Vatta, her friends & family, and her shipmates as Ky and cousin Stella work to rebuild Vatta Enterprises, and to find the enemies who have created interstellar death and destruction.

The amount of detail in the book continues to be amazing, and those details continue to make the world of Vatta feel very real. It was particularly funny as Ky and Raf read through one planet’s written rules for fornication.

“Engaging the Enemy” also continues providing each character with individual personalities. Stella became annoying for awhile, and Furman was certainly not wanting Ky to succeed...even taking her to court claiming Ky wasn’t Ky. That presented quite the surprise!

“Engaging the Enemy” is even longer than either of the first two Vatta books: 15 and 1/2 hours, and still filled with wonderful adventures and personalities, narrated wonderfully by Cynthia Holloway. Highly recommended with a 5* rating.

Mike (the Paladin) says

THIS RATING AND REVIEW ARE FOR THE AUDIO EDITION I (TRIED TO) LISTEN(ED) TO ONLY. I WILL MAKE A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT THE BOOK BUT THE RATING IS ABOUT THIS AUDIO VERSION.

Some of you may know that Elizabeth Moon wrote one of my all time favorite series including a trilogy I think of as one novel. So I hate that I've never been able to like her space operas. I mean I've tried and the first in this series was pretty good but I just haven't been able to get involved.

HOWEVER I got the audio version of this book and I've got to say...the reader drove me completely away. I don't understand why publishers or whoever decides these things will contract a mediocre to poor reader to

read a book. Do they never listen to their own product???

I mean the trilogy I mentioned above (That I like so well) is The Deed of Paksenarrion. I own them in both print and audio and the reader of those while not as bad as the reader of this book is still not what I'd call "up to it". She is (in my opinion of course) mediocre. She miss pronounces word, reads the Elves in a sort of sing/song way and in one case reads characters in the wrong voice. In other words has someone else say Paks' line and Paks say his line..

I just don't get it.

I mean the reader here seems to think that...the-way-to-sound-dramatic-is-to-pause-between-each-word or two.

So, I couldn't take it. I put it aside. maybe I'll find the print version and give it a try. Till then I've noted the reader of this one down.

The Captain says

Ahoy there me mateys! This here be a combined review of the second and third books of the Vatta's War series. While I try to post no spoilers, if ye haven't read the first book and ye keep reading this log then ye have been forewarned and continue at yer own peril . . .

Well book one could have been a standalone but I am extremely glad it wasn't! The second book quickly brings about a major, surprising change for the main character, Ky Vatta, and her family. It was mind-boggling but brilliant. It certainly upped the ante. I loved the crazy mercenary company and how Ky made deals with them. I loved all the space battles. It even makes trading goods interesting.

Ky continues to be a delight. I love watching her get into impossible situations and use her brain and her gusto to solve problems. These books be action-packed, have no real romance, and be filled with admirable women. I particularly love Grandma Grace. She is one tough cookie.

The only minor quibble was the distrust between Ky and her cousin in book three. It made sense in terms of story telling but it did wear on me a bit. I think that overall this book, while enjoyable, felt more like a placeholder set-up book. However, the ending was very satisfying and I am extremely interested in what adventures Ky will get into next.

I have already made plans to get books four and five in me mitts. Arrr!!!

Side note: Much thanks to me matey, Sarah @ brainfluff, for pointing me in the right direction in terms of the recommended readin' sequence for these books!

Check out me other reviews at <https://thecaptainsquartersblog.wordpress.com>...

James says

Longer, more involved and more intricate than the two preceding volumes, *Trading in Danger* and *Marque and Reprisal*, in the story of Kylara Vatta and her supporting cast of comrades, villains, and bit players. The military aspects of the story ring more true than in a lot of fiction, no doubt because the author, Elizabeth Moon, served in the Marine Corps. Her academic background in history helps with the grand politics and strategy that form the background and drive the story, too.

Excellent characterization, good plotting and suspense, strong action scenes, and varied and colorful worlds and cultures. I really enjoyed these books, and am waiting eagerly for the next one, since the story is definitely not finished at the end of this book. This is well-done space opera, and that's a compliment.

Erika says

Kylara Vatta has finally made it to Lastaway, safely delivered her original cargo, and is on her way to her next trading port when she suddenly finds herself in charge of much more than the command of *Fair Kaleen* and her crew. There is little doubt someone or someones are out to get Vatta Transport, Ltd, but now other trading companies are under attack as well. Ky's novice Captain skills are put to the test again as she tries to avoid trouble and postpone her grief. Corleigh has been hit hard and her childhood home is destroyed. With ansibles still down and communication at a stand still, the only question is: is her family safe or have they become victims of the explosion?

At this point, Ky's proven she has the ability, not just the potential, to be a great captain. When she's approached by her cousin Stella, Ky automatically takes command, unafraid for the consequences but more likely: willing and able to deal when the time comes. She's independent and pragmatic, nothing at all like Stella; the contrast (both physical and personality-wise) between the two makes for an interesting dynamic which Moon does not fail to take advantage of. Although I did feel Stella's characterization was a bit different from how she acted in *Marque and Reprisal*.

Stella is, almost from her first appearance here, bitter and resentful of Ky. She devolved very quickly into jealousy and her anger is too apparent not to notice. This, in light of the misunderstood, competent young woman whose current actions and abilities spoke volumes against past indiscretions did wonders for her character. Stella in action was quite different from the second hand descriptions of her. Others had low expectations of her. Her personal restraint and quiet confidence proved otherwise. Even Aunt Gracie thought more highly of her strongest abilities than other family members did of her, family that could not get past her weakest moments.

This woman was not the same Stella present in *Engaging the Enemy*. In fact, she came across as more emotionally unstable and petulant than anything else. To be fair, she also did a very impressive job at whatever Ky assigned or essentially left her to deal with. Stella was in a difficult situation in this book at every moment. My only complaint is she did not handle it well when confronting Stella. How could she? How would anyone react in private, personal conversations with so much pent up irritation? I caution that I may be too harsh on Stella; she ran the gamut of emotion and not everyone can shoulder as many burdens without breaking at some point. I still consider her to be one of my favorite characters, second only to Aunt Gracie.

We saw some of Grace Vatta's secrets at the beginning of *Marque and Reprisal*. Her cunning spy work and

covert deliveries belong to a woman with much more experience than the average “dotty” old woman. And she does not fail to disappoint readers looking for more of a peek into her character. Without spoiling the plot I can’t reveal too much more, but trust me that I hope we get to learn more about her in the final two books. She is, much like a Transformer, more than meets the eye.

There was one other character I was more interested in: Zavala. From a planet named Ciudad in the Loma Linda group and with a ship called *Dona Florenzia*, I began to suspect Moon drew heavily from existing Earth cultures to develop this man. With the additional distrust of women in power and a ridiculous sense of honor, I began to get a bad taste in my mouth at the choice of culture chosen being represented a bit negatively. Clearly, Zavala is drawn from Spanish-speaking cultures, but I found this curious since I haven’t found any other characters with as strong (I should say: obvious) real-world influence as he had (there are probably more that I haven’t recognized!). His customs are ridiculed and not considered feasible and in this way completely disrespected. But of course, I couldn’t be too critical here since the source of the incredulity was mostly from an incompetent Admiral and not entirely likable character. Ultimately, Zavala proved his worth and I’m grateful Moon included such diversity in honestly, a realistic way. And to be fair: the Cascadians were the best example of culture clash in this book.

Engaging the Enemy has the misfortune to be the middle novel in a five book series. It has to sustain the plot up until this point and carry it forth into the last two books. This gives middle books a large disadvantage. It cannot have the exciting novelty of the first, nor the satisfaction of the last. The middle book inhabits the fictional landscape between these two sides: somewhere beyond discovery, but before journey’s end. Of course, the middle book also holds great potential, especially in its position to entertain us when the adrenaline has begun to seep out of the protagonist’s system and the end is still too far away to reach in a day, but close enough to see.

With a series of five books, the middle can so easily plateau with action. *Engaging the Enemy* felt a little like that for me, much to my disappointment. While I did enjoy some of the deeper characterization of Grace and Stella, very little happened plot-wise that didn’t involve an inordinate amount of procedure that I honestly felt should have happened “off-screen.” The majority of the book suffered from the tedium of red tape and shopping assignments (toilets, textiles, canine sperm) that included selling as well as buying for ownership and trade. Kylara may be the captain of a trading vessel, she may be acting as a privateer to reestablish Vatta Transport, Ltd, but I wasn’t as engaged in the narrative as much when I was drawn through the dull routine of Vatta’s world. The world-building was a bit too much for me in this book, especially when Ky’s world revolves around very uninteresting trade cargo.

I feel very conflicted about this series, having now finished the first three books. Elizabeth Moon’s writing can be extremely compelling. I don’t argue that any difficulties I find are there. On the contrary, her writing is part of what has kept me reading this long. With a lesser author, I feel I would have given up a long time ago. I just wish most of the action in *Engaging the Enemy* wasn’t confined to the last 50 pages, especially when the rest of the book didn’t encourage it.

There was more suspicion and mystery here, more revelatory plot information that’s extremely relevant to the series as whole, but not too conducive to the type of heart-pounding excitement of the first two books. There’s something mellow in this book, something of a respite before the real fighting begins. I can only hope the next will deliver on the promises of its predecessors.

Jim says

A good space adventure with a likable heroine & some well developed characters. I'm a bit peeved because one character is STILL hiding & I think I know who it is. It's beginning to be more a point of wonderment & becoming ridiculous. Minor point though. The rest of the universe is well painted, the situation is believable & tense. It's an easy read, but not a dumb one. Better than just a candy book.
