



Pelquin's Comet

Ian Whates

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In an age of exploration and expansion, the crew of the freetrader Pelquin's Comet – a rag-tag group of misfits, ex-soldiers and ex-thieves – set out to find a cache of alien technology, intent on making their fortunes; but they are not the only interested party and find themselves in a deadly race against corporate agents and hunted by the authorities. Forced to combat enemies without and within, they strive to overcome the odds under the watchful eye of an unwelcome guest: Drake, agent of the bank funding their expedition, who is far more than he seems and may represent the greatest threat of all.

“Intrigue and action in this high octane collision between Firefly, the Bourne films and Indiana Jones. A two-fisted SF adventure, space opera as it should be written!” – Gavin Smith, author of Veteran

“It is his characters who live through the story and make the reader need to know just how it's all going to pan out, human characters who may seem familiar but then there's that one thing, that shifted alteration that changes the world and changes the reader too.” – Interzone

Pelquin's Comet Details

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From Reader Review Pelquin's Comet for online ebook

Helen Gould says

I enjoyed this a lot. It's been a while since I actually read any science fiction, as during the nineties and noughties I completely went off reading SF due to the fact that it all seemed to be related to computers and near-future settings. That didn't interest me at all - it wasn't what I signed up for!

But with this book I re-entered the genre. Sure, it has a character who has some kinky machine-based implants, but we don't really know what they are or what they can help her do, at least at the start of the book, and as this is a series I'm guessing we'll find out more and more throughout. Leesa's actually an interesting and sympathetic character, because it soon becomes evident that she's forgotten a large part of her life and how she ended up where she comes into contact with the rest of the protagonists. The other main characters are all guys, but women are by no means ignored, as the original pilot of the *Comet* is also female.

Pelquin himself, the captain of the *Comet*, is a colourful character with a background to match. Together with his one-time partner, Nate Almont, he intends to set out to find an Elder Cache (containing high-tech gadgetry) which Nate has told him about, and sets off to butter up the representative of First Solar Bank in order to get a loan to cover the equipment they'll need to get in and out of the well-protected cache. But he's reckoned without that representative's canny ways; she insists Pelquin take along Drake, a mysterious agent of the bank, in order to oversee progress and protect the bank's investment.

Drake isn't quite what he seems. In the very first chapter he's introduced as a man of action, as he gets a previous bank customer's promise to pay following renegeing on a business agreement. But he doesn't work alone; his telepathic partner is Mudball, whom everyone takes to be a Genpet (though the term's never explained, I interpreted this as an artificial pet). We quickly learn that Mudball is very much an active member of the partnership. But so is Drake...

A rival bank agent and a major corporation add conflict, of which there's also plenty between Pelquin and Almont within the crew. Almont was previously a member of the crew but left due to a disagreement with Pelquin. When his new crewmates are wiped out one by one by the cache protections, he seeks reconciliation with Pelquin. And Leesa joins the crew to replace Monkey (the ship's mechanic), injured in a contretemps with the corporation, which results in a hasty take-off as the *Comet* and its crew make a run for a planet where spares and supplies can be picked up. At first glance this seemed like a chance encounter, but I quickly realised that the corporation was behind it in order to get the cache before the crew of the *Comet* do.

Pelquin's Comet is a brew of conflicting factions, and just the thing to keep you reading. I'm intrigued enough to want to follow this up when the next one comes out.

Avid_D says

Ok, so I knew this was advertised as the first in a series, but I did not expect that even as I was reading I would be so aware of plot points which I knew were not going to be answered within the book. There is an awful lot of setting things up for later books which is something I dislike immensely and against which I

react by refusing to buy anymore in the series.

It was decently written, if not exactly groundbreaking.

The universe created seemed somewhat strange - for instance, faster than light travel but cars with squealing tyres?

The book needs more proof-reading, with grammatical/typo errors and, more annoyingly, several references to actions or words by character A when it meant character B.

Tyler says

Pelquin's Comet is an entertaining and enjoyable space opera.

Pelquin and his crew set off to find a cache of alien artifacts, rumoured to be of very high value. Along the way they have to deal with aliens ("Xters"), a new crew member with a secret, and a bank representative along for the ride (with his alien genpet) to ensure his bank's money's protected.

I think one of the best assets of the story are the characters - very well developed, and many of them have some sort of agenda going on to make things interesting. There's also plenty of action and adventure along the way.

That said, most of the tropes used are ones that have been done before, and the book can really be compared to a space version of the Tales of the Ketty Jay by Chris Wooding - an extroverted and influential captain, in a ragtag crew (many with a shady background), even the new crew member who is not quite human. Not that it made the story less, but was just noticeable.

Overall a fun read and one of the tops of 2015 - looking forward to the next in the series.

Gerhard says

There is nothing wrong with recycling genre clichés; just ask Becky Chambers. One could even argue that the only thing separating James S.A. Corey and Iain Banks, for example, is how they deal with genre baggage ... Ian Whates' response is to be as insipid and as bland as possible, to dish up a gruel-like version of the inimitable *Firefly* that leaves one hungering for The Real Thing (another cliché, alas). There is nothing original here; the characters are tired and undifferentiated; plus there are so many loose ends and glaring plot holes that this hardly hangs together as a novel at all. Hugely disappointing, not to mention a grave disservice to the Guardians of Space Opera, which Whates disingenuously, it turns out, pays feeble homage to.

J. says

This full-length space opera is so close to a five-star read that it's not worth quibbling about fractions. The characters are well fleshed and the important ones have complete arcs. The book stands alone (no cliffhanger ending) although not all questions are answered (the start of a series).

And you know how you can tell in the first few pages that you'll enjoy the book, that the author can be trusted to deliver a good story? Yeah, I got that feeling in the first paragraphs, although the early scenes, introducing one new character after another in multiple PoV shifts, did shake that a bit. Once the story settled into its stride, it was great.

The ending disappointed me some (**SPOILER ALERT** I'd hoped he'd make the other choice **END SPOILER**) and the sex scene felt gratuitous. Otherwise, even I can't find anything worth a complaint. Let's call this one 4.75 stars, rounded to five.

A free copy of this book was provided in exchange for an honest review through the Library Thing Member Giveaway program. The price of the book has no bearing upon the review or rating received.

Liviu says

re-read may 2017 on publication of 2nd volume The Ion Raider

actually started The Ion Raider first and then realized that while I remembered the striking ending and a few details, I had forgotten a lot of the Pelquin Comet, especially the part about Leesa with whom The Ion raider sort of starts (not directly but with an assassination attempt on Jen/Shadow, another former Dark Angel, and while she escapes that, she is almost killed on the run when Leesa/Hel N intervenes in the nick of time), so did a re-read of this one first; have to say that I greatly enjoyed it now too and while I kind of remembered everything as I was reading, it still was a page turner that I couldn't put down until finished; for my impressions on original read see below

(original review on publication 2015)

fast, fun and intriguing so far, kept me turning pages until my eyes closed

finished the novel as expected and it was big fun - haven't really enjoyed a space opera romp like this in a while now, not to speak that the ending while at a definite stopping point only whetted my appetite for more

the blurb is accurate and gives an idea about what's going on so i will say only a little

the characters and the world building are the stars while the plot is generally predictable - though there are a few twists, one in the middle and one at the end that i did not see, another also close to the end that was more telegraphed but still enjoyable - and there is a lot of promise here - the combination of fortune hunting in space (elder race caches), an alien civilization (the "Xter") with which humanity coexists peacefully but uneasily, fanatics with a mission (venerating the missing elder race and believing that finding and using their caches is blasphemy deserving of death) and while maybe not quite fanatics, but let's say people with an

agenda (of uplifting humanity by technological augmentation) that was quite uncomfortable for the government (so they are believed to have been suppressed) and also the most famous fortune hunter crew of all times (the dark angels of the title series), whose members now are missing and presumed dead and I expect a second installment to continue this superb series

highly recommended and a top 25 for the year

Jason says

5 Stars

Pelquin's Comet by Ian Whates is a fabulous summer read. It is filled with action, adventure, mystery, and a whole lot of space romping fun. This is a book and series that will appeal to fans of Firefly or The Tales of the Ketty Jay. In fact, this book has a great deal of resemblance to Wooding's amazing series. What does this mean...It means that this is a fun space opera meant to take you on a wild ride. The real difference between Pelquin's Comet and the aforementioned is the writing of Whates. He writes at a fairly high level with concepts and vocabulary giving this series a much needed twist into the science of things.

The quest like adventure is done well. The characters are all likable, witty, and all clearly holding back on something. The book is a real page turner and I quickly came to see why I am a fan of Ian Whates.

A fun summer adventure and fantastic start to a new series. Highly recommended!

Andrew Wallace says

The cloaking device used by the titular spaceship to sneak into alien territory feels like a metaphor for the characters in Ian Whates's bracing space opera. Most of these people have ulterior motives, with the motives of one so ulterior she doesn't even know them herself. Such duality seems to be a survival mechanism in the world of the novel, because the single honest character dies horribly at the wraithy hands of... Well, read it and see.

Even the cute, furry Mudball needs close watching as he may or may not be the most dangerous entity in the book. Mudball accompanies an enigmatic banker called Drake, whose mission is to accompany Captain Pelquin when the latter borrows large sums to retrieve a secret cache of priceless Elder technology.

Pelquin's Comet is crewed by competent reprobates who wouldn't be allowed anywhere near Starfleet. After Pelquin, the most interesting of the original crew is Bren, an ex-soldier turned engineer. Engineer characters are hard to get right and female ones especially, but the author pulls it off here. Yes, Bren is in love with the captain, but spends most of the novel furious with him for one reason or another. She blends the soldier and technical roles traditionally given to male characters with no sense of the issue being forced.

Indeed, one of the best aspects of the novel is its female cast. I preferred them to the men, including Pelquin, who fancies himself as a prime mover in a dangerous universe but often comes across as smug.

Even more striking than Bren is the androgynous, amnesiac Leesa, who joins the crew when Bren's fellow engineer Monkey is injured in an ambush. Leesa is sexually confused in a lovely, believable way. She is also great at unarmed combat and possessed of a thoroughness with technology that is just the right side of obsessive. Once aboard Pelquin's Comet, Leesa is disturbed by increasingly vivid dreams of combat and conspiracy. These visions come from a past linked with Pelquin's mission via Drake, who knows Leesa's

real identity but doesn't reveal it for complex reasons of his own.

Androgyny also features in another engaging character: the female banking executive Terry Reece. Terry has the courage to back Pelquin's mission, regardless of the feeling there is more to it than he is willing to admit. Although Drake is dispatched as a result of Terry's intuition, she has a strong sense of leadership in common with Pelquin. Neither are micromanagers and both understand the awkward truth that most results are achieved through trust, despite everyone's insistence on using either contracts or high-tech spying.

As expected in a story of this kind, there is an abundance of clever gadgets. My favourite is the sample of awesome but useless Elder tech Pelquin uses to impress Terry. However, most of the cities have cars, shops and other commercial structures we are evolving out of in 2017. It may be that there needs to be some familiarity amid the exoticism, and the backwater nature of the planets is emphasised, but there is sometimes a sense that we could just as easily be on Earth, now, rather than on an alien world in the future.

A related cavil is the use of descriptive cliché ('a certain rakish charm'), as if the author is in a hurry. These phrases distract from a solidly-written SF adventure with some great inventions, like a disturbing but funny version of hyperspace that literally drains people of the will to live.

More intriguing still is a world inhabited by both humans and the insect-like Xters. Since the Elders disappeared thousands of years ago, and the devious Mudball disguises himself as a genetically engineered pet, the Xters appear to be the only other advanced race in the galaxy. The world they share with a research party of humans is recollects in snatches by Leesa, who lived there with her fathers. There is a welcome touch of dangerous otherness to this environment. Hopefully we'll see more of it in future novels in the sequence, while the Xters themselves are a source of some splendid plot twists.

Les says

English author Ian Whates has been around for a while now as a publisher, editor and author and I've been meaning to give one of his offerings a crack for some time, especially since he has been responsible for publishing stories from a few of my firm favourite sci-fi writers like Peter F. Hamilton & Eric Brown. Based on this, I naturally assumed that maybe Mr Whates has the same good taste as me (IMHO) and finally sought out some of his own work. What caught my eye first was *Pelquin's Comet*, a shortish novel and the first in a (so far) two-part series called *The Dark Angels*. It turns out that it's a bloody good story, spinning my wheels up pretty good and arousing my imagination wonderfully because it's brimming with many solid sci-fi tropes and elements.

Right from the start, Whates gets you thinking, and you just know that you're in for some twists and turns. That's exactly what you get, a medium-to-fast paced story with fun and interesting characters and a plot that keeps you thinking right to the very last page - just my sort of thing. It's a fun ride, travelling faster-than-light with the crew of the small trading ship *Pelquin's Comet* under the command of the rather full-of-himself Captain Pelquin. The ship is crewed by a stereotypical bunch of rogues who come together to form an efficient crew, their intention to make as much money as possible from their various ventures cavorting around the galaxy. In this story, we're taken on a quest to acquire a cache of ancient technology left behind by the Elders - an advanced civilisation which seemed to have abandoned the galaxy centuries ago. The Elders, no doubt (and hopefully), will play a much larger role in the greater story arc, as will many of the key characters.

Pelquin requires a considerable loan from a bank to facilitate the recovery mission, which he is able to secure, but not without Drake who is one of the bank's agents (along with his unique and more-than-meets-the-eye alien companion), tagging along for the ride. Also added to the crew of the *Comet* as a stand-in

engineer is Leesa, a woman who does not even know who she really is herself. What becomes clear early on, is that these two, as well as a few others who pop up along the way, are a whole lot more than who they initially appear to be. We're given glimpses into their somewhat nefarious pasts which I assume will become much clearer as the series moves forward. The book comes to a satisfactory conclusion but it probably asks more questions than it answers and requires you to seek out the next book in the series *The Ion Raider* for more. The action is good, not too graphic yet gritty enough for a story such as this and pretty much perfect for a general audience. My only genuine critical observation would be that I found myself now and then wanting to see a little bit more of the various locations that are visited in the story. But the world-building is still more than adequate, the author no doubt saving the word count for the guts of the story.

The combination of fun and intriguing plot, effective characterization and an easy flowing style makes this a very entertaining read. It's a boisterous space romp between the stars and I'd recommend it to anybody who enjoys solid grass-roots sci-fi to be immersed in and chill out with. That's my purpose for reading books like this much of the time and why I enjoyed it so much.

Heike says

Entertaining story, interesting characters. I did really enjoy this book but was not satisfied with the ending. Like a delicious meal that leaves one hungry. The characters were set up with sometimes even too many flash backs, and still many secrets, and since the book was written as a first in a series I could live with it expecting it to be a set up for the next books to come. Except ... two years after this novel was published there is no follow up. Which makes me feel like I wasted my time learning all about these characters, since the plot line of this book ended a bit hasty and more like an after thought "*huh* besides describing characters, there needs to be a story line, too".

I gave it a 4-star rating before I found out that the sequels are missing. Down to three stars. Give me the next book and I will update the rating! ;)

Jacey says

Ian Whates: Pelquin's Comet

The Dark Angels #1

Space opera, adventure, treasure hunting, a motley crew, aliens and some corporate intrigue are the building blocks that form this science fiction tale from Ian Whates. Pelquin is a free trader/ The Comet, his ship, and motley crew, bear some resemblance to the Firefliesque scenario (no bad thing in my book) in which a rag-tag bunch of adventurers skirt the barely legal side of free trade amongst a collection of worlds. Pelquin, the captain has a lead on a cache of valuable alien artefacts, but to get at them he needs to finance his expedition with a hefty loan from the First Solar Bank. He gets the loan, but also acquires a sharp-suited banker, Drake, who is a lot more than he seems to be, and, when his engineer, Monkey, is injured, Pel casually acquires a young woman replacement who's not quite sure who or what she is, but super-soldier wouldn't be far off the mark.

This is a set-up book for more adventures and so there are a lot of potential avenues unexplored, but on this first showing I'd be happy to read more books set in the dark Angels universe. Some questions are answered, more are asked, so if (like me) you like your spaceship crews a little rough and ready. Morally ambiguous while retaining the general designation of good-guys, this is for you. It's well-paced, twisty and gives a good

glimpse into the possibilities of Pelquin's universe. Oh, and it's got a gorgeous cover - art by Jim Burns.

Leo says

This is the first book of what must be at least a trilogy. I have now read books 1&2 of The Dark Angels series--the second is The Ion Raider. I am reviewing them together. Nice action and character development. Ian Whates gets better with every book--not just in this series, I think. Classic space opera, leavened with humor. Both books can stand alone, but the character development works better if they are read together. My only quibble is that there is not yet any word on the third book.

edifanob says

Really entertaining space opera with well fleshed characters.
I look forward to the new adventures of the Comet crew.
It is remarkable that the author did not shy away from killing of one of the more important characters.

Andi Fitzherbert says

Really enjoyed Pelquin's Comet. It's kind of like Firefly with some more obvious magic/scifi/unusual elements. It reads really smoothly - someone who obviously knows his craft here. The characters reveal nicely and a couple are drawing me to reading the next book as I want to know how things pan out for them.

Nice concise 'complete' story although it's obviously going to be a trilogy.

Tom Loock says

I very rarely give five stars to any novel, but this one ticks all the boxes for me:

A great cast of characters with enough intrigue left for sequels, yet fleshed out sufficiently to make them interesting from the start.

A background/universe that is not too complex to memorize, beautifully described ("*Vast bridges spanned the Kusbah's expanse at irregular intervals – seeming from this vantage to be crude stitches across an open wound, holding the two halves of the city together.*" at ca. 25%) with enough white areas on the map for the future.

A story that is obviously part of a longer and wider arch, but is complete in itself and includes some nice twists.

I am **very** much looking forward to the sequel I have just purchased and wouldn't mind reading more than "only" a trilogy in this universe. Recommended for fans of Becky Chambers and of *Firefly*, naturally.
