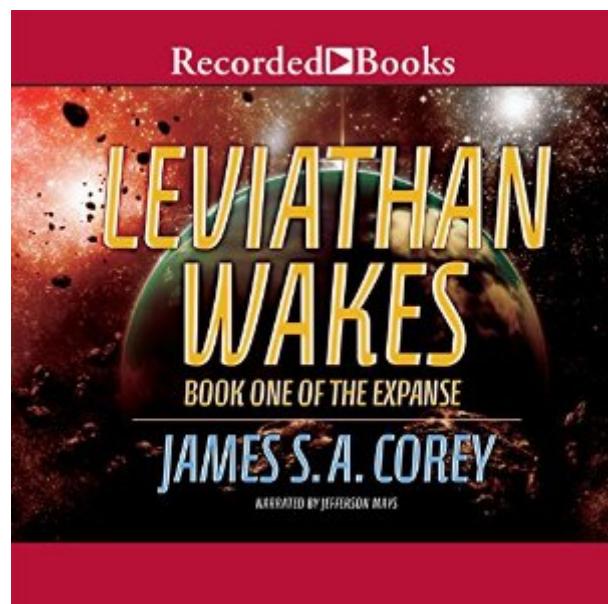


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# Leviathan Wakes



## Synopsis

James S.A. Corey delivers compelling SF that ranks with the best in the field. In Leviathan Wakes, ice miner Jim Holden is making a haul from the rings of Saturn when he and his crew encounter an abandoned ship, the Scopuli. Uncovering a terrifying secret, Jim bears the weight of impending catastrophe. At the same time, a detective has been hired by well-heeled parents to find a missing girl, and the investigator's search leads him right to the Scopuli.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The Canterbury, an ice-hauling ship, receives a distress signal from the Scopuli, a deserted ship with a hole in the hull and a transmitter that sends a signal as soon as the ship is boarded. Soon the Canterbury is attacked and destroyed by a frigate that appears to be part of the Martian Navy. Only the shuttle crew that boarded the Scopuli survives, including XO Jim Holden. When Holden broadcasts the details of the attack, the news nearly ignites a war between residents of the Belt (represented by the Outer Planets Alliance) and those of Mars. Holden's story, told in the odd-numbered chapters, unfolds from there. The story told in the even-numbered chapters belongs to Miller, a security officer (essentially a corporate cop) on Ceres, a Belt gateway. Miller is assigned to find Julie Mao, the missing daughter of a wealthy corporate executive, and return her to her parents. Miller eventually hears that Julie shipped out on the Scopuli and he goes looking for her. A little less than halfway into the novel, the two storylines converge as Miller and Holden meet in a moment of unexpected violence. Miller's investigation leads him to a conspiracy that relates to the

prologue in which a character melts into goo. More than that I cannot say without revealing too much of the lengthy but carefully plotted story. This is throwback science fiction, an old school space opera married to a futuristic detective story. While much of the background in Leviathan Wakes is familiar (the privatization of law enforcement, the conflict between the old "inner planets" and the rebellious "outer planets" that resent being taxed and controlled by Earth), James Corey (the combined pen name of Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck) does an impressive job of making it seem fresh. I particularly liked the Byzantine nature of interstellar politics as envisioned by Corey. I also appreciated the characters' philosophical debate about the merits of making potentially unreliable information openly available, even if it might lead to war (which Holden advocates) as opposed to concealing facts to prevent the aggression and rioting that might be sparked by faulty conclusions (as Miller advises). In the context of the story, neither position is clearly correct; that's the kind of nuanced writing that is too rare in science fiction. Equally impressive is Corey's ability to tell an exciting story ("exciting" being a descriptor I don't often use). Battle scenes, both in space and hand-to-hand, are frequent and furious; they create genuine tension. While the novel is filled with action and thus moves quickly, none of it is mindless; the plot is intelligent and credible. The writing is sharp; occasional sentences and phrases are quite clever. The characters aren't particularly deep but that's the norm in plot-driven sf. Holden and Miller nonetheless work well as archetypes that play against each other: idealist vs. cynic (although neither character is so limited as to become a stereotype). Miller's dependence on his mental construct of Julie -- throughout the novel, he imagines this woman he never met as a trusted friend, a moral touchstone -- is an effective device that humanizes Miller. If I have a complaint, it's that having characters melt into goo is sufficiently horrific without introducing the concept of "vomit zombies" (don't ask); the latter made it difficult to take the story seriously. Fortunately, vomit zombies are a relatively minor aspect of the plot. Leviathan Wakes is the first book in a series that will collectively be known as *The Expanse*. Given the quality of this novel, I'll be sure to read the next one. I would give Leviathan Wakes 4 1/2 stars if I could.

If you like Space Opera, this will be the book for you: Leviathan Wakes, by author James A. Corey (a collaboration between Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck). Spanning much of our solar system, it's an epic story in a reasonably near future, with an excellently conceived of environment and a fun story that is both action packed and thoughtful. Leviathan Wakes is the embodiment of what good space opera should be: there's a bit of a scientific background that helps to inform the plot, but the focus of this story is on the characters and major events that blast the story forward. As such,

Leviathan Wakes works on a number of levels. Throughout the story, the influence of two authors who have been identified strongly with the fantasy genre is clear in the text: there is a wide, sweeping and epic sense to the world that's been constructed here, and the fingerprints feel very much like there's experience with fantasy here. This ranges from the somewhat tired: some of the characters feel almost a little too forced with the world-weary or tough guy things that some modern fantasy novels seem to be saddled with, to the good: the world building and scale of the storyline, which seems to grow and grow. In a large sense, a space opera story has far more in common with a fantasy novel, as opposed to a straight up science fiction novel, although Leviathan Wakes feels at times like it's caught between the two, for better and worse: for most of the story, it's evenly balanced between the two, and it works very well from that standpoint: the science helps to inform the rules of *The Expanse*, while the fantastic elements get taken over by the story and its own momentum. In a recent blog post somewhere, someone made the comment that Orbit was betting that a recent offer of a free ebook copy of Leviathan Wakes paired with a copy of Abraham's book *The Dragon's Path* would pull in a crossover audience from the fantasy fans, and after reading through this, I can easily believe it. Leviathan Wakes stands out amongst a lot of books for the world-building efforts that have been put together for this story. In this far future, humanity hasn't quite made it out to the stars, but they've made it out into the neighborhood: Earth's Moon, Mars, (Venus had abortive attempts), the asteroid belt, the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, and as far out as some of the moons of Neptune, all have some element of human habitation, with a wonderfully rich human society living and working within our solar system. Self-sustaining governments have grown up with their own cultures, and the book really shines by adding in an enormous depth to the environment in which the story is placed: it helps turn what would be a fairly average novel into something that really stuck in my head, and makes me biting at the bit for the next installments in the projected three book series. The story that's settled in the world is one that works well: the destruction of a ship travelling through the solar system on a transit run, when they come across an abandoned ship, *The Scopuli*. When their ship is destroyed, a wave of outrage runs across the solar system, angering two sides of a brewing conflict, and pitting the Belters, Earthers and Martians against one another. At the same time, a cop is tasked with tracking down a girl for a family, bringing him on another track towards *The Scopuli*, and soon, the main characters are caught between revolution and corporate interests. The story really surprised me at points as the authors angled things in unexpected ways, and they manage to pack quite a bit into the pages. The book falls roughly into three parts (and I thought that it could have transitioned a bit better between each of the acts), that bring the story higher and higher to the end, and the entire thing is really a rush

from beginning to end. If there's any fault with the book, it's in the execution, where it felt like some of the book could have been trimmed down from its lengthily page count (almost 600 pages in my copy), and at some points, it feels as if there's parts that are just far too wordy, with excess exposition and explanation that didn't necessarily need to be present. This book is one that I'll predict will divide audiences along a science fiction / space opera divide. The science here exists mainly in the background: there's some plausible elements here, as well as the usual grain of salt, as ships careen back and forth between the Belt and various planets, with some token explanations, but it's not the central focus of the story. People will fall on either side, either advocating for a stronger or more realistic setting for the stories, and people who might argue that it's not necessarily all that important to the story and that it should be enjoyed on its own merits. Coming to the end, I think that the latter argument holds up a bit better, but I'm happy to see that the authors have given a bit to support it in some measure of reality. At the end of the day, Leviathan Wakes was a book that I really enjoyed: there wasn't a moment that I found myself really bored, and few occasions wondering why the book was drifting aimlessly: we've got a fun space opera story that's created one hell of a world to play in, with this story thundering out the gates, all guns ablaze, while touching on everything from military science fiction to romantic entanglements, and I'm already awaiting to see what happens next in The Expanse. Originally posted to my blog.

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