



Zeroboxer

Fonda Lee

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A Sci-Fi Thrill Ride Set in the Action-Packed Sports Arena of the Future

A rising star in the weightless combat sport of zeroboxing, Carr “the Raptor” Luka dreams of winning the championship title. Recognizing his talent, the Zero Gravity Fighting Association assigns Risha, an ambitious and beautiful Martian colonist, to be his brandhelm—a personal marketing strategist. It isn’t long before she’s made Carr into a popular celebrity and stolen his heart along the way.

As his fame grows, Carr becomes an inspirational hero on Earth, a once-great planet that’s fallen into the shadow of its more prosperous colonies. But when Carr discovers a far-reaching criminal scheme, he becomes the keeper of a devastating secret. Not only will his choices place everything he cares about in jeopardy, but they may also spill the violence from the sports arena into the solar system.

Zeroboxer Details

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Author : Fonda Lee

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From Reader Review Zeroboxer for online ebook

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

At first, I thought that *Zeroboxer* was just Rocky in space, but as the story developed, I realized that it was more than that. *Zeroboxer* is also an examination of genetic ethics and, like most science fiction, poses some serious 'what if's. What if humanity begins to settle the universe- will they divide themselves into different races depending upon their planet of origins? What if the settlers develop their own system of government- how will humankind negotiate the potentially choppy waters of intergalactic politics? What if humanity could use gene therapy not just to eliminate disease but also to create a sort of super human? Fonda Lee has imagined a future filled with flawed but well-meaning people that feels very similar to our own and is, perhaps, not as far into the future as one may imagine.

The style of boxing in this story incorporates mixed martial arts with the added hiccup of no gravity: *"To inflict any bare-handed damage to a person in zero gravity, you had to establish a brace or a point of leverage- preferably a vulnerable part of your opponent's body- to keep them from floating away while you hurt them. Or you had to treat space itself as a weapon, using the infinite angles of movement to strike and rebound, strike and rebound, faster and harder than the other guy."* pg 13, ebook. Fans of MMA may enjoy this story more than I did- I don't particularly care for violence but it was never too graphic or more than I could handle.

The colonists who settled on Mars (the Martians) embraced zero gravity sports while the people who stayed behind on Earth (the Terrans) didn't. Luka, the main character in this story, is from Earth and he's part of a group that is trying to popularize the sport on Earth- with mixed success: *"I left Mars twenty-five year ago, saying I was going to grow the sport with the Terrans. I was practically laughed off the Red Planet. All the best zeroboxers in the Martian system... you know what they said to me? 'Everyone on the old planet is a planet rat. The most daring and inventive Terrans left generations ago to build Mars and the other settlements. Why would a place with countless gravity-dependent sports want anything different?'"* pg 27, ebook.

The story becomes even more complicated because the Martians have accepted gene therapy as a way to improve and expand their race, while the Terrans only use it to keep children from developing poor eye sight or asthma. The Martian fighters are so dominant at the sport because not only were they born into a world that encouraged zero gravity sports, but also they were partially engineered to be that way. When the boxers from Earth face the boxers from Mars, it is more than planet vs planet- it is also a match up of nature vs science.

Luka doesn't want to consider the complexities of it all and just wants to fight: *"Two guys go into a Cube. They fight. One of them beats the other. How much simpler can it be? People don't have to make it more than it is."* pg 176, ebook. Will Luka get his wish?

This book should appeal to fans of Ender's Game or Red Rising (which is a much more adult examination of these themes).

Bogi Takács says

This was exactly my thing. More about it in a bit. (IY"H) I am piled under Transcendent 3 stuff, but I want to review it later. Just a few notes -

Note that it is more NA-ish, with a 18yo pro athlete character who is already contemplating things like career and marriage. (This is not a problem!!) It is hard to find NA that is not entirely a romance, and this has a plot about sports and performance enhancement (and a really good one!!). So you might want to check it out if you're interested in something like that. Note that the protag is very straight.

Also

- * Ownvoices on sports too, the author is a martial artist (AND IT SHOWS)
- * Racially mixed protagonist
- * Lower-class and/or poor characters
- * FIGHTING IN SPACE (ok, technically on space stations, but. :D)
- * The mentions of CTE made my little health scientist heart happy (I was thinking "wouldn't this be an issue" and yes, it was discussed)
- * Realistic depictions of marketing (!!) as part of the plot (!!!)

Source of the book: Lawrence Public Library

Jessica says

Would you like an extremely quick breakdown of this book? I'll oblige. Zeroboxer is Rocky, in space. Oh yes, my friends. Complete with the craggy, but ultimately lovable coach, and all the related drama. That's not to say that this isn't a good book. I'm simply telling you exactly what to expect. This was most definitely a different kind of Science Fiction than I'm used to, and I'm still not quite sure how I feel about it.

First off, credit where credit is due. The sport of zeroboxing is so well fleshed out in this story that it isn't even funny. You won't just be reading about Carr's matches, you'll live them. Fonda Lee has not only built a sport, she's built a sport that actually makes sense. I felt the tension, heard the cheers, and watched the blood float around in zero gravity. If nothing else, this book will get you for that very reason. It's hard not to be caught up with the sport, and everything that comes along with it.

Even the world itself is pretty solid, since it's essentially Toronto in the far flung future. Genetic enhancements are the norm. Tattoos are done with an animated liquid. Best of all, travel between Earth and Mars is something that's done often. The one downside here is that the reader is thrown directly into this future without a whole lot of hand holding. While I eventually found my footing, it took me a while to truly associate Carr's life with his futuristic home. If it wasn't for the references to zero gravity boxing, I'd have been much more lost.

Now here's where things get a bit hairy. First off, I wasn't always a huge fan of Carr Luka. Our main character felt a little too perfect. Thus, when things started to turn sour for him, I wasn't really empathetic. I actually wanted him to lose. If just once. It's no fun to root for someone who is nigh unbeatable. Nor is it easy to feel bad when they're injured. My other issue was with how casually the topic of people being genetically enhanced in the womb, and the fact that only bad parents didn't do that, was mentioned and then tossed aside. I understand this was part of the world building, but I needed more. That's a big subject to simply touch on.

Overall, I was fairly impressed with *Zeroboxer*. I'm not generally a big fan of sports related books or movies, but this one held my interest. The union between boxing and Sci Fi definitely made this a different read than I was expecting, and a rather happy surprise.

Sunil says

I first heard about *Zeroboxer* from my *Lightspeed* book review editor Wendy Wagner last November, but I was like, I don't care about boxing. When the book came out, it got a lot of good buzz, so when I went to Sasquan, Fonda Lee was on my radar. Turns out she's a very cool person, and I bought the book and started reading it on the way home.

Fonda Lee describes *Zeroboxer* as "*Rocky* meets *Gattaca*" and *that is actually an accurate description*.

In the future the coolest sport is zeroboxing, which is boxing in zero-gravity, which means it's a lot more than just punching so it's a bit closer to space MMA. Carr Luka is a rising star, a teenage hotshot who's got all the right moves. I don't care about boxing but zeroboxing is *so cool*: the Cube is like Thunderdome meets Battle Room, as fighters fly through the arena, kicking off the sides and launching themselves at their opponents and then grappling for control and pain. The fights are marvelously choreographed and smoothly written; I could clearly envision what was going on, and I winced with each hit. Lee spends a lot of time detailing the first few fights to give the reader a good sense of what the sport looks like, but after that, she understands when to pull back and summarize to avoid drowning the reader in the detail. It's a good balance, and it makes the moments where we're right there in the fight with Carr that much more visceral.

Much of the book does follow a traditional sports narrative, as we root for Carr to defeat his opponents and become successful, make his home, his friends, his family proud. But I liken his role to that of Katniss's in *Catching Fire*: it becomes more about him as a celebrity and symbol, and how he gets caught up in the media narrative of his own life.

The *Gattaca* comparison comes from the prevalence of genetic engineering. In the future, humans need not be held back by disabilities like asthma or nearsightedness, as long as you can afford it. The baby-making process can include requested enhancements, and...wouldn't you know it, there's a whole *race* of genetically engineered humans living on Mars! I love the worldbuilding in this book, especially how Lee allows the background to speak for itself, never spending paragraphs or pages on infodumps. While the details of Martian colonization are unclear—I have no sense of how far in the future this book takes place, or how long people have been living on Mars, and I didn't really care—Terran-Martian relations are quite clear. I found it fascinating how Martians were essentially treated as people of color (literal aliens, despite being genetically superior humans).

The real meat of the story doesn't emerge for a while, but Carr's zeroboxing career is compelling enough, and he's a likable, sympathetic character, even though he has his flaws, his moments where he lost me for a bit. Part of it is the curious experience of reading the male gaze as written by a woman: Carr *is* a teenage boy, and so pretty much every woman he sees is described in terms of how attractive she is. The zeroboxing ring includes scantily clad women holding up signs (I would have hoped we'd move past that in the future). Carr's love interest, though incredibly savvy, driven, and competent, is seen so frequently through Carr's horny-teenager eyes that even *I* was attracted to her (some steamy scenes in this book!). I wouldn't have minded so much if she weren't the only major female character besides Carr's mom, who appears a couple times, and a female zeroboxer I would have loved to see more of because this is a very dudely book full of dudes

punching each other.

Zeroboxer is not exactly the "sci-fi thrill ride" the back of the book proclaims, as that implies more chase scenes and explosions, but it *is* a very well paced, thoughtful novel full of fighting, suspense, romance, more fighting, and great worldbuilding. I would give it two thumbs up but you can't see my thumbs inside these boxing gloves in spaaaaaaaaace.

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

Quick & Dirty: Gravity-defying solar sports contests and a life altering secret.

Opening Sentence: Carr Luka woke from a nap three hours before his fight.

The Review:

I am not a fan of any kind of sport, whether it's football, basketball or golf, and although this book is based on a sport called 'zeroboxing' it had me hooked. Zeroboxing isn't any sport you've heard of before, it's an inter-planet sport that is like boxing but without gravity! This story is set on Valtego; which is best described as a sort of space-station in between Earth and Mars. I was fascinated by the concept of a gravity-defying sport that's played on multiple planets.

Blake shook his head. "You've never been to that place, Carr." Was it a good or bad sign that he was weirdly at ease, his eyes distant? "Where you know you can't win...but you can decide not to lose."

Carr Luka is training as a professional zeroboxer and despite his young age, he's racing his way to the top. Life seems to be perfect for Carr; he's excelling in his career, has a lovely girlfriend and just landed a solid contract with The Martian. Just as his dreams are coming true he learns a secret that shatters his self-pride and could cost him everything: his career, the love of his life and his dream.

Carr drank in the sight, letting its sweet flavour infuse his euphoria. Victory was a better high than a hundred bliss bombs. Perfect and real, lasting for days, even weeks, before being polished and stored in its own special nook of his soul, each win in his collection unique and everlasting, wanting nothing except more neighbours.

I loved the way this story is written: the author's descriptions of Carr's feelings, the fights themselves, how the planet's look. It was all described brilliantly. Sometimes you can read the perfect storyline but the writing will let you down but in this case, even the duller events are depicted excellently.

Now he was on the up again. Attention could be good or bad, he decided, but it didn't really matter. "Fighting isn't a popularity contest," he said.

Onto Carr himself; he's an excellent protagonist: kind, hardworking and most of all, determined to succeed. The secret he uncovers devastates him (no spoilers), mainly because Carr has worked tirelessly to win and he's so proud of this so it's unfair to see how quickly one truth could take it all away! This could destroy not only his life, but of those he holds dear.

“You were perfect.”

“What do you mean? I didn’t do anything.”

“You looked confident, you paid attention, you were serious, but funny, and you didn’t act like a prima donna or a jerk. You have no idea how rare that is, for a sports celebrity?”

Once Carr learns of the truth, he struggles with what he should do. He’s come too far to go back but the guilt is eating him away. Can he give up his life’s work or will he continue to live in fear? Whatever the decision, everything as he knows it has changed...

This is a fantastic read and it surprised me how much I enjoyed it and I hope you give it a chance too!

Notable Scene:

A shudder of distaste ran through Carr, along with a strange and immense fatigue. Why was all this happening to him? There was a time, not that long ago, when things were a lot simpler. When he knew who he was, and what he wanted, and the world seemed like the sort of place that would reward him if he worked hard enough, and each step he took went forward, toward something better.

FTC Advisory: Flux provided me with a copy of Zeroboxer. No goody bags, sponsorships, “material connections,” or bribes were exchanged for my review.

Megan (YABookers) says

I received this free from the publishers via NetGalley

I really shouldn't leave it so long to write my reviews as I'm never any good at them when I leave it so long but too much work...

Carr Luka is one of the best at the weightless sport of zeroboxing. He dreams of winning the championship and after a great fight he gets a new contract who want to make him a star. He is assigned a marketing strategist Risha, and the two soon fall in love. Carr becomes an inspiration on earth but his life is soon turned upside down when he discovers a secret about himself which changes everything.

This was a pretty decent read, but I guess I was expecting more. I should probably learn from my mistakes and stop having too high expectations for books. I felt like the world building was pretty good, but it could have been better. I found the plot to be good, but as someone who isn't a sport fan, it just was not as interesting as it could have been so it is more of a personal thing. Saying that, it was an original take on boxing and it was done really well. There were some intense moments, but I felt like it dragged a lot. I found the 'criminal' element intriguing and fairly suspenseful.

The characters were pretty decent and I felt like Carr was very well developed and complex. The secondary characters however, I thought fell short as it not as much attention was given to the secondary characters as there was to Carr. They were all likeable enough, but all felt a little flat to me. Same with the romance, as it felt rushed. However, one positive is that is was not at the forefront of the story.

Overall a good science fiction read, and if you are a fan of sport and boxing then this is a must read.

Lee Kelly says

This is quite simply one of the best science fiction novels I've ever read.

As a reader, I was totally swept away: I found myself rooting hard for Carr, thought the rich world of the future that Lee imagines -- Mars/Earth tension, Luna, space station "vacation" colonies -- was completely immersive, and I gobbled up the thrilling zeroboxing scenes. But as a writer, I might be even more impressed if that's possible. Fonda Lee has not only built a world in ZEROBOXER, she's created a sport -- from the rules and regulations right down to the fandom feeds. It's such a unique and wonderful debut, and I know I will be thinking about this story for quite a long time. I highly recommend this to anyone -- sci-fi readers, sports lovers, thriller readers -- it's a PHENOMENAL novel.

Lata says

3.5 stars. Fast-paced story with believable fight descriptions in the zeroboxing ring, as well as a credible future that includes space travel, gene modifications for health as well as cosmetic purposes, and interplanetary tensions between Earth and Mars. Carr is a young zeroboxer who is incredibly focused and determined to win a prizefight. He's given a new brandhelm, Risha, who ensure Carr's profile is raised. Carr, of course, falls for her. (I had some problems with the relationship between these two; why did nobody mention how wrong it was for Carr and Risha to have a relationship??) We follow Carr over the course of a year while he trains and fights, and what was an interesting story of a young man with goals he was willing to work for transforms into something deeper and darker when Carr discovers some truths about himself. (And how funny was it to find out part of the story was set in Toronto, and even better, the TTC is still moving people around the city!)

Beth says

Fonda Lee sends us on a totally new extreme fighting thrill ride with an endearing romance to boot.

Luka Carr is the up and coming hopeful for the Zeroboxer championship. His talent is unsurpassed. He is assigned a brandhelm, a personal promoter named Risha. The attraction is evident immediately between Luka and Risha and sparks soon fly.

This is a very different world they live in. Mars is colonized. Space stations offer vacation retreats (hence the zero gravity) and old earth is now called Terran. Genetic altering is banned but genetic enhancements (scanning) is encouraged to avoid bad eye sight, genetic illnesses, etc. allowing an individual to obtain modifications that will fix their deficiencies.

Luka's dream is to become a hero with the Terran cities while his brandhelm, Risha is part Martain. Tension is growing between the Martians and Terran born which doesn't matter to either Risha or Luka. But as Luka becomes more famous a powerful secret is revealed that could derail not only his hopes for the championship but his totally career and his hopes to become a role model for Terran.

You can't deny that *Zeroboxer* is a kick butt fighting storyline but Lee also manages to give us a great romance and side story that will keep you vested till the end. There is also strong supporting characters and a very unique and original plot.

I really enjoyed reading *Zeroboxer*. The story is told with lots of betrayal, love, friendship and action. *Zeroboxer* has a little something for everyone, MMA type fighting, scifi/futuristic dystopia, romance, and action.

I received this ARC copy of *Zeroboxer* from Flux in exchange for a honest review. This book is set for publication April 8, 2015.

Written by: Fonda Lee

Stand Alone

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Genre: Scifi | dystopia

Find this book on: Amazon | Barnes & Noble

Reviewed for: <http://tometender.blogspot.com>

Justine says

"You've never been to that place...That place where you know you can't win...but you can decide not to lose."

Carr Luka is a rising star in the sport of zeroboxing, which is essentially a kind of MMA where participants fight in a zero gravity cube instead of a ring. His story is a fairly simple one and we see the rise of the small time fighter as he makes it big. So what makes *Zeroboxer* a little different then? Because if you're like me, you don't really care at all about sports, but you do want to read a good YA SF book if there is one on offer.

First of all, the world building is very nicely done. In the future Fonda Lee paints in *Zeroboxer*, only very moderate genetic enhancements are accepted on Earth in order to correct health deficiencies such as asthma or poor eyesight. People who immigrate to Mars, however, undergo a much deeper form of genetic enhancement in order to thrive on that planet. There is a great deal of tension between Terrans and Martians and the physical differences between the two as a result of Martian genetic engineering only serves to emphasize the fact there are fundamental philosophical differences as well. There are two zeroboxing associations, one for Terran fighters, who would have to fit within highly regulated Terran guidelines for moderate genetic corrections only, and one for Martian fighters, where genetic enhancement is unregulated because it is embraced. In the first half of the book Luka is fighting only in his own association, but later on we see the Terran zeroboxers take on the Martian zeroboxers, and the question of genetic enhancements becomes a more central issue.

As Luka's success and popularity increases, so does the pride his home planet has in him. His personal life comes under scrutiny and the fact that his girlfriend and brandhelm, or marketing agent, is half Martian stirs some controversy. He also has to deal with the inevitable changes to his personal life that success brings. But there are also secrets about his life that are revealed that he is completely unprepared to deal with, and that he has to try and cope with essentially on his own.

The book does a very good job of capturing the stress and excitement of an athlete working to reach the pinnacle of success. The romantic sub-plot was surprisingly understated but also important to the story. Risha is a strong and career-oriented woman, supportive of Luka, but also clearly someone he trusts and relies on as well. She never comes off as simply a show piece, and Luka never treats her that way.

Overall, for a debut novel in particular I was pretty impressed. The pacing of the book is spot on and kept me turning the pages right to the end. My only complaint might be that some of the more complex and interesting events that were bound to naturally follow were left to happen at some future point beyond the end of the book. But that's a small complaint. Honestly, Zeroboxer is in some grand company being on the Andre Norton Shortlist for 2015, so to say it holds its own against the other books that I have read so far on that list is pretty high praise.

For those interested, here is the complete Andre Norton Shortlist for 2015:

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

Mackenzi says

SWEET MOTHER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THIS BOOK. *aggressively fangirls*

Where to even start!?! First of all, it is so kick ass. Literally, because it's about zero gravity boxing.

On that note, IT'S ABOUT ZERO GRAVITY BOXING. I mean....come on.

The world of this book is amazing. The sort of intense, all-encompassing scifi that feels complete and alive but never confusing. The action (which is comprised primarily of nail-biting fights) is interspersed with smart commentary on marketing and celebrity, and Carr is a hero worth rooting for, in and out of the Cube. Fonda Lee's writing is crisp and sharp as a knock-out punch, intermixed with moments of intensity and emotional depth. It's a book about zero-gravity boxing, but also a book about what makes us who we are, and how we define ourselves.

Also.....IT'S ABOUT ZERO GRAVITY BOXING. I just.....can't even. I cannot handle how much I loved this book. I plan on buying it in bulk and handing it out on street corners.

Fonda Lee says

Zeroboxer is my debut novel, so it's special to me in a "firstborn child" kind of way. It's inspired by my love for science fiction, combat sports, and smart action stories, and influenced by my years of working in the

sports industry and seeing firsthand the power of celebrity and marketing. The best part of writing Zeroboxer? Getting to create, envision and write about the sport of zeroboxing! What I wouldn't give to watch one of those matches.

I.W. Gregorio says

This book is, I kid you not, the most engrossing sci-fi book I have read in years. It has EVERYTHING - action, complex world building, characters that you feel completely invested in, and even a lovely element of romance.

In some ways it is just as much of a sports movie as it is a sci fi book, but I love how Lee makes the competitive conflict and makes it so, so much more.

Desperately hoping for a sequel...

CW (The Quiet Pond) ? says

I don't give a damn about sport.

But, this book is all about a fictional sport called 'zeroboxing' - essentially boxing in zero-gravity. *Yeah*, it is definitely as cool as it sounds. And this book was definitely cool.

- An incredible, compelling, and fun science-fiction that combines futurism, sports, and intense action.
- It's about zero-gravity boxing, called 'zeroboxing'. Yeah, it's definitely as cool as it sounds.
- Set in future Earth/Terra and Mars, the book has incredible ideas and concepts about where technology will take humankind, and what humanity will look like in the future.
- The action scenes and the zeroboxing were PHENOMENAL; extremely engaging and wonderful to read (or in my case, listen to).
- An all-rounded, bloody good book.

Full review to come.

Shaun Hutchinson says

This was a wonderful book to start 2018 off with. The short description is that this is sci-fi Rocky with an added kind-of thriller storyline added in. The plot is pretty straight forward. What makes this book so damn good is that the sport of zeroboxing is fleshed out in a really believable way. The way Lee describes it makes it feel every bit as real as MMA or boxing. The world building is simply phenomenal. The characters themselves are also well done and easy to root for.
