



The Darkside War

Zachary Brown

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People used to wonder if we were alone in the universe. Well, we're not. Not by a long shot. Aliens come in all shapes and sizes, and even the good guys are likely to haunt your nightmares. And oh, you'll have nightmares, even after you leave the service. If you leave the service.

Devin is a reluctant conscript to an alien-run army: when the Accordance conquered Earth, they said it was to prepare against the incoming alien Conglomeration forces. But as Devin travels to the dark side of the moon for boot camp and better acquaints himself with his so-called allies, his loyalties are increasingly tested. Because the enemy of the enemy is not always a friend. Sometimes they're a far, far worse threat.

The Darkside War Details

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Author : Zachary Brown

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From Reader Review The Darkside War for online ebook

piranha says

This was the last book I tried to squeeze in for my Hugo nominations, but did not finish it in time. It wouldn't have been a contender, so no problem there.

To start with, I want to bitch about this author blurb:

"Zachary Brown is pseudonym. Brown is a New York Times bestselling author as well as a Nebula and World Fantasy Award finalist."

No. Don't do that. Don't try to sell me on the sly. Either mention who the author is by the name I probably know them by, or spare me. It's a cheap trick, and I am not impressed. I don't care for the stupid games publishers play when they worry that an author is getting overexposed, or that us silly readers get confused when he usually writes hard-hitting noir but wants to branch out into bodice rippers. If I like an author I might well WANT to follow them across genres, and you're losing sales if you keep their identity from me. If I hate a genre, I can easily avoid it if you write a decent blurb. If you want me to buy somebody's book based on them having won some industry awards, tell me who the hell they are, ok?

Of course I tried to guess, but I didn't recognize the style at all, so maybe it's somebody newer I have not actually read, or maybe a team of authors.

Now that I've gotten that out of my system, this book impressed me as little as the author blurb. In fact it felt ... lazy, like it was written as a media tie-in for a game that got never published. It was rushed, very info-dumpy, with shallow characters I never got very interested in, and a terribly unlikely plot -- these guys are not even fully trained and yet they can kick the butts of the worst enemy their current overlords have. And yet they can't even kick these overlords' butts! It's not that the ideas totally suck, being conscripted by your enemy and trying to save your loved ones by doing your enemy's fighting for them is a time-honoured MilSF trope; sure, why not. And part of my lack of enthusiasm is probably that I am generally not too fond of MilSF to begin with. Yet I could have liked this; there are some nice bits of thinking outside the box instead of interminable battles, which pleased me. If only it had focused more on character development. If you are sacrificing yourself for your parents, make me feel it! Maybe actually let me get to know the aliens a bit too, I'm always interested in that. But there's not enough here.

There's a surprise twist towards the end, but I wasn't captured enough by the book to want to find out what's behind that, so I guess I'll read somebody else's spoilery review when it comes out.

Gary says

Three and a half stars.

I enjoyed this particular iteration of the old "aliens conscript humans to fight their war" MilSF plot. An alliance of alien races known as the Accordance has conquered Earth, and quickly begins poaching the solar system's resources - including humans for cannon fodder - to fight an unstoppable enemy known as the Conglomeration. The author (reportedly a somewhat accomplished writer hiding behind a pseudonym) builds

a neatly pessimistic catch-22 for the human race: they can live with some semblance of free will under the paternalistic heel of the Accordance, or become zombie-like genetic mulch for the unyielding Conglomeration's endless expansionist machine. There is some nice dark humor drawn out of this conundrum, and builds into a nail biter when our heroes finally come face to face with the Conglomeration's terrifying foot soldiers.

On the negative side, nothing too original or surprising happens here. The book is too short and moves too hastily, and there is a lot of info-dumping that bogs down the early chapters. After a clichéd but serviceable basic training sequence, though, the story picks up steam and pays off the central characters' arcs after a well executed climactic battle, throwing in a few nice carrots to drum up interest for the sequel. I'll bite.

atoria (vikz writes) says

Dark side war by Zachery Brown

So, I promised you a review of this book and here it is. First, a caveat, I read this book as part of my awards read. The good thing about this reading method is that you occasionally find books that really surprise you, surpassing your expectations. The down side is, that you are just as likely to come across books that simply weren't written for you. Books that are written in a writing style/voice that leaves you cold or a genre that you just don't get on with. This book falls into the latter camp. If you like what I call 'mainstream genre' fiction you will like this book. But, I prefer books that have a more experimental structure and/or lyrical language style. So, this book is not for me.

Synopsis

"Aliens have conquered Earth, but they haven't conquered humanity—yet. A young army conscript battles for survival in this action-packed futuristic thriller that will appeal to fans of *Halo* and *Inglorious Bastards*.

People used to wonder if we were alone in the universe. Well, we're not. Not by a long shot. Aliens come in all shapes and sizes, and even the good guys are likely to haunt your nightmares. And oh, you'll have nightmares, even after you leave the service. If you leave the service.

Devin is a reluctant conscript to an alien-run army: when the Accordance conquered Earth, they said it was to prepare against the incoming alien Conglomeration forces. But as Devin travels to the dark side of the moon for boot camp and better acquaints himself with his so-called allies, his loyalties are increasingly tested. Because the enemy of the enemy is not always a friend. Sometimes..."

<http://www.simonandschuster.co.uk/boo...>

Sample Quotes

"I stood at attention. My boots dug into the sad, scraggly patch of open field that was all that remained of what had once been called Central Park, and I remembered standing in the middle of a baseball field here, once. A long time ago." Page 1.

This book had a diverse range of characters. The characters represented different ethnic groups. There were interesting girl/women characters. The characters had different levels of power/privilege. They came from different political perspectives and had very different views on how to deal with their alien conquerors.

To me, this novel felt disjointed. It felt like it was divided into 3 distinct sections; each of which opened

questions that weren't satisfactory answered. The first section, a rebellion narrative, was an interesting look at how earthlings would deal with an alien invasion, asking how many would rebel and who would acquiesce; for what reasons? It would have been interesting to explore these sections further. But, then we and Devin are whizzed into space and into the second section of the novel which is set in a kind of boot camp; where earthlings are tested, trained and killed by their alien overlords. This could have been an interesting look at conquest and how people can fight for their overlords. It could have been an interesting look at the differing earthlings and how they survive this environment and the social conditions that they found there. To a limited extent it was. But, that was short. Since, then we were catapulted into section three and into a tradition alien shoot out; which, I found really boring.

As you see from the quote at the beginning of this review, the writing was workaday/mainstream. Which, while did work as first person narration from a teenage boy and made the work easy to scan, made the text feel boring to a reader who prefers a more lyrical/ experimental form of prose. To me the professionalism of the writing wasn't exciting and didn't feel like the speech of a young boy under stress. Surely, Devin's speech would have been more fragmented, and less structured. So, if you like YA type books with fairly diverse characters, set in a dark space landscape, then this book is for you. But, this book was not for me.

Bluecobras09 says

Earth has been occupied by the Accordance and they have taken possession of the moon. The people of Earth are to be used as canon fodder for the Accordance's war with the Conglomeration, another alien race that takes a species and turns them in to tools for them. The Accordance decides to take a group of humans to the moon to train to be the first human only fighting group. But while they are training, the Conglomeration hits the training base on the dark side of the moon and it is up to a small group of survivors to escape and warn people on the far side of the moon, to let them know that the Conglomeration has arrived.

I enjoyed the book, it's story line is different and it has great potential to grow. I would recommend reading this book.

Bookman says

3.5 stars. I liked the book a lot, but the world building was a bit weak. I thought the characters interacted well with each other and I liked the ending.

I picked this one up because once again I was in the mood for some military Sci-Fi, but I wasn't really sure what to get. I was checking the new release shelf and saw this book, well I could tell from the cover it must be military Sci-Fi and it looked interesting so I decided to get it.

Bill Hope says

Disappointed. The story premise could have been interesting. I didn't like the protagonist. Poor character development. Scene descriptions were hard to imagine because of conflicting ideas. Writing was hard to

follow. Apparent incorrect words: refracting instead of reflecting; translucent instead of transparent.

I bought all three together. Wish I hadn't.

Tom Malinowski says

The Earth has been taken over by the Accordance, an alien empire that urges humans to submit and join them in their fight with the Conglomeration. Devlin Hart strikes a deal to become a soldier to spare his parents. When training on the Moon goes horribly wrong, Hart and the other recruits must take arms against the enemy of their enemy. Action packed, great sci-fi tech (that's not too complicated to follow), witty dialogue, and the will to survive are what make this book a great read. I look forward to the sequels.

Jon says

This was pretty adequate "aliens take over the world" fiction. It reminded me strongly of the Frontlines series, but I think that's mostly POV and how the world feels. They're not really similar in theme (other than boy goes to space to fight).

It's not great, but I liked it. The world building was kind of interesting, and there's a couple of overall plot points that I'm looking forward to being resolved. I think the aliens are a little too dismissive of humanity's potential contribution to fighting, buuuutttt that's maybe because of my admitted humanocentric views of the universe.

Nickolas says

REVIEW SUMMARY: Book One of The Icarus Corps flies close to the sun and doesn't get burned.

MY RATING: 4 stars

MY REVIEW

PROS: Conflicted protagonists with room for personal growth, alien allies that are only slightly better than the enemy, recruits don't immediately become killing machines, accessible to genre outsiders, homage to the classics.

CONS: Could be improved with some extra padding, the military training doesn't feel entirely authentic.

BOTTOM LINE: The Darkside War is a lean, calculated, knife-thrust of a book that provides a stellar entry-point to military science fiction.

My military science fiction reading streak continues with The Darkside War by Zachary Brown (the pseudonym of a New York Times bestselling author as well as Nebula and World Fantasy Award finalist). I was originally drawn to The Darkside War by the traditional military sci-fi style cover that reminded me of the alternate art for John Steakley's *Armor*. It wasn't the only association I made between The Darkside War

and other classics of the sub-genre. At times book one of The Icarus Corps brought to mind Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game, John Scalzi's Old Man's War, and Robert Buettner's Orphanage among others. I breezed through the novel in a day and a half -- breaking only for sleep and school.

The Darkside War begins with a premise that has been visited before: Earth has been conquered by an alliance of aliens called the Accordance. They dropped rocks on our greatest cities from orbit and then proceeded to pacify the population through force where necessary. They're bad guys but mankind has greater worries. The Accordance is losing a war against the Conglomeration, a solar system subjugating juggernaut that enslaves and repurposes the alien races it vanquishes. The Accordance needs cannon fodder just to slow down the Conglomeration, let alone beat it. That's where Earth, and our protagonist Devlin Hart, come into play.

I've read a fair amount of military science fiction and Devlin Hart makes for one of the more peculiar protagonists I've come across. Soldiers have a variety of motivations for enlisting but Devlin is given little choice in the matter. Devlin and his parents are apprehended by the Accordance for protesting the occupation. There is a war being waged across the stars and dissent, be it peaceful or otherwise, cannot be tolerated. In order to save his parents' lives Devlin cuts a deal with the Accordance and enlists to fight against the Conglomeration. The Darkside War primarily focuses on Devlin's training period and ends with his first encounter with the Conglomeration.

Devlin doesn't become the ultimate soldier by the end of The Darkside War, in fact he spends much of the novel actively and inactively resisting against the Accordance's authority. Obstinate protagonists tend to chafe quickly make for frustrating reading but I was able to empathize with Devlin. He never aspired to be a soldier and even supported his parents' anti-occupation movement. For all Devlin knows the Conglomeration could be a piece of propaganda invented by the Accordance to keep humanity in line. Starting from this position Devlin has room to grow as The Icarus Corps series progresses. Devlin does develop to a degree over the course of The Darkside War -- nothing too drastic for the limited timeframe of the novel, but enough to assure readers that he won't be a static character.

I have slightly mixed feelings about Devlin's training to become a soldier of the Accordance. There are two training periods -- bootcamp at the Hampton's and then Icarus Corps instruction on the dark side of the moon. Bootcamp feels rather brief and uneventful. This short portion of the novel does introduce Amira and Ken, the two most important characters of The Darkside War after Devlin. Amira, like Devlin, was involved in the anti-occupation movement before being press-ganged into the Accordance's war. Ken, on the other hand, comes from a family that has been collaborating with the Accordance since the very beginning. From the Hampton's Devlin, Amira, and Ken travel to the moon as inductees of the Icarus Corps: the Accordance's first all-human infantry unit.

This second training period is much longer and more fulfilling than the first. Here's Devlin and the other humans are given power armor and begin learning how to function as a unit. The combat training occurs in a dome that's environment can be altered on the fly in order to prepare soldiers for the unknown and unexpected. It is also here that we encounter Commander Zeus, an Accordance alien charged with turning the Icarus Corps into a cohesive fighting force...or at least a decent meat-shield. Zeus pushes the recruits to their limits and generally acts in an antagonistic fashion, as to be expected of a drill instructor and alien conqueror. Several times while reading this part of the book I was reminded of Ender's Game, though the training isn't quite so structured.

The Icarus Corps' first contact with the enemy Conglomeration is disastrous. I found this to be the most distinct portion of The Darkside War. Devlin and the others are still early into their training when caught in a

surprise attack. As a result relatively raw recruits are forced to adapt what little they've learned in order to survive and even take the fight to the Conglomeration. For once it was good to read military science fiction from the perspective of those unprepared for battle. The Icarus Corps does mount a resistance against the Conglomeration but is vastly outclassed and outgunned. Survival takes precedence over winning.

The description of The Darkside War declares that it will appeal to fans of Bungie's hit video game Halo and I agree. I believe that this novel could more easily be adapted into a game than some of the still great but more technical military science fiction I've read. The different races that comprise the Conglomeration would result in a variety of complex encounters. They're even classified in the manner of video game enemy types: Drivers (capable of turning allies into meat-puppets), Trolls (rhino-like shock troops), Raptors (fast, smart, and outfitted with laser rifles), Crickets (swarming insectile robots), and Ghosts (covered in advanced active camouflage and capable of sending surrounding Conglomeration troops into a suicide frenzy). The "ally" Accordance aliens are just as varied, from the ostrich-like struthiforms to the power armored squids known as the Arvani.

The Darkside War proved to be a short but fun read. It managed to stand on its own merits while serving as homage to many of my favorite military science fiction novels. I would also recommend it as a good entry-point to a reader looking to get into the sub-genre. The Darkside War is light enough to be accessible to the uninitiated but still manages to offer the things that people love so dearly about military sci-fi.

Nick Sharps
SF Signal

Kurt Springs says

Review originally published on Kurt's Frontier.

Synopsis:

"For ages, people have looked at the stars and wondered if we were alone in the universe." Now we wish we were. Devlin Hart is a young man in a time where Earth is occupied territory. The Accordance—ruled by the squid-like alien Arvani with other, lesser races under their control—have conquered and pacified Earth. There is resistance, but no doubt the Accordance is in charge. Devlin's parents are trying to resist peacefully. When they are caught and sentenced to death, the only way he can save them is by joining the Colonial Protection Force. Sent to a training facility at Icarus on the dark side of the moon, he is taught to fight by the sadistic Arvani instructor, Commander Zeus.

Devlin's brutal combat training is interrupted when the Concordance, the Accordance's enemy, attacks the moon base and the training facility. However, sometimes the enemy of your enemy is even worse than the your enemy. Now he and the surviving recruits must fight for their lives.

Review:

The Darkside war is set in at time where an alien empire has pacified earth. However, the Accordance is not beyond fear. The Concordance is pressing in on their empire. Devlin and a group of misfit humans are to be trained to fight. The novel proves to be a fast read overall. The battle for Icarus Crater is exciting, and there are no guarantees that the Devlin and his friends will survive. The initial setup, while a little slow, does set

up the interpersonal relationships between the characters. Overall, it is a fun and satisfying read for those who enjoy military science fiction.

Michael Elia says

Fun and easy to read military science fiction. I am not as happy with partly trained 'recruits' who are able to overcome all odds to win. I liked it though, and hope the next in the series is a little better. Zachary Brown is stated as a pseudonym, and I haven't looked hard, but hope to find out who it is soon.

Patrick says

"The enemy of my enemy is not always a friend." Humanity has been conquered and pacified ... for its own good. There are many big-bads out there in the ocean of night, and Earth is chock-full of willing and unwilling recruits, cannon fodder, meat for the grinder. Meet Devlin, one of the not-so willing variety. Circumstance has placed our hero in uniform and posted to Icarus Crater for training, dark side of the moon, babies. Hell of a life. Nightmare aliens throwing everything they can think of at you, seemingly trying to kill you. And these are supposed to be the good guys.

For fans of Starship Troopers, Ender's Game, and perhaps Old Man's War, though the recruits at Icarus are far from old, nor are they expected to get much older. One helluva fun Saturday afternoon read. Old school action and adventure. Suit up, apes! You wanna live forever?

--Patrick

John says

True military SF, not a standard issue historical war story transferred into the future. I enjoyed ripping through it, but, oddly, feel no urge to read the sequels--it just seems plain that they'll be more of the same.

Conal says

This book had the basics of a good story but it felt like the author did not take advantage of this in actually telling the story. It felt rushed and almost incomplete in this...

2.5 stars for a story that could have been good.

Jack says

It started out good the book, which made it only worse when it started getting bad. The main character made

some really nice smart moves and the book was going along real well, and then suddenly the rest is down hill.

It was like reading three different books in one book. Good start, terrible middle section, and then okay ending. It was weird.

Another problem was character development. There was nothing endearing about the characters, they were just like whiny noise. It was really irritating especially the tough girl character. She was just a bitch. Always complaining. Damn, the whole book was annoying. It would seem that if you want to stay happy, don't read this book.
