



Aliens: Berserker

S.D. Perry

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It is called a Berserker team—reckless, desperate volunteers recruited by the Company to destroy alien infestations.

Based on the spaceship *Nemesis*, it consists of three brutal ex-cons who do all the grunt work and the Berserker itself, code-named MAX: an armed and armored exoskeleton powered by the living brain of what was once a human, configured into an unstoppable killing machine.

When the *Nemesis* is sent to a massive space station, D.S. 949, the team finds an alien hive, the largest in history, with nearly a thousand hapless humans cocooned and incubated. The team mission: to destroy the aliens while leaving the terminal intact. The mission seems like suicide to the bug hunters and their small support staff. And that is perfectly fine for the Company...which wants no witnesses left to the terrifying secret of D.S. 949.

Aliens: Berserker Details

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From Reader Review Aliens: Berserker for online ebook

Marion says

The ending was ambiguous and that drives me crazy.

Ana Mardoll says

Aliens Novels: Book 9, Berserker / 0-553-57731-X

At some point during "Berserker", I realized that I've now read nine aliens novels as well as the four film novelizations, and I've still yet to read an account involving an isolated colony or ship having to suddenly deal with an unexpected infestation in their midst (indeed, this was really my only complaint with "Aliens", that we weren't treated to knowing what, exactly, had happened to the colony during those missing days).

This seemingly small point is, in my opinion, an insight into the deep flaws in the aliens novel series as a whole. Nearly every single novel so far has followed one of two plot lines: (1) a mad scientist is experimenting on aliens when things go inevitably sour and all the janitors and lower-level scientists have to clear out in a hurry, or (2) a group of fighters heads into an alien nest or infestation to exterminate them or retrieve a MacGuffin. While these are by no means bad plot lines, what this means from a practical reader's perspective is that when the blood inevitably starts flying, it's hard to feel too sorry for the blokes getting slaughtered because, really, they should have known better than to muck around with aliens. In other words, we have no true victims, undeserving of their fate.

The other problem with these limited two plot lines, of course, is that the authors have to increasingly stretch for new reasons as to why anyone would keep going into these nests to be slaughtered after it has been proven, time and again, how deadly this species is (and this problem also feeds into the "had it coming" issue because, really, any other species would have learned its lesson by now).

Perry has attempted to handle this problem by constructing a reality in which the occasional alien infestation is just a matter of life and the W/Y company has put together crack pest control teams that can be dispatched to clean out infestations as they pop up. So it's sort of like working for Orkin, except the on-the-job fatality is pretty darned high. You'd have to be pretty stupid or pretty desperate to take a job like this, so the crack teams are composed of convicts and felons who are motivated by a one-to-one ratio of nests cleaned to years left to serve.

This doesn't really solve the problem, though. Ignoring the fact that an outraged public probably wouldn't be too happy with Charles Manson exchanging 40 years for 40 alien raids, and skimming over the fact that this isn't exactly social rehabilitation, we are still left with the issue of why the team doesn't just quit when a routine situation rapidly turns suicidal for shady Company reasons. And even assuming they can't quit (which Perry stresses that they can), they're convicts on a freighter with a crew of six and no guards or guns. So the characters come off as particularly thick when they know that they're headed into a highly unusual suicide mission and they have no motivation to continue, and yet they continue anyway.

Having said all that, this isn't a bad aliens book. The plot premise is thin, but less thin than many of its predecessors. The middle of the book is, in fact, quite solid - it's just the beginning and ending that bother me. Perry seems to have trouble characterizing the people in her stories and spends the first few chapters rushing over uninteresting character details. She seems aware of this, but her solution is to just hurry through

and get it over with as fast as possible. Once everyone is properly fleshed out into two-dimensional cardboard cut-outs, the story settles down and things go relatively smoothly. The Berserker team is an interesting idea, particularly the part with the "bait", but the whole man-in-the-suit premise doesn't work well in a world with synthetics and seems like a gimmick to just make the Company as evil as possible for no real reason. This is the major problem, in fact, with the ending - resolution is tossed away in favor of an anti-industrial subtext that just comes off cheaply.

All in all, if you're planning to read all the aliens novels, this is by no means one of the worst. It's an interesting read and a good take on the aliens universe, even if I continue to be disappointed in my search for a plot line where the aliens come to the humans, instead of the ham-handed vice versa. But if you're getting tired of the series, or planning to start new with this installation, your socks probably won't be blown off.

~ Ana Mardoll

Richelle says

Fairly good story. Great art - liked this more than most I've read thus far.

Probably the art was one of the main reasons I've decided to give this one 3.5 out of 5 stars.

Jean-Francois Boivin says

The title page says "Based on... the Dark Horse graphic novel *Aliens : Berserker* by John Wagner, Paul Mendoza, Andy Mushynsky" but sadly, the 4-issue mini-series was never collected as a graphic novel. the comic came after the 8 "main" series, following *Aliens: Stronghold* and serving as a prequel to *Aliens vs. Predator: War* (also a sequel to the original *Aliens vs. Predator*). The comic was also the first one to mention Weyland-Yutani, whereas previous series had their own main "bad companies" overseeing the bad things happening: names like BioNational, Chigusa Corp., Grant Corp. and Z.C.T.

Since I can't review the Graphic Novel, I'll review it here and the novel adaptation by S.D. Perry (her second solo *Aliens* novel.) the story by *Judge Dredd* creator/writer Wagner is very frantic and intense in places, and there is no mercy for the main characters. He takes the main element of the story directly from Steve Bissette's *Aliens: Tribes*, the concept of a Berserker squad of bug-killers who consists of a ground leader, a "baiter" (guy who willingly gets taken by the aliens to be brought to the Queen to reveal her location from his tracer), a heavy-weapons specialist "Drake"-type, and an unseen guy imprisoned inside a two-ton, invincible, heavily-armed and -armored killing machine named a MAX. (Note: in *Tribes* it was named a MOX: Mobile Offensive ExoWarrior.) In this story, the squad is made up of convicted felons who volunteered for the post in order to get their sentences reduced.

They are led by Commander Eric "Pop" Izzard who never takes part in the infiltration missions, and helped remotely by 2nd Lt. Katherine Lara who is more on the team's side. There is also a recent member of the team, a young techie named Brian Ellis who is in charge of "controlling" MAX by checking its life-signs and cutting off the sedatives and injecting adrenaline whenever the killer man-inside-machine is needed.

Perry handles the story expertly, and the story is told from alternating point-of-views of all the main characters, except the MAX and Pop (for reasons that become clear towards the end.) There are few changes from the original comic, one of which is the less horrible way one of the characters dies (which makes one

feel like Perry had perhaps grown attached to and had pity on.) Her most interesting contribution is the psychology she created for the characters: Lara's deteriorating relationship with Pop, Ellis' rise from being ridiculed as a kid and trying to become a brave man, Teape's experiences as a prisoner in the hives slowly driving him insane, Jess' struggle to keep his team together and Pulaski's love of candybars and heavy workouts.

Needless to say, some of the characters escape the whole mess of a crazy mission gone wrong, since their story continues in *AvP: War*. A recommended book, and also the comic is recommended first if you can get your hands on it. It is included in one of the *Aliens Omnibuses* under the title "Aliens: Frenzy" for some reason.

NOTE: for unknown reasons, the previous graphic novel *Aliens: Stronghold* was not adapted into a novel, and *Berserker* was chosen instead probably because Perry wanted to write the adaptation for the sequel to *AvP: Prey*, titled *AvP: War*, and this one takes place between the two.

Alex Klimkewicz says

For some reason this book is hovering around \$20 on Amazon. This fact is probably due to scarcity from the printers rather than being one of the better written books of the Aliens series. I am in the process of downsizing my library, and one of the booksets that I've decided to toss out is this one. However, these books hold a sentimental spot in my heart, so I decided to review and read through at least one once more. *Aliens Berserker* was the book that I decided to revisit.

The plot is very simple, even a bit simplistic when overanalyzed. A group of convicts (in the process of being rehabilitated I suppose) sign up for bug extermination duty in exchange for shortened prison times. Along with these three hardened "bad guys" are a Marine spaceship captain, a female communications officer, and a tech geek running the company's specialized bug destroyer MAX -- another convict surgically inserted into a hyped up exoskeleton made to rain death down upon the xenomorphs. Fortunately this last guy is kept doped up until required to go into action and then pumped up with adrenaline shots.

Several questions come up at this point. Why would the company entrust such potent firepower and expensive machinery in the hands of convicted criminals. To be sure, the author paints them as nice enough people, but there is no logic in giving thieves and murderers weapons like this. The natural consequence would be rogue ships going berserker -- ha -- and becoming spacefaring pirates, which actually may have been an interesting story in its own right. However these prisoner soldiers are loyal, if not to the Company, then to themselves, and enter into a potentially fatally inescapable situation with not much more than depressed sighs and a swallowing of their fears. This whole fact strained my suspension of disbelief.

Here is another big question. Why is there a human inside MAX? This is a big one. Seemingly the Company has developed a weapon that is capable of taking down entire nests of aliens -- the only other viable option is to nuke 'em from orbit -- but the whole thing is controlled by a flesh and blood -- read: weak-link -- operator. There are no androids in this book. But, and this is a big but, synthetic humans are an established institution in the Aliens series. They are ultimately loyal to their programming, and unlike these humans, probably not likely to rebel against the Company. Why is their no android intelligence controlling MAX? From the Company's POV this should be better than another convict in a suit. From a storytelling POV this works better too -- as the familiar trope is the android turning on the humans. This would greatly be ramped up in a situation where the humans are stuck between a killer robot running amok and the mindless and ruthless

killing machines that are the xenomorphs.

These two questions constantly distracted me from this novel. It was a good enough book, but I couldn't stop thinking about how it could have been better. As it is, the characterization is good. I was rather taken aback when some of them died. It happens late in the book, but I kind of got it into my head that, even though this is a juvenile spacemarine sci-fi horror thriller, maybe it would break the mold somehow and let all of the cannon fodder survive. This doesn't happen, though the deaths are treated with much more tenderness than one would consider possible. There is plenty of blood and gut -- mostly acidic -- but the alien carnage doesn't affect the reader as much when the already small group (only six humans, plus MAX) starts to diminish.

If you are like me and have a bunch of these Aliens books saved up that you haven't read in quite while, then you could do a lot worse than reading this one.

Nick says

To me this was the perfect Aliens story in many ways, gun's and grunts and company dodgy dealings a plenty but with a nice human story woven in too. The Aliens were presented well with face huggers and drones a plenty causing fear and death.

If you like Aliens the movie you'll love this.
