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Joel Shepherd

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One thousand years after Earth was destroyed in an unprovoked attack, humanity has emerged victorious from a series of terrible wars to assure its place in the galaxy. But during celebrations on humanity's new Homeworld, the legendary Captain Pantillo of the battle carrier Phoenix is court-martialed then killed, and his deputy, Lieutenant Commander Erik Debogande, the heir to humanity's most powerful industrial family, is framed with his murder. Assisted by Phoenix's marine commander Trace Thakur, Erik and Phoenix are forced to go on the run, as they seek to unravel the conspiracy behind their Captain's demise, pursued to the death by their own Fleet. What they discover, about the truth behind the wars and the nature of humanity's ancient alien allies, will shake the sentient galaxy to its core.

Renegade Details

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Author : Joel Shepherd

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From Reader Review Renegade for online ebook

Dan says

Pretty good, though I skimmed several pages of run-on descriptions. I look forward to more of this series.

Bob Reiss says

Renegade is a nice blend of standard Military Science Fiction with far thinking political science fiction. Shepard takes a page from Campbell's Black Jack Geary Lost Fleet series, but with a main character that is just a bit more fallible and a whole lot less moralistic. Oft used mil/sf tropes and given just enough tweaks to let push it past cliché and allow hardened mil/sf fans something new to grab their attention. Renegade is full of characters on the positive side of the realistic spectrum, and plenty of over the top conspiracy twists to make it fun.

The main reasons I gave this a listen was it was read by John Lee. Well, it was read by John Lee. Solid characterizations, and a fluid handling of the prose enhanced the book, filling it with depth.

E.J. Fisch says

I want to start out by saying how absolutely terrible I feel about how long it took me to finish this book. According to Goodreads, I started it February 24, which actually wasn't as long ago as I feared. It really WAS excellent, and the last 30% or so really flew by because I was actually able to devote a proper amount of focus to it.

I had never heard of this series or even of Joel Shepherd until some friends recommended this book. I read the blurb and was immediately hooked by the whole on-the-run-after-being-framed-for-murder thing. I downloaded it and then it gathered dust on my Kindle for a couple of months before I decided I should go ahead and read it or I'd never get it done.

I'm really glad I did.

I can't really explain it, but there was something about the characters that had be absolutely hooked from the beginning. Nothing was really even happening, aside from establishing the setting and backstory, but they somehow still seemed totally real and I was very drawn to them. A lot of other reviews for this book have mentioned the characters as well. And despite the (very) large cast, there are still only 3 POV characters -- one of which has significantly fewer scenes than the other two -- so you don't feel totally overwhelmed. We have Erik Debogande, lieutenant commander of the battle ship Phoenix, Major Trace Thakur, leader of the marine company aboard Phoenix, and Erik's sister Lisbeth, an engineering student who gets caught up in the action when Erik and Trace are on the run with Phoenix after Erik is framed for the murder of their captain. Despite the fact that these characters are interacting regularly, the military man, the warrior, and the civilian all have very differing perspectives and I thought that made for a great dynamic. The racial diversity among all the characters was interesting and really well done too.

While not combat trained, Erik can still hold his own in the chaos. He's determined and intelligent, and his skills as a pilot are unmatched. His growth throughout the book was great too; he started out as a reluctant subordinate and ended up really embracing his role, transforming into a fearless leader by the end. The banter and interactions between him and Trace was great and had me laughing out loud on a couple of occasions. Trace is a freakin' badass and has definitely found herself on my list of Favorite Female Characters. Despite the fact that she's kind of an indestructible super soldier, she still has very human moments throughout the book that make her believable. I absolutely loved the interactions between her and the rest of her marines; the camaraderie and respect among them was SO well done. Between her combat skills and her relationships with her soldiers, she's my Commander-Shepard-headcanon incarnate. Next time I play Mass Effect, I'm totally making a Shep based on her.

Lisbeth and the rest of the Phoenix crew are a little harder to discuss just because they weren't in the spotlight as often and therefore weren't as developed. I admit to having trouble keeping track of all the different marines (a dramatis personae for this book would be great!), but names definitely became familiar enough that I felt like I sort of knew the people. That made for fun reading.

And speaking of Mass Effect, I loved all the ME vibes I was getting from the galactic structure and political history in this story. There are numerous alien species, some of which are allies to humans, some of which are allies to each other, some of which are enemies to all, and...some of which were thought to be extinct. The combat, both in space and on the ground, is really well-written, and although there's a lot of it, it doesn't get old. The fight scenes are lengthy and thorough without being repetitive, which is something I've always struggled with as a writer.

As the Phoenix crew evade their pursuers and fight for survival, they discover clues that hint at cover-ups and conspiracies involving those at the very top of the (human) galactic government. While this book had a reasonably happy ending, the real battle is just beginning, and I'm definitely picking up book 2.

Kathleen says

I really like where the author is taking this upbeat and yet seriously engrossing series. 3rd person POV space opera involving humans, aliens, and cybernetics in the distant future at various planets in the Milky Way. Likable and textured characters! Lots of action, including military battle scenes (but not too much battle, which gets boring to me).

Excellent dialogue and characterization. Strong plot, with a suspenseful peeling-the-onion feeling as "the truth" is gradually uncovered. There's also politics and team bonding/friendship and philosophy (especially via the Marine who practices zen Bhuddist decision-making and meditation).

I will go on to the next book. And I would recommend this book to anyone, if language doesn't bother you. No sex, but plenty of swearing (mostly F-bombs by Marines, which felt natural). No religious cussing, which I appreciate. Lots of bloody gore, but not gratuitous.

Quibbles: Sometimes the author sacrificed storytelling and pace for a little too much description, or tedious technical exposition about how space-flight works, or how the landing platform is structured, etc. However, it's not too bad, and I appreciated the "bottom of a gravity well" analogy.

Muzzy Ch says

If you want substance and a rich, well-written wartime space opera, this is not it. This is a story about what happens after the fact. The war is over, there is minimal action and the story trundles along at a snails pace with plenty of filler. If you like shady back-room politics and a murder mystery. This is for you.

I read the next in the series hoping the arc would change my perspective but it hasn't.

Sarah says

I loved this book. For me, it had a bit of everything I like in a good military science fiction story - great characters, great space battles, great ground combat, and an intriguing overall plot. This story had such a great mix of fleet action and marine action that kept things interesting. But the real gem of this book was the great characters and their struggles. Although the captain dies in the first part of the book, I loved his character by the end of the story. How did that happen?! The two main protagonists are compelling and just a little outside of what one would consider cliché, especially the marine commander. I loved how their conflict was as much internal as it was external. They both had to wrestle with their beliefs and their decisions and consequences of those decisions. And the supporting cast of characters was excellent. There were enough characters to make the story feel full and real without being overwhelming. If there was one thing that I did struggle with it was trying to figure out the different species and history. Things came together a bit more at the end but for the first while I was trying to recall who was on which side. However, this really didn't detract from the story that much. I'd recommend this book to anyone who enjoys a good military science fiction read. I hope there are more to come in this series as I'll be first in line to find out what happens!

Patrick Barnes says

Not good

The aliens are interesting both in their social organization and interspecies interactions. The humans, not so much.

The author does not describe a viable economic divide between space and planet based humans. In a very few years, the Fleet would lose political power or rule through threat of orbital bombardment. This limits its ability to utilize planetary production and manpower. Shabby manufacturing will kill a Fleet unit more certainly than an alien missile. Troops forced into a military or navy whose officers are despised overlords, are a dangerous liability not a resource. Rule by terror never ends well.

His hero commands a big, tough, super deadly, fast, heavily armored, heavily armed (battleship-like) warship called a combat carrier. A warship that has two hundred marines as its main weapon system. the total crew is six hundred.

Battleships in wet navies boasted thirty-five hundred crew, carriers more than five thousand crew. So what is this ship. Too little crew to be a battleship, a battlecruiser or heavy cruiser. No attack craft carrier capability.

Ground combat capability is one company of marines and a ship too small to have a galley. Crew has to eat

in hallways. Really! There's no briefing room big enough to accommodate the bridge crew! Interesting design. The captain pilots the ship! Doesn't he have his hands full monitoring the ship's status before, during and after a combat action. If not who does? If that's another officer, why aren't they captain?

Too lazy to watch a war movie, a science fiction movie or heaven's forbid read a book on naval history in any period.

It's really disrespectful to create characters who are so juvenile that they carry their pet names into combat. These nicknames aren't even that abused in war movies and in real life, soldiers use their last names.

"Captain, let's send Tiny Sullivan's squad of ten to attack the enemy battalion of six hundred. Those enemy marines aren't nearly as good as our marines". That sums up the writers understanding of and experience of war. Like John Ringo and a lot of Baen writers, they mock the reality of the men and women who face terror, fear and uncertainty before killing and dying as they were ordered.

War isn't a video game and soldiers and sailors are not cartoon supermen or superwomen. If you write a story about them whether it takes place next year or a thousand years from now, have respect or maybe write fantasy novels.

I'm curious about and like the descriptions of the aliens. Will read more about them. He actually does that well, too bad he doesn't put as much effort into what war looks like to humans or aliens.

Zad says

Now, this book was a surprise. In this book, Shepherd merges good space opera with good military sci-fi. I quite enjoy both of these, but until now I haven't read anything that merged the two this artfully. It has the detailed story world and deep characters you'd expect from a space opera, but the usually slow flow of space opera is augmented with fast paced action, which makes the whole story more dynamic.

This is a must read for every sci-fi fan.

Jon Abbott says

Excellent first book in what promises to be a great space opera. Nicely different in that the two main characters, one male, one female, share the stage as the "hero(ine)". Most books of this type seem to feature one leading character, albeit often with a supporting cast. Ms. Shepherd's characters have depth, to go with a good plot.

Allyn Nichols says

Fantastic from start to finish. Well written, great characters and a solid well thought out plot. Highly recommend for all science fiction junkies.

Jed says

Decent, but too much world and object description

When the book sticks to the story and what is happening to the characters it's really quite good. However, there are many times that the author spends a significant amount of time talking about the layout and construction of a space station when a generalized one sentence description would have worked and allowed the story to continue. Essentially, this book suffers from pacing issues and too much exposition is the cause.

When the author is writing about the characters and action scenes it's quite enjoyable. I just wish all the other boys were cut or simplified so I don't have to skim them.

The book was still good enough to read the next one. I deducted two stars because I had to skim a lot to keep reading.

M. Spencer says

Renegade...the Spiral Wars;

An excellent illustration of power-hungry leaders attempting a surreptitious coup with murder, and military takeovers as the main means.

It's also a terrific military sci-fi action adventure, with the maturity of a marine officer and the growth of a young fleet 3rd officer leading the fight against the greedy, political scumbags attempting the takeover.

I really, really look forward to the rest of the series. A Great Read!!!!!!

Jason says

4.5 Stars

Renegade by Joel Shepherd is a space opera tailor made to my likes. This is the first book in the Spiral War Trilogy. I will summarize this review with my 5 reasons why you too should read this book.

1. the female lead character is kick-ass and unforgettable.

Trace Thakur is a marine commander who like all Marines is genetically and surgically enhanced to be an even more lethal soldier. Trace also happens to be fearless and incredibly focused. She made me want to keep reading as she is a very unique and interesting individual. Trace is another amazing woman who fits right in with the Israelian elite soldier Adira from Greig Beck's Alex Hunter series or my very favorite female soldier Devi Morris from Rachel Bach's Paradox series.

2. Renegade is a political science fiction space opera

One of the best things about this book is the depth of the world building and the complexity of the political of the many species of aliens. Shepherd has created a deep and complex backstory and he fills us in on many of the details as the story progresses. I loved all of the different aliens. The historical back stories made this book a real page turner. The danger and the tension of politics gone bad fuel the action and the outcome of this book one.

3. Lieutenant Commander Erik Debogande is a competent protagonist with a heavy burden on his shoulders.

I enjoyed Erik and his backstory and easily identified with his motivations and why he is so driven. I like that he grows a great deal in this book and lives up to the position that he inherits. Erik is a man destined to be more and a natural leader.

4. the writing is very good.

Joel Shepherd throws us into a space opera that is more a game of politics than it is a science fiction. He crafts a complex world without overwhelming the reader. I found myself not wanting to put the book down.

5. the fact that it is more.

Renegade is just book one in the Spiral War Trilogy with much more to come. The combination of two amazing leads plus a fabulous world make this a must read for fans of the genre.

"Jokono frowned. "But without legal authority..." "There's no such thing," Trace said firmly. "The legal authority you're talking about exists because people think it exists. It's data on a chip, it's a piece of paper, it's an idea in people's heads. My marines on this ship also have an idea in their heads, and it's that their loyalty to me and each other now drastically outweighs their loyalty to Fleet since Fleet tried to screw us. Whose idea of legal authority is superior?" "You're saying you're going to just make your own laws?""

This is a well done space opera that is light in the science department and very heavy in the political games department.

Karsten Fischer says

Brilliant.

Really nice story setting, oddly enough the background story reminded me of C.J. Cherryh's Chanur novels, which is a good thing. If someone would dissect the story for all the parts and try to find something exceptionally different compared to other stories, there's nothing much to find. The basic ingredients are solid, but nothing out of the ordinary. But the blending, my...

It's basically a space opera, mix in some ancient alien conspiracy (but who conspires against whom? Or even - why?), a war won long ago, but not forgotten (and not nearly as over as anybody thought it was) and basic day-to-day paranoia. Allies trying to kill you while your enemies are protecting you - that sort of thing. Government screws up, as usual, but which part of the government does the screwing up is almost as exciting as to uncover the why of it.

Making #1 on my "Write faster, I'd like to read more"list in no time at all,

Joel Shepherd says

Given that I wrote it, I'd say it's excellent!
