



Zenn Scarlett

Christian Schoon

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When you're studying to be exoveterinarian specializing in exotic, alien life forms, school... is a different kind of animal.

Zenn Scarlett is a resourceful, determined 17-year-old girl working hard to make it through her novice year of exovet training. That means she's learning to care for alien creatures that are mostly large, generally dangerous and profoundly fascinating. Zenn's all-important end-of-term tests at the Ciscan Cloister Exovet Clinic on Mars are coming up, and, she's feeling confident of acing the exams. But when a series of inexplicable animal escapes and other disturbing events hit the school, Zenn finds herself being blamed for the problems. As if this isn't enough to deal with, her absent father has abruptly stopped communicating with her; Liam Tucker, a local townner boy, is acting unusually, annoyingly friendly; and, strangest of all: Zenn is worried she's started sharing the thoughts of the creatures around her. Which is impossible, of course. Nonetheless, she can't deny what she's feeling.

Now, with the help of Liam and Hamish, an eight-foot sentient insectoid also training at the clinic, Zenn must learn what's happened to her father, solve the mystery of who, if anyone, is sabotaging the cloister, and determine if she's actually sensing the consciousness of her alien patients... or just losing her mind. All without failing her novice year....

Zenn Scarlett Details

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Author : Christian Schoon

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From Reader Review Zenn Scarlett for online ebook

Ryan Snyder says

Ok. First and foremost, I want to say Wow. Just Wow. That was unlike anything I have read before- in a good way. An very very good way.

I love the fresh/original storyline. Zenn is a fascinating character with a huge heart for the alien animals her family cares for within the cloister. And I have to say I love all the creatures that were introduced to me in this book. You really have to exercise your imagination to picture the extra-terrestrial patients being described in the text. Every time a new animal came up, I found myself concentrating and creating an image of the animals in my mind. And believe me, I was not disappointed. It seems a lot of thought has been put into both the functions and backgrounds of the fore-mentioned animals. Interesting, very interesting. (: And Zenn is such a cute character- so careful and thinking through everything. She can be too hard on herself sometimes, but she is learning!

Now, I had not heard anything about this being the start of a series, but when I was about 80% through the book, I started panicking thinking this book could not possibly be properly ended in the amount of pages I had left. Now, I have still not heard anything about it being a series, but it cannot possibly end like that. There is no way on Earth (or Mars.. haha.. get it?) that this man could end that amazing book where he ended it and not have a sequel planned. That would be just downright cruel. And what a place to end it. I am equal parts angry and impressed with the ending. Ok, and I am a little bit worried. Not gonna spoil it, but whew. That is a lot of information to take in... And I cannot wait to see what happens to Zenn and her friends next! This book seems to be the start or a wonderful series.

My Favorite characters

Zenn- Loved her. Hardworking girl struggling to balance her academic and personal life training to be an Exo-Vet on Mars. Wouldn't you be a little stressed, too?

Hamish- I love him. He is such an original and endearing character. (:

Katie- oh. my. gosh. I love Katie. I would absolutely love to have one of her. She is just so marvelous! and she has her own precious, endearing personality as well.

Those were by no means all of the main characters, but they are my three favorites! I decided to stick with three, so I would be less inclined to gush and therefore, less inclined to accidentally spoil it. ;)

All in All?

An original read with adventure, mystery, aliens (yay!), amazing creatures, a whole lot of Biological terms (some real, some made up), an interesting new world, friendship, fantasy, and.... do I detect a hint of romance?

Katja Weinert says

I got an ARC of Zenn Scarlett in exchange for an honest review. I hadn't read any reviews of the book, but

the blurb piqued my interest straight away.

The first chapter pulled me in with the world building, where we're immediately introduced to the hazards of living on Mars and meet a giant alien which provides the means for people to rapidly travel through space.

The book gets top marks for originality - exovet heroine, animals that help space-travel and the Kiran sunkillers who are so large that their backs are used to carry sky-palaces. Crazy critters, and yet so easy to imagine because most of the animals and sentient aliens have a mammalian or insectoid reference point.

If you like your books heavy on romance this one will be a little tame for you. That's not to say there isn't a love interest. Local boy Liam certainly pays Zenn attention, but she's so busy that she doesn't initially realise he may like her. When she does notice him we learn that she has a few emotional blocks that have her more frightened than excited at this prospect. Her obliviousness and her apprehension help lend Zenn's character yet another layer of realistic complexity. She's wonderfully flawed and easy to relate to because of her hang-ups and stubbornness. I

Zenn is ambitious and often self-defensive, and it's at those times that she feels like she has a point to prove that things tend to blow up in her face. I think we can all relate to life taking us down a peg or two!

The characters are well written, Zenn, Liam and Hamish were my favourites and the towns folk can almost be collectively thought of as another character. They play a perfect stereotype of suspicious closed minded folk who need something or someone to blame in a time of austerity.

The plot is well structured, and while I wasn't surprised as to who was sabotaging the work of the Ciscan Cloister Exovet Clinic, I did enjoy the flow of the story. The end of the book creates yet another hook, as the story's development finally works its way towards why Zenn's father has stopped communicating with her, and hints at an explanation about why she's developed the uncanny new ability to 'link' with her animal patients.

The only reason I've not given this a full five stars is my personal preference for my sci-fi lit to have fast pace. The blurb hints that she is actively trying to find out why her Dad is ignoring her, but this gets far less attention than implied - until the very end. Although the pacing was slower than I would have liked I still thought this was a great read, and I'm looking forward to the sequel and discovering more about Zenn's world and her gift.

All in all: Imaginative, well structured and containing enough hooks to reel me into the instalment. I got in touch with Strange Chemistry after reading it, to get on board with their blog tour. It's the first time I've felt motivated to be a part of a blog tour, so that's another indication of how much I enjoyed this book. Four out of five stars.

Kimberly Francisco says

I loved this book pretty damn hard. It's so unique and imaginative and interesting. It's full of aliens and alien animals and relationships between the two that are just plain fascinating to read about. The main plotline is wrapped up within this volume, but the last chapter sets up the sequel (which is going to be a much bigger story that I am very excited about). Parts of this main plot were predictable, but that didn't bother me.

There are definitely some unpolished bits with the writing (overuse of the non-word "alright" for starters), but wow, I haven't read something this creative in YA SF in a long time. I would like the sequel now please.

Full review: <http://www.stackedbooks.org/2013/04/z...>

Stuti (Turmeric isn't your friend. It will fly your ship says

2.5

*One white dove-y carries my pearl,
Two little dove-y's carry my pearls,
Third little dove-y,
Is that gold?
Fuck, just shoot this birdie down!
But stupid, useless stupid gun
You leave the birdie hurt?*

A Week in the Daily Life of Zenn Scarlett.

Day 1:

Here's an alien animal. Watch me screw it up. Here's an animal. Watch me watch in wonder. Here's a guy. Watch me ignore him because he could be a possible friend. Obsess over the Rule. *Thou shalt not make any friend because thou are extremely stupideth.*

So, could Liam Tucker be added to the list of people actually worth talking to? Zenn was skeptical, but told herself to try to keep an open mind.

Day 2:

Here's an alien animal. Watch me screw it up. Here's an animal. Watch me watch in wonder. Watch me watch the animal attack. Watch me not use the gun in my hands. Watch me use my mojo.

Day 3:

Here's an Earther animal. Watch me not screw it up. Yay! Watch me obsess over the guy and the Rule. Watch me thinking about possible conspiracies and sit tight.

Day 4:

Watch me obsess.

Day 5:

Watch me finally taking some action. Watch me obsess over the Rule. Watch me screw up an alien animal.

Day 6:

Watch me do something. Watch me be stupid/susceptible/ignorant/pliable. Watch me go to sleep when I should be raising hell.

Day 7:

Watch me still not raise a hell. Watch me obsess over the Rule. Watch me saving the day *and* an alien animal. Woo hoo!

The Week Ends

Zenn Scarlett had potential. Still does. But in book one, at least, it was left dormant due to poor character and lack of any kind of plot, engaging or otherwise.

The blurb says:

Now, with the help of Liam and Hamish, an eight-foot sentient insectoid also training at the clinic, Zenn must learn what's happened to her father, solve the mystery of who, if anyone, is sabotaging the cloister, and determine if she's actually sensing the consciousness of her alien patients... or just losing her mind.

But I think there was some mix-up. this should have been the blurb for the next book.

Which of these mysteries was exactly solved or even explored in this book? Precisely one. And when exactly did she employ Liam's help? Never. And everything else is left to the posterity.

The world of this book is indeed unique, but you know, I think it could have worked very well as a fantasy setting. It is all very well and compact but the endless barrage of weird names seem akin to a high-fantasy novel. And the bit of physics the book employs could have very well been explained away as magic mojo. Plus, the little history provided doesn't fill in all the gaps.

How did the humans first arrive on Mars? Was it because earth was overcrowded? Was it due to lack of resources? And what about the other planets humans are staying on? Doesn't it conflict with the Earther humans' apparent hatred of aliens?

But still, this is the only aspect of the book that somewhat interesting. The rest of it just falls flat and the story/action starts about 70-something% into the book. Before that, it is all raining info dump. Info dump though useless conversations, info dump through accidental yet opportune peeping. It's an info-dump fest all around.

The MC is unrealistic, unrecognizable and not someone you could get a feel of. In order to sympathize with a character, the reader has to be inside the MC's mind, be it in third person or first. Yet, Zenn is kept light years away from us and we are simply the spectators who are kept in redundant ignorance.

The book also tries to take on deeper topic, like from an alien's perspective, you are the alien and the whole shebang of how one shouldn't base their actions on myths and rumors but conclusive proof and how it could be very injurious to the community of living beings. It all pancakes.

Plus, the book being overly descriptive when it comes to animals doesn't do it any favors. I felt like glossing over most of it.

Coupled with its long, sinewy neck, the raff's body configuration gave it the incongruous look of an Earther camelid of some sort but outfitted with the immense hind legs and tiny forearms of a tyrannosaurus rex. But besides being clearly mammalian, the...

Here's how I read it:

Blah-blah-blabbity-blah, ooh lean neck(like a giraffe?), blah-blan-blah, dinosaur-like, wonder how big their dumps were? from what appendage did they pee? and how did they engage in coitus? blah-blah. mammal. blah it's over!

Well, at least, it restored my faith in my pseudo-intellectuality. I could see those culprits coming from light years away.

A copy was provided by the publishers for reviewing purposes.

Cross-posted on Books behind Dam{n}s

Faye, la Patata says

An ARC was provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This did not influence my review in any shape or form.

You want the truth? I'll give you the truth. The synopsis of *Zenn Scarlett* didn't suck me in - the cover did. If y'all follow my reviews, you must know by now how insanely obsessed I am with anything related to space. Paste a picture of the cosmos on the cover of your book, overlay or screen it with warm yellow-orange-red colours, and you got yourself a follower, my friend. Just look at that sweet, sweet baby. I'd love to have a big poster of this book and hang it on my bedroom wall. It would be a spectacular sight.

But, unfortunately, as a book blogger, I do not review covers. They're simply a bonus ~~okay fine maybe they're also a factor whether or not I'll read the book~~, adding a little touch of aesthetic value to the product. I read the book, and review the content. And this is what I have to say.

For starters, the premise is unique and highly interesting. It does not only take place in another planet and involve intergalactic travel, it has aliens. **Alien animals.** I found myself deeply intrigued, especially since the only extraterrestrial lifeforms I've had the pleasure to watch were from *Alien* vs. *Predator* movies and a few others I cannot recall right now, so I was looking forward to this book riling up my imagination.

However, this aspect kind of fell short. Yes, the alien life forms introduced were interesting, but the descriptions of the creatures didn't reach out to me. Don't get me wrong, they were all described nicely, but *I felt it seemed a little too technical, with big and unfamiliar words as well as scientific names inserted here and there, that I just couldn't picture them in my head.* In the end, the aliens simply became mere sentences and words to me, not a being I could envision and imagine. This really dampened my mood, because they were what I looked forward to the most in this book. To be honest, I do not want to read a paragraph three times over to get what was being said or described.

Granted, I'm not a native speaker, and I guess I could use a little more vocabulary on the technical side, but still. I checked Amazon and it was listed there that the intended audience for this book was 12 years old and above, and I really doubt that the lowest denominator could trudge on those descriptions about aliens, procedures, and equipment, without consulting a dictionary. **I felt that the words could have been simpler**

to make it easier for non-natives of the English language like me and for those young 'uns, otherwise, it's akin to giving us a blank page. What's there to visualize if you can't even understand what's going on in the first place?

The plot, on the other hand, was predictable and simple, but nevertheless enjoyable to follow. So Zenn is living in a human settlement in Mars, together with her Uncle, and studying to become an exovet. Their clinic gets a lot of huge aliens to help and take care of, and this riles up the rest of the humans because they're (gasp) monsters and pests. It also doesn't help they have been cut off of all contact with Earth, and are thus limited to the alien planets in the Accord. The clinic has debts to pay, mortgages to worry about, and animals running loose suddenly without any explanation, and oh, yes. She suddenly has this ability to feel the animals. What's a girl to do, right?

The plot here is easy to follow, and like I said, quite simple. **I only feel that it could have been given more shocking events, because it felt as if the pace was really slow, or that things were, majority of the time, uneventful.** However, **the ending implies a bigger and more sinister plot**, and I guess that's a plus, but it felt totally random in the end because it was like *"la la la la nothing's really happening here oh crap an animal is let loose, oh, no, it's speaking to me, I'm linked to it!, oh, it's fine now, aha!, so it was you all along and you did that for what?! How dare you?!, okay, back to normal la la la la"* and then suddenly **wham!** you're given a twist that spans galaxies and worlds. Um, ok. While that threw me off guard, I found myself to have enjoyed the plot nonetheless.

The world-building was decent, but I felt it could have given a bit more "umph". When I finished, I still couldn't exactly picture the human settlement in Mars. Other planets are mentioned, but what they're like are not totally explained. How the Indras work, though, I thought, was nicely done and kind of made sense to me. If there is a second book (and I am certain there will), I would really want to know what else this world has in store for us. The author has a huge imagination, and I'd love to see more of it.

The heroine, though, annoyed the fricking hell out of me. We're told that she's smart, level-headed, and things like that, but throughout the book, her actions and recklessness merely spelled fickle, stupid and annoyingly naïve. How can someone who's been studying to become an exovet for the longest time, has an "edge, or so she says, be distracted and forget important procedures? Every time she spaced out and forget a thing or two here, I couldn't help but want to go inside the book and slap the lights out of her. **I also hated her stupid Rule regarding no attachments because boo-fucking-hoo! If I have friends, they'll only leave me! They'll only hurt me! They'll only give me pain! Me, ME, ME! Who cares if the most important is the memories, or the connection, or whatever - relationships or opening myself up to people will only make me suffer! Boo-hoo!**

T_T

Really, sister? Really? What the flying fuck, girl? GET A GRIP! THE WORLD DOESN'T REVOLVE AROUND YOU, AND NEVER WILL IT REVOLVE AROUND YOU! Those kind of sentiments are really selfish, and I really wince a lot whenever I encounter such a situation. I also didn't get her action in the ending. I won't spoil it, but what the fuck? How could you do that?

All in all, this is not a bad book. Far from it, actually. I liked it enough to give it three stars, and enough to look forward to the second instalment. There were just a few bumps in the road, a few things that caught me off guard, but otherwise, it has a refreshing premise and a lot of promise. I'm sure it will get better; there's a lot of room for improvement. Give this one a try come May 7!

Read this and my other reviews at The Social Potato!

Dragana says

It's not a secret that I was looking forward to reading Zenn Scarlett. Colonization of other planets (especially Mars) is one of my favorite topics in science fiction novels. Add to that the fact that Christian Schoon kept teasing us in his comments and tweets by throwing out names of unusual animals featured in a book and you got one very excited bookworm (aka. me).

The amount of exotic animals did not disappoint me. There were rikkasets, crypto-plasmodial seepdemons, Greater Kiran sunkillers, yotes and many more. In fact, there were so many animals that sometimes I felt overwhelmed. New species kept appearing and I just could not picture how do they look like. And Christian Schoon does not rush his narration. Everything is slow, from worldbuilding to descriptions.

Through Zenn Scarlett's impatience there are some big lessons to be learned. When to be sure of yourself and when you need to take a break. And great view about aliens species and people's antipathy towards them. On a planet that is not your home world, who is really an alien?

A lot of things can be said about Zenn Scarlett. It's slow at the beginning and Zenn, main character, can be irritating with her mistakes and overconfidence. Still it's very original and if you're patient it pays off in the end because Zenn Scarlett is an intriguing start to a new series. I will be looking forward to the sequel *Under Nameless Stars*.

In The End...

If you like young adult science fiction novels with original plots, unusual animals and are patient reader who do not mind if story takes time to develop, then Zenn Scarlett is the book for you.

My rating: 3.5 stars

***Disclaimer:** I was given a free eBook by the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for a honest review. This text is also posted on my blog *Bookworm Dreams* in a little bit more styled edition.*

Maja (The Nocturnal Library) says

The first thing you're likely to notice about Zenn Scarlett is that it's unlike anything that is currently being published. The second thing you'll notice about Zenn Scarlett is that its breathtaking originality is a very good thing indeed. There have been quite a few surprises from the Angry Robot/Strange Chemistry camp in the last year, and it seems that they'll just keep on coming.

In worldbuilding, Schoon reminded me of a kid with Play-Doh and an overactive imagination. It's easy to feel the joy with which he created each of his creatures, from Zenn's tiny rikkaset Katie to the Kirian sunkiller. Although impressive, the worldbuilding is also a bit overwhelming at times. The Martian setting is

completely foreign, there's nothing familiar to hold on to and it's quite disorienting at first. Even now I don't have a clear picture of the Universe as Zenn knows it, but hopefully this will change in the next installment.

*"The native life forms on Mars all died out long before humans came. We're all aliens here. That's why it drives me crazy when Graad and the others complain about the cloister's patients. Calling them monsters. Calling them alien 'things' and saying they don't belong. They belong here as much as we do."**

Third person limited narration is never my favorite, and I think I would have enjoyed Zenn's story more if it were told in first person. As it was, I can't say that I experienced a strong emotional connection, although I did admire Zenn's determination and courage. She also seemed a bit young for her sixteen years, which I suppose can be explained by her isolation in the cloister. It's no wonder she was immediately (and a bit naively) attracted to Liam, a townie boy who started showing up at the cloister to help with the animals. She and Liam developed a tentative friendship and an odd sort of relationship, with just a hint of romance between them.

The plot takes a while to pick up. Combined with the rather complicated worldbuilding, it might be a bit challenging for a less patient reader. The mystery seemed pretty straightforward the entire time, but in the end, it wasn't anything I thought it would be. I love it when I'm absolutely convinced I have everything figured out, only to be proven utterly wrong in the last few chapters.

Schoon daringly weaved a tale that is richly imaginative and breathtakingly original. Zenn Scarlett is perfect for younger YA and middle grade readers, but older audience will find much to love about our red-haired heroine and her cloister on the Red Planet.

**Quote taken from an uncorrected proof and might be changed in the final version.*

Rashika (is tired) says

after reading

TELL ME THERE IS GOING TO BE A DAMN SEQUEL
TELL ME!

Review

The reason I decided to request Zenn Scarlett was (not because of the pretty cover) because it reminded me of another book I had read ages ago. I read this book back when I was in middle school and I absolutely adored it, the problem was I forgot what it was called and so for the past 5 years I've been trying to find it without any luck. Sometimes I wonder if I can call the school up and ask them to print out a list of all the books I ever checked out and send it to me, although that would be super awkward.

This is probably the second book I've read dealing with Earthern colonies on other planets (if I've read others, I cannot recall them so I apologize to you dear books for forgetting you).

I am very happy to say this book didn't disappoint, of course I won't say it was better than the book who's title I forgot because that book is connected to my childhood and is hence more precious (insert psychological explanation here).

Zenn was a great main character, she lost her mom when she was fairly young and her father left her on her own. Due to this she created rules so as to keep herself from getting hurt again. But the thing is she knows that the rules will probably have a negative effect on her as well, she understands that. She also realizes (later on) that her rules are a defense mechanism, she lets in a hand full of people but other than that she doesn't want to have to deal with anyone else but slowly she opens up to Liam. Zenn also has a great voice, it makes it very easy to relate to her. I've never wanted to be a vet in my life, doctors scare me in general yet I found myself wanting to be one while reading this book. Her passion for animals is admirable.

Liam is a rather interesting character, he has some of his own secrets but to see how his views about aliens change is rather exciting. He was never rude to the animals but his opinions about them weren't so great because his father was killed by one.

Hamish is awesome. The best alien friend ever. Hamish is their sexton but the planet where he comes from has a hierarchy, because of this he asks permission for everything. Despite this he is a great listener and very understanding. He tends to be curious about humans and their behavior. Zenn is always telling him to not ask permission for every single thing and to think for himself. I LOVED seeing how his character developed throughout the book.

The plot to the book is well paced, at first it starts of slow as the author gives us insight into this world he has created. The world building is great and I actually have a very good idea about how everything would be like. One of my favorite things about it is that humans didn't create colonies on other planets because the Earth was dying but out of curiosity (I am not sure about that but that's what I believe). I hate it when people leave Earth because is messed up, why cannot we create colonies because we can? Why wait till the last moment? That sounds extremely bratty but that's not my intention, what I mean is humans are obsessed with science, if other planets can support human life why would we not test that theory? It doesn't make sense.

Anyways going on. As we go further into the book, the author starts feeding us more and more tid bits until finally we can see the plot unraveling. It's almost like the climb to the top of a roller coaster, right before you go down.

This book ended on a cliff hanger and I am not sure if there is a sequel but there better be because otherwise, there are going to be plenty of angry fans.

This review has also been posted on my blog

Nemo (The Moonlight Library) says

See this review and more on The Moonlight Library!

Back in the 90s/early 2000s, there was this surge in cinema of the family friendly 'performance saves the day' type movies. You know, where the poor downtrodden dance group/cheerleading squad/singing class/sports team needs to put on a performance to raise money to save the destruction of their hall/teacher/lessons because some greedy developer wants to knock down their building and replace it with

hotels or whatever? And they have some vague problems like someone tries to burn down the hall anyway or sabotages the music or equipment, but the plucky heroes eventually overcome their difficulties to give a successful performance/game and the villain is arrested and everyone lives happily ever after.

That was this book. Minus the performance and the happily ever after because it's clearly a set up for a second novel. Oh, and this conflict was secondary to what I would like to call a plot, but really, following a doctor around all day isn't a plot. It's not even a character study. It's a patient study.

Zenn Scarlet had a great premise – a vet specialising in alien lifeforms ('exovet') situated on Mars. There's no reason why that premise doesn't sound awesome. Zenn's school is kind of under threat because there's a chance they might lose their land and have to put the animals down, but no one really does anything about overcoming this conflict. Zenn and her uncle just go about their daily lives and chores and lead this book's plot into a 'day in the life of an exo-vet in training', which meant that the selling point of the novel is actually its myriad of aliens, and which honestly would have been interesting enough...

...except that the showcased animals weren't very imaginative.

The majority of the aliens we met were mammals, which makes me so rageface I can't even. Several of the other aliens were based on bugs from Earth but you know, giant and intelligent. There was a giant beaver the size of a barn. There was this one awesome gaseous lifeform that has no eyes but could sense light all over its body. That was interesting. But the only truly original alien lifeform in this novel was the baby sunkiller, a massive two-headed beast with wings reminiscent of manta rays that floated its mass using gas in skin bubbles on the wings. That idea was truly awesome and astounding. But unfortunately, it was one of very few aliens that was truly alien, the only alien I could actually see evolving on its world. The rest of the aliens were far too Earth-like. Not to mention the fact that Zenn's school could only treat aliens from worlds similar enough to Earth and Mars that the animals could breathe our air and drink our water and eat our food.

The technology and world-building in this novel were really good. I was just frustrated that the aliens were mammals. Plot-wise, nothing exciting happened at all – some animals got loose, yeah, and it was totally obvious who was behind it from the start. Zenn wasn't particularly bright because she kept forgetting basic rules and getting distracted. The blurb also claims she's occasionally a little too smart for her own good, which was never demonstrated in the novel. In fact, Zenn could have put two and two together to realise who was sabotaging the school much earlier than she actually did and skipped about a quarter of the novel. She didn't even seem that keen to figure out what was going on at the school, because she convinced herself she'd made all the mistakes that allowed the animals to escape.

It didn't feel like a mystery 'who's sabotaging our school' kind of book so much as a 'here are some cool aliens, this is what's wrong with them, this is how we fix them.' That part in itself was interesting, but it made the book feel lacking in an actual plot. Plot is not 'a day in the life'. Plot is conflict + obstacles + overcoming them. I didn't feel like Zenn Scarlett explored its conflicts, despite having a very interesting mystery involving a missing presumed dead mother that really wasn't looked at but instead seemed to be an excuse for Zenn to act all angsty and explain why she wanted to be an exovet so badly – at least, I guessed that's why she wanted to be an exovet so badly. Instead of showing conflict and overcoming the conflict, we kept following Zenn and her patients and their illnesses and surgeries. Even the basic premise of the novel, the fact that there were animals escaping because someone was sabotaging them in the hopes to school would be shut down was only looked at from arm's length until it was revealed who was behind it, which only gave Zenn another reason to angst.

It also suffered from incredibly stilted, unnatural dialogue and infodumps cleverly disguised as conversation

that read more like chat show interviews:

“Have you heard of this thing?”

“No, tell me about it.”

“Well, a long time ago blah blah bah.”

“Oh yes, and then what happened?”

“Blah blah blah, related to blah.”

“What does that mean?”

“Let me tell you every conceivable detail, because you are my willing audience who is desperate to know more.”

Thankfully, this occurrence was rare and only happened two or three times throughout the novel.

The novel also felt preachy in several areas, mostly maintaining that aliens are awesome, science is good, narrow-mindedness is evil and being afraid for no reason is stupid. It doesn't matter that I agree with the sentimentality, the fact is that it was hardly subtle and felt like I was being preached to. Dude, I'm already on your side! You don't need to hit me over the head with the same argument two or three times.

On the plus side, without using accents, the dialects used by characters raised in different places were totally awesome. Character voice was definitely well conceived and is one of the great strengths of this novel – because with interstellar travel and colonies on many worlds, you'd come across totally different cultures and ways of speaking. That was great and I thoroughly enjoyed the dialects. While Schoon's narrative was generally nothing spectacular, it was clean, uncluttered, and flowed well enough, and he did have a very firm grasp on worldbuilding. I very much felt completely immersed in the novel and could vividly imagine the world due to Schoon's subtle descriptions.

Zenn herself felt flat as a character. She didn't appear as intelligent as the blurb or editor's foreword suggested she was, and she had no personality. I wouldn't be able to tell you how she'd react in any given situation. Sure, she was brave and cared deeply for her animals, but what exovet wouldn't? She had all the usual YA 'orphan' angst, a complete naivety to boys, and would rather be alone than go into town and make friends.

The secondary character, Hamish, however, was totally awesome and full of the character development that should also have been extended to Zenn. Did I mention Hamish is my favourite? Also, Zenn's pet rikkaset Katie was equally as adorable and a totally awesome representation of an intelligent pet without making her anthropomorphic. I want one!

Overall – don't go into this novel expecting a rip-roaring sci-fi adventure. It's got a slow pace and we spend much longer looking at aliens than we do exploring the mysteries of the novel and overcoming its conflicts. However, I am hoping that the sequel spends more time investigating Zenn's mother's disappearance/death, because I have a few suspicions about that I'd like to see come to light. I'd also love to see what other aliens Schoon can dream up, because that's really the main selling point, isn't it?

Thanks to Angry Robot/Strange Chemistry and Netgalley for providing this advanced reader copy for an honest review.

Nerine Dorman says

I don't even know where to start. This story just blew me away. I've worked in the veterinary industry so I'm totally passionate about animal care, and Christian Schoon writes with a voice of authenticity that left me with goose flesh.

FULL REVIEW (updated April 11, 2013):

This is one of those books that I knew the moment I read the blurb that I was going to love utterly and completely. And it goes down as one of my 2013 YA reads that I whole-heartedly recommend to anyone who's into the genre.

Zenn is the kind of protagonist whose mouth is often way ahead of her brain, and for a female protagonist, she's a breath of fresh air. This young madam knows exactly what she wants and isn't afraid to work very hard to get it—in this case she wants to be an exovet. You have no idea how happy it makes me to have a 17-year-old protagonist who isn't a vapid, boy-obsessed creature. In fact, when the boys do pitch up on the scene, she's not afraid to argue with them.

But a bit more about the world-building. Zenn has grown up in a kind of monastic order/clinic dedicated to the care of animals. And this is where Christian Schoon writes with a ring of authenticity. I spent my younger years working part-time in a veterinary clinic, and the author totally captures the atmosphere of such an environment. Animals need to be fed. Their enclosures need to be kept clean. They're troublesome—only in this case the animals Zenn and her uncle deal with are also quite dangerous if not handled correctly—as Zenn discovers.

And you get to meet some pretty fascinating critters with bizarre appearance or super sizes that would make caring for them a real challenge—a challenge that Zenn is more than up to as she attempts to prepare for her upcoming exams.

Things aren't all plain-sailing, however. The Martian colony where the Ciscan clinic is situated has suffered for many years due to a rift between Earth and Mars. Technology is outdated or redundant, and its failure often means a life-or-death situation for folks. The cities face massive urbanisation as people from the rural areas are forced to move to safety. Xenophobia is rife—only the humans view alien lifeforms, like the animals treated at the clinic and visiting aliens, with great suspicion. These are hard times.

Zenn is outspoken and often at loggerheads not only with her uncle, but the people around her. But she also has to solve a greater mystery: why her mother, an exovet, vanished while treating a patient, and the reason why her father left Mars to pursue answers. I like the fact that she makes mistakes, and everything is not all plain sailing for her. It makes her triumphs all that much sweeter.

The novel gets off on a bit of a slow start, but I was so fascinated by the day-to-day workings of the clinic/school and I could see the story building up its textures to something bigger, that this didn't present a problem to me. I really just enjoyed the ride, which was kind of like Gerald Durrell meets a Star Wars bestiary. The pace picks up near the end to quite a nail-biting finish, and Schoon is clearly setting this up for a series, so be prepared for unfinished story arcs. And I'm hoping that Schoon hurries up and writes the next in the series.

Lisbeth Avery {Domus Libri} says

In early 2011, I read a book called THE GALACTIC GOURMET. THE GALACTIC GOURMET was about a renowned alien chef named Gurronevas who was tasked with feeding other aliens.

What made this book special was White's imagination when it came to the aliens. Every alien was unique. Most didn't even have vaguely "Earther" (to steal a word from ZENN) characteristics.

ZENN SCARLETT was severely lacking in exciting and unique aliens. Every alien could both breathe air and drink water. They were all mammals and each one was compared to some Earther life form such as an insect-like or a fox-like alien.

The aliens of ZENN SCARLETT were boring. The Indra - asteroid dwelling "whales" - were as interesting as they got. ZENN SCARLETT could've used some serious imagination when it came to aliens.

While I didn't expect White-level aliens, I did expect something more than a series of mammalian, air breathing horses.

One of the lowest points to the book was the feeling that you are constantly being preached at. I know other reviewers have covered this but I feel it needs to be gone over again – just for emphasis.

Schoon, I agree with you. Science is good and narrow-mindedness is bad. But that does not mean you can spend the whole book drilling it into our heads like a teacher.

Just because science good does not mean anyone can go up to a religious person and pretty much tell them that for believing what they do, they're idiots.

I'm not a religious person and, to be honest, I don't like overly religious people at all. I can't stand them. But I would *never* go up to someone and tell them "Hey, for believing in what you do, you are a complete idiot" which is what Zenn did.

Characters

Zenn wasn't a very amazing character. She wasn't a lifeless wall but overall, Zenn was pretty plain.

She's supposedly *a-little-too-smart-for-her-own-good* (according to the blurb) but I didn't find anything that would make me think "ah, she's too smart for her own good".

Zenn was infuriatingly oblivious and naïve. There is a guy is flirting with her throughout the book. It's so OBVIOUS. But our little Zenn spent the whole book wondering "Does he like me? Is he flirting – no he couldn't be because well, I'm just Zenn".

Guys, the naïve-little-girl trope is annoying. I cannot stand oblivious heroines. It is not that hard to see when is someone blatantly flirting with you especially if they have been flirting with you for WEEKS.

Another part that annoyed me was the angst. Girl, I get it. Your life is hard. But that does not give you the right to sit around moping about how you just want to be a ~~real-boy~~ normal girl.

With all that said, Zenn isn't a bad character. Sure, she gets on my nerves but at least she wasn't a horrible person or a stick in the mud. She was brave at times and I admire her dedication to the animals.

Liam, the love interest, was bland and by bland, I mean, he was nothing. At all. He was pretty much just a name. He couldn't be called a main character by any stretch of the imagination.

Thankfully, there were two redeeming characters. Hamish, the insect alien, and Katie, the rikkaset (a fox like alien) were absolutely adorable. Hamish was the sweetest insect ever. I just wanted to hug him! Katie was an adorable deaf rikkaset who spoke in sign language.

They have to be the cutest characters I've encountered in a long time.

Plot and Writing

Plot

The book, for the most part, was a monotonous series of alien rescues. The rescues were bland and tedious since they were basically the same steps repeated with different animals. Find sick animal, help sick animal, think you can't do help it, and then actually save it...

The first two to three times were really interesting and fun but after that, I lost interest. ZENN SCARLETT became a chore to read. It wasn't bad but I felt less enthusiastic to read it.

The actual plot was a who's out to get us type book. It was more of a side plot really. Zenn helped numerous aliens but she made these "uncharacteristic" mistakes and OMG someone is trying sabotage her!

This who-did-it plot was extremely predictable. From the beginning, it's very obvious who "did" it because it's all but said outright!

Writing

The best part of the writing for ZENN SCARLETT was definitely the world. How cool is a book *set* on Mars? The world-building for the facility was fantastic and very immersive.

The worst part is the dialogue. To be blunt: it's terrible. It feels like every time Zenn is talking to someone she is either being interrogated or interrogating the other person.

Through dialogue, most of the info-dumping happens. This is a common practice but it feels even worse in ZENN SCARLETT. I don't know why or how, but it does.

Likes and Dislikes

Likes

- world building
- setting
- Katie and Hamish
- occasionally Zenn

Dislikes

- Zenn
- Dialogue
- Aliens

Conclusion

ZENN SCARLETT has a lot of problems. While my review doesn't show it, I did actually like the book for the most part. It's honestly not a terrible book and I would recommend it.

Find this review and more at my blog:

Leontii Cristea says

Zenn Scarlett, by Christian Schoon is the Strange Chemistry title for May—and damn if it's not worth waiting for. This here is a very special book and I am very excited to tell you precisely why.

Zenn is a seventeen-year-old trainee exoveterinarian—an exovet. She doesn't treat cats or dogs or budgerigars; she treats whalehounds, sunkillers and sandhogs. On Mars where she lives in the Ciscan Cloister with her (currently absent) father and uncle, Zenn is dedicating her life to the practise of attending sick and injured alien animals—the practise of her mother before her.

Whilst Zenn might not have the most normal of lives—who does on Mars, really? Since the Rift and everything—she is happiest when treating the animals, especially when she's allowed to do more than just mop up Otha's mess. Yet, with her exams approaching and her dreams of progressing to the level above, Zenn needs everything to go as smoothly as possible.

So of course, that's precisely when everything begins to go wrong. Small things, little things that can be waved away here and there: nothing to worry about. Just accidents, mistakes. But when she experiences something strange during one of her exams, something completely inexplicable occurring between the whalehound and herself, Zenn isn't so sure she can pass that off so lightly.

Before she knows it, getting through her exams might just be the least of her worries: animosity for the alien creatures the Cloister treats is at an (unusual) all-time high and for the first time in her life, Zenn's future seems uncertain.

And then, there's the towner boy Liam, who is definitely interested in something at the Cloister—only Zenn's not sure what. Towners don't like the Cloister and yet Liam spends his every free moment lending a helping hand to the Cloister's sexton, Hamish, a bug-on-loan from a very strict alien planet, sent to help and learn. But towners hate aliens, so Zenn is confused.

More confusion is definitely not what she needs.

Zenn Scarlett is an incredibly imaginative story with masses of bold insight into the human race and just how we might fare once we reach the stars. It is at once deep and light and honestly handles subtle issues of racism/xenophobia and the human assumption that its race is always superior and eternally entitled. These kinds of issues are best explored through YA—in the very least, though YA characters—because it is the non-conservative viewpoints of young people in the Real World that will change mindsets into the future.

I'm going to say, for various reasons, that Zenn Scarlett is quite possibly the definitive book on how YA (and even regular) science fiction should be written. Gone are the unnecessary gritty space stations and hard-ass spacefarers, replaced by a unique and imaginative setting that is bright and so easily envisaged it truly added

a whole other layer to its reading experience.

This book reads more like a video game in how it is visually presented and set. Or at least, the video games I play. I'm talking Final Fantasy VIII and Star Ocean: TLH. The aesthetics of these games was so dominant in my mind that they deserve mentions and Schoon deserves top kudos for deviating from the usual science fiction model.

If Square Enix and Atlus (Persona, Shin Megami Tensei) got together and made a video game of this using a powerful enough engine and with the correct focus placed on Zenn's daily life, the adventure Schoon created would taken to all new levels of awesome. Screw movies: a video game would do this justice.

Zenn Scarlett is gripping in all the right places, and entirely true to its purpose and heart in others—it remains true to the nature of its setting (an exo-vet Cloister/practise) and does not feel the need to invent action or create physical and tangible conflict in order to create tension or energy. All the energy is there through its total honesty.

The book is tightly plotted and with all the right 'breadcrumbs' to give the reader the ability to solve the ongoing mystery—and a large hint towards the explanation of events far beyond the first book. It is a subtle hint, but it was tantalisingly obvious for me, and made the end of the book far more exciting. Its characters are energetic and engaging and easy to envisage and welcome into your own imagination—again thanks to the vividly written setting.

Of course, this isn't a perfect book.

I am growing increasingly more irked at YA characters who react to hurt and pain, especially the death of a parent, by closing off and instating a "Rule" to not let anyone close. By now it's so cliché and overdone that it hurts and it threatened to turn me off to Zenn right away. However, she does lessen the irk slowly over the course of the story by analysing the Rule and finding it lacking in calculated data and reasoning. This is, of course, character development and evolution, so Schoon gets unexpected kudos for this.

Finally, Schoon is sometimes a little too eager to share the vastness of his imagination: with regards to the animals, there is just too much. A little strangeness is fantastic (I can imagine the sunkiller so perfectly I want to flail, and Katie is fantastic...although my image of the whalehound is that of an embiggened seal with brown fur and very large puppy eyes...?!) but it I feel that Schoon really missed out on the opportunity to geek out over the question of other planetary animal evolution by creating animals that more closely resembled our own, albeit it mahoosive. It would be been super-science-evo geekery. It would have been awesome and I would have fanboyed.

Overall, this is a book you have to take notice of. This book is showing an alternative to how science fiction should be written, whilst simultaneously showing how to write a YA novel lacking in angst, angsty-romance, and overemotional (and annoyingly unrealistic) teens. Zenn Scarlett is like no book you've ever read before... and if that's not enough... just look at that cover...!

Ingrid Jonach says

Hands up who wanted to be a vet when you were a kid? ME! And after reading ZENN SCARLETT I reckon I could treat an animal or two, as long as they were an alien animal!

Yes, I know the book is not scheduled for release for a few months, but I am in a position of privilege as I share the same publisher (disclaimer!).

I must say I was riveted as I followed the adventures of Zenn as she trained to become an exovet - a vet on Mars. YES - on MARS!

On his website, the author Christian Schoon describes himself as a 'critter-wrangler', but he has not just written this book for the friends of the furry, scaly and slimy (which I am - well, maybe not scaly). ZENN SCARLETT has everything you would want from a young adult novel: from action to romance to mystery. It hooked me from the first heartbreaking chapter.

Of course, now I really want a rikkaset, but I will let you read the book to find out more about that amazingly awesome critter.

A well-deserved five-stars!

Kat (Lost in Neverland) says

Aliens? Animals? Teenage animal-alien loving veterinarian? UM, YES.

This is my kind of book.

PhoenixFantasy says

Starting with the obvious, the cover art for Zenn Scarlett is absolutely BEAUTIFUL. I'm not big on SF in general, but I absolutely HAD to have this one because it's ridiculously pretty. Yes, I will buy a copy for my shelf when it's released on that fact alone. I'm a terrible human being, I know. And I've no doubt plenty of other readers will find it irresistibly shiny also. The magpies among us will be appeased. I've done some rummaging about to see who's responsible for such gorgeousness, and it appears to be a company called "Argh! Oxford". I'm just ten minutes or so from Oxford, so I will be re-mortgaging my house whenever my own novel is finished in an attempt to get these guys to work with me. I will sell my car, my PC, goddammit even a kidney. Whatever it takes. But I digress.

Zenn Scarlett is like nothing else I've ever read. And in today's market, that's one hell of an achievement. Hats off, seriously. I thought that Schoon's world-building and characterisation were excellent. I loved all the different creatures, and the respective roles that they fill. It's absolute genius, and I'm not going to give any examples because I don't want to spoil any of it for you, you're just going to have to trust me. One thing I will say though, is I want a rikkaset. I really, really do.

Schoon serves up a unique concept, amazing world-building and enjoyable characters. Zenn is good fun to read, she's far from perfect, but she's determined and stubborn, and her heart is in the right place, I'm all for

that. The only thing that lets the novel down, for me, is the plot. I found it to be a little weak in places, and it pains me to say it because so much about the book is amazing, but elements of the plot towards the end of the novel felt rushed to me, and the ending itself was a bit of a let-down. It's a shame, it really is. I wanted to love this unconditionally. It suffers a little from repetition as well, with Schoon labouring several points more than necessary, in my humble opinion of course. Again I don't want to go anywhere near spoilers, but you'll spot what I mean as soon as you dig in. Does it matter? Not really, slightly iffy plot, sub-optimal ending and irritating repetition pale into insignificance against the beauty of the backdrop and the imagination behind all those animals. But I'd be remiss if I didn't mention it. It only loses one star for me, because the brilliance of the Good balances outweighs the niggles of the Bad.

Zenn Scarlett is a unique and breathtaking journey, and one that I would definitely recommend.

<http://phoenixfantasyreviews.com/2013...>
