



# Mercenary Instinct

*Ruby Lionsdrake*

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## **Mercenary Instinct** Ruby Lionsdrake

Skulking around in the ruins on a planet swarming with treasure hunters, slavers, and bounty hunters isn't good for one's health. But Ankari Markovich needs a few archaeological samples for her latest business venture, a venture that might prove lucrative enough to move her family off the impoverished planet where she grew up. Unfortunately, she has no sooner collected her samples than she's captured by a band of brawny mercenaries. The captain might be handsome, but he's intent on turning her over to some finance lord who has, for reasons unknown, put a bounty on her head, a ridiculously large one at that. If she can't figure out a way to escape before she's delivered to the lord's home world, she could be forced into a life of indentured servitude—or worse.

Captain Viktor Mandrake doesn't usually take on piddling bounty hunting gigs, but when his intelligence officer informs him of a criminal on a nearby planet, he decides it wouldn't hurt to take a shuttle down to collect the woman. But Ankari Markovich is trouble from the start, nearly eluding his elite forces, then fighting and tricking his people left and right. He finds himself admiring her spirit, but according to her warrant, she's a criminal. The safest thing is to keep her in the brig and ignore her until she can be handed off to the man who wants her.

But the situation grows more complicated when other bounty hunters show up, wanting to claim Ankari for themselves. Thanks to this woman, Viktor's ship is in danger, his crew members are going missing, and he's fighting enemies he never asked for in a jungle in the middle of a hurricane. He's either going to strangle Ankari... or fall in love. Either scenario could get him killed.

Mercenary Instinct is a full-length, stand-alone novel of 90,000 words. It is part of the "Mandrake Company" series of science fiction romance stories and is recommended for readers who enjoy space-based adventure (such as Firefly) and steamy love stories (in the style of Linnea Sinclair).

## **Mercenary Instinct Details**

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Author : Ruby Lionsdrake

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# From Reader Review Mercenary Instinct for online ebook

## Marlene says

Originally published at Reading Reality

Some of the reviews compare Mercenary Instinct to Firefly, and it's a pretty fair starting point. Possibly an alternate universe Firefly. It's not that Mal Reynolds couldn't end up as cynical and universe-weary as Victor Mandrake (he pretty much did) but that I can't imagine Mal creating or leading a successful mercenary company with 200+ people on its payroll. He wasn't that organized, nor did he want to be in charge of quite that much. (Zoe, on the other hand, possibly yes)

But Mal would certainly have pulled the same stunt that Viktor does - taking a bounty for someone who seems criminal, only to change his mind when he discovers that the supposed criminals are every bit as much victims of intergalactic politics and chicanery as he is.

Upon which change of heart, trouble comes hunting him and his. So yes, Firefly.

Back to the actual book in hand (or on ereader), Mercenary Instinct. This is a combination unlikely love story and poke in the eye at intergalactic mercantile empires wrapped up in a fun package.

Viktor Mandrake is the Captain/Commander/Leader of Mandrake's Company, a successful mercenary company with a fairly decent sized payroll and quite a bit of good space-faring equipment. He's also a deserter from the GalCom Special Forces. GalCom isn't a government or a planet, it's a corporation. A universe spanning corporation that operates as a government. It's also the entity that wiped out the entire population of Mandrake's home planet because they didn't want to join the company.

Only one other planet ever suffered the same fate, and for the same reason. GalCom also wiped Ankari Markovich's home planet of Spero off the face of the universe. No other planet failed to heed those heart-breaking examples. But it does give Viktor something in common with Marcovich, the woman he is supposed to turn over to one of the more secretive Lords of Commerce on brutal but rather flimsy charges.

Ankari Markovich is the owner of a small biotech firm that plans to use ancient alien gut-bugs (try to say that three times fast) to make people healthier through gut-bug treatments. (As they are formally called, microbiota are real and research on changing or fixing them through injections from people with healthy microbiota is currently ongoing in our 21st century, which makes this plot not as far-fetched as it first appears)

Lord Felgard creates a "Most Wanted" poster for a very nasty crime using very shaky, almost "photoshopped" evidence so that he can put a very hefty bounty on Ankari and her two partners, Jamie and Lauren. All women in their early to mid-20s who have never even heard of Lord Felgard.

Their capture, in fact, the wanted posters themselves, come as a total surprise to Ankari and company. So much of a surprise that Viktor Mandrake starts to question the purpose of this bounty he has hunted. When Felgard double-crosses him, Viktor is certain there is more to this story than appears, in spite of, or perhaps because of, Ankari's repeated escape attempts.

She may be trouble, but she isn't a cold blooded killer. So what is she and why does Felgard want her in such

a huge, expensive hurry?

And why can't Viktor manage to resist letting her trouble all the way into his formerly regimented life?

Escape Rating B+: In spite of, or perhaps because of, its similarity to *Firefly*, *Mercenary Instinct* is a whole lot of fun. It has that same blend of space opera combined with rooting for the underdog that made *Firefly* so much fun.

In the science fiction side of this book's roots, we have two themes that make for an interesting "man and woman against the evil corporation" plot work. The idea of an intergalactic corporation becoming the effective government is unfortunately all too easy to believe. After all, corporations now have rights to free speech in the U.S. Also, considering the current mess between Sony and North Korea, we have a corporation that either hacked, was hacked, and censored or was censored or refused to bow to censorship in the face of an actual government. The future where corporations are as big and powerful as countries may already be here.

And we've already talked about the gut-bugs. As funny as they sound, there's real science hiding in those microbiota.

Markovich and her friends make an interesting bunch of would-be entrepreneurs. Lauren is the scientist who focuses on her work to the exclusion of everything else, including self-preservation. Jamie is a self-taught pilot and engineer desperate to escape her home planet, and Ankari is the brains and guts of the outfit. She's the one who keeps going when it would be logical to stop trying. She rescues herself, over and over.

The double-cross by Felgard creates a dramatic tension as every mercenary company in the area swoops in to attempt to re-kidnap Ankari and her friends from Mandrake. The more odds that are stacked against them, the closer that Ankari and Viktor become.

I'll confess to not being 100% sold on their romance. While it made sense that they banded together in the face of so much opposition and danger, it smacked a bit too much of insta-love to sell me. I could see insta-lust in this situation but not true love. YMMV.

Felgard was a bit of a cookie-cutter villain, if the cookies were made out of man-eating plants. He's a bit bwahaha at the end, and seemed to exist mostly to create the situation rather than have real motives of his own.

But I still had a ball with this book, and have the entire series so far on my iPad waiting for the next time I need a treat. *Trial and Temptation* is already tempting me.

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## **Jacob Proffitt says**

If you take Romance as the main genre and Sci-fi as a qualifier, you'll do okay with your expectations of this story. I had a bit of a cheat going in, as I already know I liked the author from a separate penname and thus had my expectations set more or less squarely. And I wasn't disappointed.

I liked Ankari pretty much immediately. She's determined, courageous, and capable and a good leader for her mismatched team. She's trying to turn an idea into a business and willing to take some risks along the

way while she does. And I liked that her team all had different strengths and weaknesses and that the story highlighted the need and use of Ankari's unique skillset. Which means that I could sympathize with her immediately and she maintained my interest in the frame story with little effort.

I had a harder time with Viktor. I'm used to my sci-fi covert-ops leader/killers maintaining their hard exterior a bit longer, even (particularly?) in regards to interesting females they capture along the way. I liked him fine, but I had a hard time transitioning him to love interest. I suspect this is a quirk of the (sub)genre and I *did* get used to it. And once I did, boy howdy was he a lot of fun!

At any rate, this ended up a fine tale, well told and a lovely romance. Lionsdrake knows the audience expectations and she hits them very well, indeed. And not in any by-the-numbers way, either. The story fit the characters and the action was as fun as the romance.

**A note about Steamy:** I was relieved to find this folding right into the middle of my range. There are a couple explicit scenes of moderate length and a great deal of enthusiasm...

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## Summer says

I'd seen quite a few good reviews of this and I'm a big fan of sci-fi with a strong romance angle. This however did not work for me. I didn't really like the characters and I found myself putting it down and not really interested in picking it up again.

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## Spuffed says

Wow! This book is action packed! I actually had to put it down at about the 70% mark because it was getting too intense for me and I needed a mindless historical romance for a bit. Two weeks later, I remembered that I needed to finish it and I was on the edge of my seat for the remainder of the book. I was afraid of a cliffhanger but they did wrap things up pretty quickly after another big, intense action scene.

Quick Rundown: In a future where other planets are now inhabited and Earth no longer exists, Kick Ass Chick who has hustled her whole life to get away from the poverty of her youth has gathered two other ladies to create a company that will harvest ancient alien shit (literally) into a microbiotic treatment for those many who have weak immune systems due to all kinds of current day health problems. All three get picked up by bounty hunters and learn that a exorbitant amount of money is on their heads to be delivered to a super rich asshole for reasons unknown to them. Dude runs his own mercenary outfit and trouble begins when his group is ambushed many times by other mercenaries in order to steal the prisoners for reward money. Heavy action is the name of the game in this book and some connections are made by Chick and Dude (or course).

Characterization: Really impressed. With all the action going on in this book, the author still managed to show us who the characters were as the book progressed. There was no character info dump in this book. It all intertwined together with the plot. The Chick was a bad ass and was always thinking ahead and not making dumb girl decisions. She was proactive and sneaky along with some great fighting skills. Dude was more of a mystery as he wasn't the type of person to share his feelings and I didn't find him lacking because of that. That's just who he is. Secondary characters were just fine. The Big Bad's motivation is shown at the very end and while the action scenes surrounding that reveal were great, the actual reason was a bit of a let

down. There was not a whole lot of romance in this book. There was a decent amount of really good sexual tension and I think only two sex scenes, the later of which was very abrupt so that was a bit disappointing as I love my smut:)

Plot/Writing: The basic plot was nothing new, I suppose but there was something about it that made this book different. It had layers and again, a ton of exciting action scenes. The writing was great. Everything made sense and despite all the troubles in the book the characters had to go through, there was only one detail in the end of the book that was over the top for me. But, this author ended up making that detail worth it in the end.

Overall: I do wish there was a bit more romance and smuttyness in the book but I can't fault the book for that. It was a really great read and I thank Celestine for recommending it to me! I will certainly be reading more books from this author!

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## LAB? says

This was probably the best free book I've ever downloaded. I don't read a lot of sci-fi but not for any real reason other than I don't hear of too many. I loved the H in this book. Viktor was a complete badass. The h, Ankari, was full of surprises and definitely wasn't a weakling waiting to be rescued. I plan on continuing with this series.

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## Hannah says

This is actually a fun, frothy sci-fi romance, but I would have enjoyed it far more if I hadn't read just about every single thing Ruby Lionsdrake had written under her other name, Lindsay Buroker. I'm not sure whether it's fair to the book or not, since the bulk of my criticisms have to do with its similarities to the author's other works under a different name, but I simply can't avoid the comparisons.

The fact that I've loved almost everything Lindsay Buroker had written is why I tried this despite sci-fi romance/space opera being a genre I usually avoid. Her trademarks are here - and therein lies the problem. Ankari is a strong heroine with a sense of humour and a talent for persuasion, running her own self-recruited team only to find that she has a bounty on her head (she's basically (view spoiler), but with considerably less character). She has an interest in scientific research and works in the field (much like (view spoiler)). The hero, Captain Viktor Mandrake, is a stoic mercenary who has a few question marks over his relative morality (in essence, a more socially-functional, less dangerous version of (view spoiler)). All the action in this book, from the heroine being captured due to a bounty, plotting escape and dodging captors left and right with the goal of clearing her name - all these elements are central to the above-mentioned books under the Buroker name as well. It was difficult to enjoy *Mercenary Instinct* as its own story and as something that's supposed to be a bit different - an expectation based on the author's explanation that it's why she chose to use a pen name - when it's actually composed of bits and pieces of her other books. *Watered down* bits and pieces, as well, since the space of one novel hardly did justice to the elements that took time to develop and grow in the other series.

That aside, *Mercenary Instinct* is enjoyable as a light romance novel in sci-fi clothing. Don't expect serious depth to the characters, plot or world-building, but Ankari is likeable, there's plenty of humour and it's easy

to just get swept along for the ride. I'll be the first to admit that disappointment over a favourite author producing same-same under a different pen name has *heavily* coloured my reading experience, so I'm sure other readers who're less familiar with the author's work would likely enjoy this more.

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### **Beth says**

New series for a favorite author under a new name...Lindsay Buroker is now writing adult alien scifi fantasy under the name Ruby Lionsdrake. Come to find out I had already owned 2 of the books, so I decided to check them out and am loving this new series.

The Mandrake Company is a mercenary ship for hire. In *Mercenary Instinct*, Captain Viktor Mandrake collects the bounty on Ankari Markovich and her fellow crewmates. But Viktor quickly discovers that the women in his care can't be wanted for the crimes they supposedly committed. With each escape attempt Ankari weasels her way deeper under Viktor's skin.

Totally shocked on the bases of Ankari's research but what an original idea!!!

Fun, flirty and fantastic science fiction adventure, I was immediately absorbed into this new, and much steamer exploit.

Written by: Ruby Lionsdrake

Series: Mandrake Company

Sequence in Series: 1

Rating: 5 Stars

Genre: Scifi | Fantasy

Find this book on: AMAZON

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

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### **Mara says**

Definitely a meh experience. A very thin plot, cardboard characters, evil mustache-twirling cartoonish villain, instalove.

Skimmed a few paragraphs.

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### **Shanna Matheo says**

Mehh... Didn't really dig it. Although the characters all seemed to have complicated back stories, they themselves seemed one dimensional.

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## **Gwen (The Gwendolyn Reading Method) says**

Fun space opera romp. But some of the early half of the book was a little uncomfortable on the whole how to treat female prisoners front.

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## **Sunny says**

This book is sci-first light. No deep emotions, no deep mystery, no deep explanations, simplistic world-building. It is superficial which makes it difficult to care very much for these characters.

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## **Laura (Kyahgirl) says**

3.5/5; 4 stars; B+

This was a fun kind of space adventure with humour, romance and action. I enjoyed the characters and the plot. I am looking forward to reading more in the series.

Thanks to my GR friend Mei for the recommendation!

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## **Mei says**

Captain Grumpy... LOL

A really, really fun and action packed story!

Ankari, an enterprising girl, with her two friends/business associates, is captured by mercenaries after a bounty issued by a Finance Lord.

The leader of mercenaries is the hot grumpy captain, Victor.

As we came to expect from SF romance stories, Victor is attracted to Ankari. He's a honorable man trying to remain honorable even in his new profession and he "rules" his crew with the same attitude.

Ankari is a very determinate to make her business a success and she doesn't appreciate Viktor's trying to detain her. She also doesn't understand why the Finance Lord issued the bounty – she didn't do anything wrong!

So she constantly tries to escape Victor in any way she can.

But Viktor is a very capable captain and she gets caught every single time, but with her escape plans she puts in danger the mercenaries each time. That was the fun part, because she's very inventive with her escapes! LOL

Victor and Ankari, each fighting for their own goals, get to know each other better. And the attraction becomes more!

Viktor overcomes his grumpiness with Ankari and Ankari gets to know him better and view him as a man with an unexpected sense of humor and warmth.

I loved Viktor's quirks: he never sits down except when piloting; he drinks strange tasting shakers because he doesn't like to eat vegetables... it was really fun reading about them!

A very nice romance with the right amount of hotness and humor!

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### **Lyndi W. says**

A fun read, but a whole lot of build up for a kinda meh ending.

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### **Gwynn White says**

This was a fun read and I did enjoy it, but I found a few too many similarities between Akarai and Mandrake and some of the author's other characters written under her other pen name. Also, some of the settings and the action seemed familiar. I guess when one has devoured every other book an author has ever written that it is inevitable that there will be some crossover of plots. I will read the rest of the series.

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