



The Devil's Nebula

Eric Brown

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Best-selling author Eric Brown has created a brand new shared world for Abaddon Books: **Weird Space**. This thrilling space-opera series will begin with the release of **The Devil's Nebula**. Brown will introduce readers to the **human smugglers, veterans** and **ne'erdowells** who are part of the **Expansion** – and their uneasy neighbours, the **Vetch Empire**. When an evil race threatens not only the Expansion, but the Vetch too - an evil from **another dimension** which infests humans and Vetch alike and bends individuals to do their hideous bidding, only cooperation between them means the difference between a chance of survival and no chance at all.

The Devil's Nebula Details

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From Reader Review *The Devil's Nebula* for online ebook

Liviu says

The Devil's Nebula turned out to be quite a disappointing book after a great start. It soon becomes corny and predictable with a story I have seen a million times in sf and a writing style that alternates between readable and very pulpy and corny; very cliché characters and action and while sometimes such is fun if the writing style is modern and cool and the action smart, here neither of those hold.

And now a few details:

1: Interesting start - a crew of 3 misfits who thumb their nose at authority are on an artifact retrieval mission on an abandoned planet in enemy space where they get into unexpected trouble and find out some interesting stuff, but when they think they got away clear and with the booty, they are captured by the human authorities and the circus - show trial, death sentence, but of course a reprieve if they accept a dangerous mission etc etc - and super corny dialogue starts.

2: Interlude on a planet far away; primitive humans worship alien god(s) who of course are evil and drug them into continual happiness until they go voluntarily to get eaten (hey David Gerrold did this in a much cooler way in his Chtorr series decades ago, but ok, maybe something will come out) but special girl knows to avoid the drugged alien food and has "outlaw" friends who teach her the ropes (oops here already we start veering into corniness..).

And guess what the dangerous mission above is? Well, you guessed it, make contact with said primitive humans who somehow sent a mayday distress signal to human space

And I could continue but it's really not worth the time and energy; much better sf, space opera adventure, dangerous missions, misfit crews, etc out there.

Mieneke says

I love Eric Brown's writing. His *Kéthani* made me believe I might enjoy SF outside of the military SF subgenre, that I wasn't too dense to get it, as it were. Though other than *Kéthani* I haven't read any of his other novels, I did love his short story with Keith Brooke in *Solaris Rising* and loved the snippets I've read of *Kings of Eternity*, which has been on my TBR-pile for far too long. So when Abaddon Books announced that Brown would be creating a new shared world for them, I was duly excited. Here was a shared world I could not only get in on from the ground level, it was thought up by one of my favourite SF writers. So reviewing *The Devil's Nebula*, the first book set in the *Weird Space* universe was really a no-brainer for me. And I'm glad to say, Brown lived up to my expectations.

After introducing us to Captain Ed Carew, his pilot Lania and his engineer Jeb while they are in the middle of – let's call it an asset extraction – on Hesperides, during which he also manages to impart the basic facts about humanity's relations with its nearest alien neighbours, the Vetch, these three intrepid adventurers get caught by Expansion officials for breaking the law. In three short chapters Brown manages not only to

establish two of his three points of view, he shows us the two main powers in his universe, humanity's Expansion and their alien adversaries, the Vetch and gives us an idea how the power balance between the two lies. Once caught, Carew and his crew get offered the same *Dirty Dozen* deal as the one I referenced in my *Control Point* review. This time the analogy is even closer, as our trio are criminals who get their sentence commuted if they agree to go on a very dangerous mission. It's probably just coincidence, but I was amused by the fact that I've read two novels so close together that both utilise this same trope. The crew's storyline, which is told from both Carew's and Lania's points of view, alternates with that of Maatja, a young woman living on World in a society of human settlers dominated by the Weird, a strange and terrifying alien species. She is our window on World and shows us what living with the Weird is like. When these two storylines converge, Brown has made the stakes clear, not just for the inhabitants of World, but for all humanity. They are high and they make for an exciting climax of *The Devil's Nebula*.

Brown's stories are mostly character-driven in my experience and *The Devil's Nebula* is no different. I like Carew and Lania. They live on the fringes of both society and the law, but all the same are likeable and seemingly decent human beings. There seems to be a lot of emotional baggage for the both of them, which we only learn about in full by the end of the novel. I liked that Brown keeps us guessing a little at their history, while at the same time making clear that this history is what is informing their decisions. I loved Lania's relationship with Gina. It's good to see a same-sex coupling forming without any raised eyebrows or emphasis on such. While I was rather surprised by the swiftness of their bonding, the fact that it is cemented by the stressful situations they find themselves in made it more believable. Maatja is an outsider, similar to Carew and Lania, though in her case less by choice than by necessity. While she wants things to change, she wants to change them from within her community, even though she knows this really isn't possible. If I'd have one critique, it would be that some characters were a little telegraphed, particularly Jeb, but it's hard to explain this without giving spoilers for the story. Suffice it to say, that some things aren't as surprising as they should be.

The Devil's Nebula is the set up for a new shared world. Brown does this admirably. While he gives us a clear outline of the universe/humanity and its eventual main nemesis, there is still much left to explore. I can see stories going both forward in time and stories exploring the history of this universe and how space came to be divided as it is between the Expansion and the Vetch. It will be interesting to see whether any of the writers who will be part of this world will choose to set their stories in the Vetch world instead of in the Expansion. One thing is for sure, Brown has created a solid base for others to work from and expand upon themselves.

Weird Space has a lot of potential and I'm curious to see where it will go. As for *The Devil's Nebula*, I hope it is only the first chapter in many chronicling the adventures of Carew and Lania, because I've the feeling their story is far from over, even if the narrative is self-contained. This book was a great start to a shared universe and once more Eric Brown proves he's my gateway author to non-military SF. I think I have to move *Kings of Eternity* up on the TBR pile! *Weird space: The Devil's Nebula* will be available from Abaddon Books May 29th in the US and Canada and June 21st in the UK.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

Nathan Trachta says

I saw this one and was intrigued by the description; sci-fi with a touch of horror in an unstable environment, right up my alley. Have to say that lasted about 3 chapters and then the author fell apart. Ok, to tell the truth

he was weak before the end of the third chapter and I was hoping for something to pop after the first three chapters because there was potential. Free that it collapsed on itself like a pile of something that could never solidify until well afterward. It's sad because the books concept is cool and I think it could make a great storyline vs. the tried and true war between cultures.

Ashish says

I hate to say it, but...

It's kinda kiddish. It basically covers the same ground as *A Mote In God's Eye*, but somehow it's much... lesser. Simplistic? *Mote* had a depth, length and creep factor exponentially greater than this one - which is slightly like a script for an RPG-shooter type game, everything happening between a ship, village, river, jungle and cave, with stereotyped characters, stereotyped aliens... it started well, but started losing the plot right after the capture and became almost a parody by the time it finished. Not enough attention to detail, world-building too incomplete, ending predictable and empty.

Not worth it, frankly, if you've read *Mote*, watched *Aliens*, or played *Mass Effect*.

It doesn't even come across as the script for a full game! Just a side quest!

Jason says

4 Stars

What a thoroughly enjoyable summer space opera read. Eric Brown does something unheard of in this genre, he writes a book that is not Herculean in size and in bloat. The Devil's Nebula is proof that a great writer with lofty ideas, a massive plot scope, and a great editor can achieve science fiction space opera goodness without the intimidation of a massive tome.

This is a novel that is similar in style and in scope as The Ketty Jay series by Chris Wooding. In this we have a group of three rogue outcasts, led by their captain Ed Carew. He saved a young military woman a decade ago named Lania, and now she is his devoted pilot. Along her way into adulthood she came across Jed, the man with the knack with a wrench, and of course a natural engineer. Brown adds to their story by putting them in an old starship with a really cool name...The Paradoxical Poet.

The story and plot are a tad predictable but that is ok. The Weird, the strange alien race are a delight. The action can be fast and violent. The dialogue is filled with enough wit to raise the quality of the conversations. The mysteries unfold as the story progresses and you will want to know more. Brown has created a world that I will definitely revisit, and made the heroes an enjoyable bunch.

The Devil's Nebula is a truly fantastic summer read. Space Opera fans will not want to miss this one. Fans of epic adventures would feel right at home with this novel as the science fiction is done with light hand. I highly recommend this fun read!

Updated February 2015.

After A reread of this book, much of my thoughts and feelings remained the same. Brown has disguised an adventure story inside it's space opera shell. The story as a whole is a light science fiction horror adventure

that does lay down the grounds for more books in a series. Carew, the Captain and main protagonist is likable, smart, and capable. He remained the solid foundation that made Devil's Nebula work.

I liked this book twice. It is an easy read that is fast paced and fun. I look forward to more.

Mark says

The Devil's Nebula is the first book in the new 'Weird Space' shared world series from Abaddon Books, and written by one of my favourite authors, Eric Brown. I've not read many shared world books before as I've never really seen the attraction of doing so - I much prefer to read a series from one author. As this is the first book in the Weird Space setting I was pleased to be able to jump on at the start, see what Brown would set up, and just how I would perceive it knowing it was to be the first of many in this setting and to be continued by different authors. But anyway, what did I think of The Devil's Nebula? Exactly what I expected - I enjoyed it.

There are two main threads in The Devil's Nebula. The first follows Ed, Lania, and Jed, the crew of the borderline illegal trading ship The Paradoxical Poet, as they attempt to acquire a statue from a once-human world now under the control of the Vetch. With the penalty for being found here certain death, the crew know that it's a risky mission, and that's before the Captain, Ed, reveals the other reason they are there. But all does not go smoothly, and after a tight confrontation with the Vetch they escape only to be caught by the human authorities. Fearing the worst, it comes as a surprise that they are offered a mission to what is believed to be a far-flung colony world settled in secret many years ago. With their choices limited there is really only one option, and it's this exploratory mission that makes up the bulk of the story.

The other plot thread focuses on Maatja, a young girl living on the World, a planet where the small human population lives under the control of the Weird, an alien species that appears to look after them. But Maatja has suspicions, and as events unfold she realises that the Weird aren't the good-natured aliens they show themselves to be. And when Ed, his crew, and the officials arrive on the World questions finally start being answered.

There were two main things I wanted from The Devil's Nebula before I started reading it. The first is obvious: a good story. With Eric Brown at the helm I knew that was pretty much a sure thing, and he didn't disappoint. The Devil's Nebula is firmly set in an SF setting, but it isn't hard SF, nor really space opera. The small crew of the Paradoxical Poet added a nice set of characters, while Maatja allowed the World to be seen in a different view to the one most of its inhabitants have. Brown manages to convey the sense of wrongness on the World, but it does feel one-sided. It's not a bad thing, though a point of view here and there from the other side might have helped to balance it out a little. The Weird match their name well, and while they are explored throughout the story (more towards the concluding chapters), further details could have given a deeper complexity to them.

One of the few aspects I felt was thoroughly under-developed was the relationship between humanity and the Vetch. After the early stages of the novel they seem to be pushed to one side, the threat they pose to humans not really looked at in detail, and after some of the early scenes and exposition about them that raises many questions, I felt a little short-changed regarding them.

Of course, all this relates to my second requirement from The Devil's Nebula: how well does it work as a

shared setting? The answer is quite simple: very well. These little things that weren't developed thoroughly here can be looked at in greater detail in future novels. Having Brown firming up all details would have been a bad idea for the future writers of this series, so it's a sacrifice that I'm prepared to allow it for the sake of future stories. And the ending certainly opens up many possibilities there.

Overall I'd say *The Devil's Nebula* is a spot-on first novel in a shared setting. It delivers a good story, introduces the premise of the setting and the threats and dangers posed within it, but also works well as a stand-alone. I'll be very much looking forward to the next *Weird Space* novel, especially one written by another author just to see where they can take it, and with Eric Brown already signed up for another book in this setting (*Satan's Reach*), I know that it'll be a series worth following.

Ali Berk Çetinbudaklar says

Ne fazlas?, ne eksi?i olan, farklı?l?k yaratamayan "space opera" türünde bir roman kendisi. Yazar her?eyi katmaya çal?m?? heralde; "hive mind" temas?na sahip uzayl? bir ?rk?m?z, çe?itli eklentilerle psi güçlere sahip telepatlar?m?z, distopik bir ya?ama itilmi? bir kolonimiz, Firefly tak?m? tad?nda bir mürettebat?m?z var (tabi o kadar olamazlar bir fikir vermek aç?s?ndan); k?saca çok bo?san?z deneyin.

Dale Donovan says

This book does nothing better than *The Expanse* novels do. Nothing.

Harmen says

Eine gute Geschichte. Die Menschheit hat sich im Universum verbreitet, der gesamte menschliche Raum wird als "Expansion" bezeichnet. Die Expansion wird ziemlich streng und eindeutig regiert. Angrenzend ist der Bereich der Vetch. Es gibt regelmäßige Streitigkeiten mit dieser Rasse. Hinter dem Vetchgebiet befindet sich der "Teufelsnebel", der wegen seines Aussehens mit zwei Hörnern so bezeichnet wird. In diesem Gebiet hinter dem Vetch-Raum haben sich menschliche Siedler niedergelassen, die angehörige eine seltsame Sekte sind. Ein SOS wird empfangen, ein Notruf! Dann beginnt die Reise durch den Vetchraum. Bei den Siedlern angekommen erwartet Sie eine unangenehme Überraschung.

Mehr werde ich nicht verraten. Spannend, gut geschrieben und ziemlich originell, was im SF immer schwieriger wird.

Odo says

(Originally published on my blog: <http://sentidodelamaravilla.blogspot...>)

I am huge fan of big idea science fiction. In fact, the bigger the ideas, the more I enjoy the book. However, I'm not always in the mood for philosophical disquisition or scientific speculation involving convoluted physics theories. Sometimes I just want to read something light and fun. Something with a straightforward plot, that grabs you from the first page and that you can read without worrying about every little detail or

subtle hint left by the author. *The Devil's Nebula* by Eric Brown is the perfect such book.

At the beginning of *The Devil's Nebula* we follow two different plot threads. On the one hand, we have the crew of *The Paradoxical Poet*: Captain Ed Carew, Pilot Lania Takiomar and Engineer Jed Neffard. They are trying to smuggle an alien statuette from a Vetch planet when they are detained by the Expansion Authority, who will make them an offer they can't refuse. Meanwhile, young Maatja is about to discover that the Weird, the alien race that provides nourishment to her village, may not have her people's best interest at heart.

Although both threads are fun to read, the one that takes place in World, the planet where Maatja lives, is the most interesting of the two. While the adventures of Captain Carew and his crew are quite entertaining, they are a bit formulaic and the characters are two-dimensional. The chapters devoted to Maatja, however, are more original and refreshing, especially because we get to know what is the strongest point of the book: the mysterious aliens called the Weird, a race with a very peculiar biology that reminded me of the aliens in the *X-COM: Apocalypse* videogame.

The prose is simple and clearly subordinated to plot development. In fact, the novel has a certain YA science-fantasy feel to it (there are a number of explicit scenes, though). There is also plenty of humor, and even self-parody, especially in the first third of the novel.

The Devil's Nebula has been classified as Space Opera, but I don't quite agree. In fact, only a small fraction of the novel takes place in space and, for instance, the interplanetary conflict (between humanity and the Vetch) is, sadly, one of the most underdeveloped aspects of the novel. In *The Devil's Nebula* you won't find the plot complexities of Peter F. Hamilton's stories or the dark tone of some of Alastair Reynolds's works. You will find, however, a pulp (in a good sense) science fiction adventure that is fun all the way and very difficult to put down.

It must be also noted that this is the first novel in a shared world series and some of the aspects of the universe may, and certainly will, be explored further in future installments. Eric Brown has done a very good job with the world-building and I'm looking forward to reading the next novel in the series.

All things considered, I strongly recommend *The Devil's Nebula*, especially if you're looking for something light and fun to read at the beach this summer.

Trevor says

Brown's *The Devil's Nebula* reads like a throwback to the older days of the space opera--and not in a good way. The book is almost all plot, with characters less defined by a full-bodied profile and more by their clichéd quirks, and involves familiar sci-fi tropes from its subgenre such that nothing in the book feels particularly original.

Perhaps one of its issues is that the book is clearly an effort to launch a new franchise for a minor genre publisher. It often feels like a book without real soul, all genre without any clear human philosophy. Even as a "popcorn" novel (the kind meant to entertain more than anything else), it doesn't do enough to set itself apart from many other books like it. Those that are fans of the pulpier era of the space opera might enjoy its throwbacks to inhuman monsters and cheap twists, but I found it fairly unambitious and uninspired.

Debrac2014 says

I liked the storyline, humans infected by the Weird! Good space opera! But I knew what would happen halfway thru the story.

Dirk Grobbelaar says

Influences were legion. Every space opera I've read, to start off. Vance: I liked his baroque, wide-open far-future scenarios, his lone-wolf characters. To a certain extent Neal Asher's excellent depiction of aliens... Peter Hamilton's complex, intricately detailed futures... And, of course, Lovecraft: his tentacled creatures from beyond... I think the mix will work well. - Eric Brown, on *Weird Space*

What do you get if you take the Space Western setting of *Firefly*, add in the exploration themes of *Star Trek* and season it with the otherworldly horror of *Lovecraft*?

That's more or less what we have here.

At first, [he] failed to take in the enormity of what lay before him. His mind registered the hundreds of stick-like objects at his feet, and then he realised suddenly that they were bones and that they went on and on and on, a macabre landscape of tangled skeletons of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of aliens extending for at least a kilometre.

I am all for keeping things lean. This time round, however, it doesn't quite work in the story's favour. Considering that this is an all new Universe, *The Devil's Nebula* is rather sparse on details. I couldn't help but feel that some substance was sacrificed in order to keep the story to a prescribed length. The net result is a book that feels somewhat rushed. It's not a total train smash, though. The romp is entertaining enough and there is an old-school charm to the adventuring that keeps the story from floundering.

Soon, all evidence below them that humanity had once inhabited this planet was lost beneath the brilliant green cover of the jungle. Here and there, towering stalks erupted from the canopy, ending in heliotropic blooms like inverted marquees which gave the scene a touch of the bizarre. Straight ahead, two moons sat above the horizon, lacy and insubstantial.

I read this after finishing *Necropath*, since it was the only other Brown book I had close at hand. It wasn't quite what I expected, but it wasn't too bad either. This **is** a Shared Universe so I expect we'll soon be seeing other writers coming to the table, and it will be interesting to see where things go from here.

The only signs of the battle that had raged above were the remains of crashed starships of alien design, half-buried in the shifting desert sands.

Ahead, the largest city of all appeared on the horizon, as eerily quiet and deserted as all the others.

This has the makings of great Space Opera, but it lacks some of the essentials. On the other hand, if you're just looking for a quick space adventure that won't keep you bogged down for weeks, perhaps this will be right up your alley.

Ole Imsen says

This is the first book in what is going to become a shared world universe. So apart from the story, the worldbuilding is of course important, and I'll start with a little bit about that.

Considering the length of this book, you'd be forgiven for thinking that there shouldn't really be room for much worldbuilding, but there is quite a lot of it. Brown manages to get across a lot about how this universe functions in the relatively small space he has at his disposal. And he manages to do it in a way that doesn't intrude on the narrative.

The world/universe we are presented with here is a very interesting one. It starts out as pretty much a standard Space Opera world, but it soon goes beyond that as we move into the Weird Space in the title. We learn quite a lot of the human Expansion, a sort of empire, but not so much that there is nothing left for later volumes. And when it comes to the aliens, we get very interesting glimpses that give us enough to go on, but leaves a lot of room for further exploration. In both cases, the humans and the aliens, what we get is intriguing enough in itself to carry this novel. And it leaves the reader with an appetite for learning more about this universe.

The only little niggle I had with the worldbuilding was that there is a "lost race" thrown into the mix. But although that in itself is not necessarily very original, it was handled well. And I had no problem with it as the novel progressed, it is in fact one of the parts of this universe that I would like to know more of.

So, all in all this is a great setting for a Space Opera type Science Fiction universe. It comes across as well thought out, . With lots of details that can be expanded upon, not to mention much that is hidden, this looks to be a shared world that will be well worth following in the future.

To the story. The opening is very interesting, and I was pulled in after the first chapter. It is not long before we have had our first adventure, and from there the novel takes a turn that makes it even more interesting. There's actually two distinct narratives here, and the second is introduced just as the first one seems to going in a familiar Space Opera adventure direction. And although it's obvious from the start that the second narrative is connected to the first, this isn't a weakness. The extra information we get fleshes out the story a great deal, and it adds to the suspense and mystery.

Mystery is the central word for this story. There's a lot of it, and it is very hard to get a grip of where the story is going. Brown offers up answers to the mysteries he presents, but frequently in such a fashion as to make them seem even greater. You get the feeling that there is much more to come as you read on, and you will not be disappointed. Not everything is answered fully, but there's satisfying answers that make this a fully formed novel. And there's a great sense of there being so many more stories left to tell, which is a great feat connected to the excellent worldbuilding.

The main characters in this novel at first seem a bit standard, but as we get to know them they become very much fully developed. There's still a feel of there not being anything groundbreaking about them, but this isn't a problem at all. They are very interesting people, and it was a joy to follow their journey.

I don't know if we will see any of them in later Weird Space volumes, but I wouldn't mind getting to know them even better. Brown is good at getting you close to his characters, and at the end it is a bit sad to be leaving them.

As a stand alone Space Opera novel, this is a nice, fast paced, adventure story with lots going for it. There's

an open ended, with the possibility of sequels, ending. But we still get a full, satisfying story. As the first novel in a shared world, this is excellent. We have enough info already to know that this is a very interesting setting, and there's enough that is hinted at around the edges of this novel, that there is the possibility of lots of interesting stories set in the same universe. If you are a fan of Space Opera, I would highly recommend getting this novel, it is a great and quick read. And I would say it would be a great introduction to the Space opera genre for those that are not familiar with it.

This review was originally published on my blog: <http://weirdmage.blogspot.com>

Jared Millet says

Sometimes nothing's as refreshing as a quick, pulpy SF adventure story about a band of space-faring scoundrels fighting for their lives on alien planets. *The Devil's Nebula* delivers exactly that, without a trace of irony. It is what it is, and it's fun. The "weird space" tagline might lead you to think this book might fall into China Mieville / Jeff Vandermeer "new weird" territory, but it doesn't. It's more in the tradition of 50's/60's SF action, updated for the generation who watched the *Alien* movies in elementary school.
