



Death's Head

Mel Keegan

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On the high-tech worlds of the 23rd century, the lethal designer drug Angel has become an epidemic disease. Kevin Jarrat and Jerry Stone are joint captains in the paramilitary NARC force sent in to combat the Death's Head drug syndicate that controls the vast spaceport of Chell. Under the NARC code of non-involvement, each of the two friends hides his deeper desire for the other. When Stone is kidnapped and forced onto Angel, Jarrat's love for him is his only chance of survival, but the price is that their minds remain permanently linked.

Death's Head Details

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From Reader Review Death's Head for online ebook

Leila Anani says

In essence this is Miami Vice meets Battlestar Galactica - We follow 2 anti-narcotics agents - Jarratt and Stoney as they face off against the evil drug running syndicate Death's Head.

Really exciting, fast paced comic book style story set in a high tech cyberpunk world with a healthy dose of romance.

There are a few editing errors in this edition, but I love the story and the characters so much I really didn't care that much. Weakest thing about this one is the blocky CGI cover. You want decent gay SF adventure look no further - what I particularly love is that this has a decent story and universe: it isn't either bogged down with gender politics or hi-concept/tech as much of the highly regarded LGBT SF tends to be, nor is it smut with a focus on erotica and barely any story. It's exactly the right balance of high octane 'trashy' space adventure and old fashioned romance.

My go to book when I'm feeling low, this never fails to cheer me up.

Vanessa says

Just so we're all on the same page: This is a space opera where everyone has gay sex (not the most graphic I've ever read, but you definitely find out what goes where) and no one is traumatised by really bad things (rape, almost being beaten to death) happening to them ever.

And weirdly, I didn't really mind. Probably because this book didn't pretend to be things it wasn't and actually exceeded my expectations in other areas. Like for example how there is an actual story and it's not only about how long it will take till the main characters finally fall into bed with each other (hint: unexpectedly long).

There was world building and we got to know the two main characters before we even got them physically together in the same room (hint: that also took unexpectedly long). There was a conflict that had nothing to do with feelings and fleshed out supporting characters with their own motives.

It wasn't masterfully written and there were things that bothered me (sometimes confusing POV switches, the ages of the sort of decoy love interests, how sex with a mentally disabled person was handled and a few of the phrasings - also when you're sensitive to the r-word, this might be hard to read at times), but it was definitely a decent read. I was never bored.

There is also a decent amount of sci-fi + military stuff in the story, so if you're only there for the sexy times, this might not be the book for you. Otherwise I think the book managed to exactly do what it set out to do: to be entertaining in the typical space opera way. And I really didn't want anything more.

Lindsay says

This book reminds me of a Rob Liefeld-era X-Force comic but with 80% more gay. With its cast of super gorgeous characters, futuristic weaponry based on early 90s technology, skintight Lycra costumes, and exotic locales, it was a fun trip down memory lane. Nothing about this book knocked my socks off, and I admit to skipping a lot of the descriptions of battle and "advanced" technology. But even though the dialogue was silly, the romantic gestures overblown, and the storyline sometimes laughably unrealistic, I had an enjoyable time reading this book.

Lady*M says

Almost, but not quite 4 stars.

If you are an M/M romance and not a sci-fi fan, this may not be a book for you. This is first and foremost a science fiction story whose protagonists just happen to be two bisexual men interested in each other. This is a setup story for the entire series and they spend more than a half of the novel separated by circumstances - the circumstances being the interstellar war on drugs.

In the future, the humanity has invented the antidotes for most today-known drugs making them legal. So, you can snort cocaine or shoot heroine as much as you like because all you have to do is take an antidote and it will clear your system and prevent addiction. But, for Angel, a newly designed drug, there is no antidote, there is no rehab. It is enough to take Angel once and you are addicted... and dead within two years. Optimistically.

That's where NARC - Narcotics And Riot Control - comes into play. They are paramilitary government-controlled agency. Only government is light years away, so they pretty much make all field decisions on their own. On every planet, they are top dogs. Kevin Jarrat and Jerry Stone are co-captains of NARC battle ship. While one is undercover, the other runs a ship. And... that is all I am going to say.

The world building is the strongest element of the book. While Jarrat and Stoney are both fascinating, strong men helped with some interesting secondary characters (the mutant empath/doctor, former Army pilot, uptown hustler, crime lord...), the world is the most fascinating thing. The action scenes which include riot armor, shuttles and battle ships are exciting and often heart-stopping. The empathic connection and its consequences were another very good point. The tech jargon might be too much for some readers, but I loved it. This isn't hard science fiction *exactly*, but it isn't far from it either.

What story needed was some editing - correction of some errors, some tightening, maybe even cutting of some excess. But, I have 2008 edition and maybe some of it was done in the meantime (the first - abridged - edition of this novel was released in 1991!).

I remember when I first read the book years ago, this one was the hardest to go through. But, satisfaction surpasses the difficulties by far. The book passed the second reading test and now I have to move on to *Equinox*.

Highly recommended to sci-fi fans.

You can read more about the series here.

Jennifer says

In going back through my blog SlashReaders, I must say that I was not very good at giving anyone, anything to actually get on in my reviews. So, in looking back I will say that I have nothing but fond memories of hours spent devouring Mel Keegan's books. I remember jumping around like an idiot in a used book store in London, when I found a copy of Equinox. I now own original and the later self published editions of many of Keegan's works.

While, I am not one to go back and reread books... I look forward to the day when Keegan pulls me back into this series. As some of his books list among the few that I have read multiple times. My favorite being 'Fortunes of War'.

And now on to the actual book in question, 'Death's Head'. This is the beginning of a much longer arching set of books that spans a great, vast, and amazing world. If you are looking for a space and a variety of characters to sink yourself into, then take the plunge and dive on in.

When I originally read this book back in 2004, here were a few of the things I had to say: *'Death's Head' was great and what I've read of the second book so far is equally good. They were definitely worth the money that I spent to get them. ;)* I love Keegan, his characters have such a dynamic and powerful voice to them you just love them and they are very human in some ways at the same time. He's also brilliant with the plots they aren't dull and they definitely keep you going throughout the book. And he has a way of playing with your emotions. ;) I cried a couple times when I was reading this one.

So, if you've read some of Keegan's other works or you're new to his universe, I've always highly recommended his work.

Christopher Moss says

DEATH'S HEAD by Mel Keegan

The origin story for the NARC series, Mel Keegan uses this novel to introduce the main set of characters, the background of the narcotics squad, NARC (the RC is riot control) and the premise for the empathic connection between the two main characters, Jarrat and Stone. This will be the "bumpy ride" Bette Davis's Eve told you to fasten your seatbelt for -- the intricacies of the plot, the thoroughly thought out world building, and the complex characterization not only of the main players in the book but the many lesser yet no less vital characters that enrich this exciting story, all combine to make this a book you will not be able to put down until the breathless end.

A criminal organization, Death's Head, is spread a highly addictive and deadly narcotic called "Angel". It takes over your brain and senses and gives you what you perceive as perfect joy. But in little time it ravages your body and mind, and you die. Jarrett and Stone are officers on the NARC starship from very different backgrounds, but they have one thing in common -- well, two -- their dedication to NARC and the fact that each is secretly really into the other. They are on the planet Chell to look into the source of Angel. When

Stone goes undercover he is captured and made an Angel addict. Jarrett goes in search of him, finds him more or less a simpleton at a controversial neurologist's compound, and agrees to let his mind be empathically linked with Stone's as the only way to break the addiction. In and around the exciting, frightening, and violent story you become acquainted with how the two men can communicate automatically and serve as rescue beacons for each other. One of the things they learn right away is how they each feel about the other. They know their careers are inextricably linked now, and they both also know they have a choice of being guinea pigs for NARC or leaving the beloved service.

Keegan does a masterful job imagining and then illustrating what it would be like to think and feel everything another person thinks and feel, and besides its practical aspects it certainly makes the sex hot – imagine feeling both your own and your partner's orgasms! One of the novelist's arts is being able to be in another time, place, and head and then dramatizing it so a reader is there too. Keegan is good at everything, but I don't think there would be much argument with the contention that science fiction is his particular forte. Thankfully there are sequels!

2Due says

I'd give 4.5 stars if I could, intriguing, smooth and very detailed, I really enjoyed this story, I loved how weapons, armors and places are described, and how NARC and TAC are organized to work. The characters are well set and easy to recognise and follow. I wasn't expecting the empathy link at all, but that made me like the story even more, it's really interesting to see how the two lovers experience it, but I need to read the sequel of the book to really see how they go on with it. A bit too kinky is few points for me, but I'm proud to have this book in my collection.

Andre says

Many years ago I discovered this title and I must admit the cover drew my attention. I had previously read the blurb for Aquamarine in an American Library Journal, and that to, had caught my attention.

So I grabbed this to read at the first opportunity. I fell inlove with both characters. It was Science Fiction, one of the genre passions of mine to read. Also, being a gay person, I could identify in a huge way with both characters and I felt like an electric eye on the wall watching these two romp through space and beat the bad guys.

Thank you Mel Keegan for flying places and dragging my queer form with you.

Vivian says

❄️?Gift from Mrs. Santa❄️?

Can't say that I've been a very good friend recently, but thank you for your gift.

Hilary says

A thinly-disguised Bodie and Doyle are space cops fighting the war on drugs in the far future. And having lots of Hot Gay Sex. Although not so much with each other, there's a bit of Unfulfilled Longing going on for most of the book. And more hurt/comfort than you can shake a damn stick at, if that's your idea of a good time. Which (shuffle), it is & Definitely a guilty pleasure.

Xing says

"They lived with death, courted it, cheated it, as if it were a beautiful, fickle and capricious lover. It was like a ritual dance, a mating rite, and it welded them together."

3.5 rounded to 4 stars.

Death's Head is a very good science-fiction story, but I think my downfall with it was a completely different expectation. The book blurb does a good job explaining the plot: Jarrat and Stone are captains of the NARC-Athena, stationed on planet Rethan against a drug syndicate known as Death's Head. NARC, which stands for Narcotics and Riot Control, are currently trying to shut down the production and distribution of an illegal substance known as Angel. Angel works by rewiring the cerebral network, and is fatal for all users with a lifespan of approximately 2 years. Users die with drug use or drug withdrawal; no antitoxin or cure has been created thus far.

So I will start with the things I didn't like:

1) While Jarrat and Stone are the two main characters and love interest, they don't physically meet/unite until about 60% into the story. While I am familiar with character separation mid-way into the plot, this was the first time I've read something where I had to read most of the story before the two MCs even meet! This was aggravating for me, since I'm a huge M/M romance fanatic, and romance is hard to have when the characters are separated thus far. Don't get me wrong, the story wasn't boring – Jarrat and Stone both had obstacles to overcome before they had their reunion. This was just something that caught me off guard.

2) Proofreading/formatting issues. There weren't just misspelled words; my ebook format had some funky things going on: several instances of word salads and weird symbols (like random letters with the '^' character) made absolutely NO sense. Incorrect or missing punctuations also made me backtrack a few times. There were also cases when there seemed to be missing words and my mind had to mentally add them in.

3) The POV and head swapping confused the heck out of me at first. I got used to it after a while, but the POV could easily switch between the main MCs and secondary characters from one paragraph to the next. There were also time jumps from one paragraph to the next without warning.

4) Long conversations during sex! (this is a personal niggle, so I didn't really consider it too much when factoring the rating, but just thought people should be warned.)

But despite all the things I did not like, there were quite a few things I did:

- 1) World building. Very essential for any good science fiction story.
- 2) The action scenes involving riot armor, different weaponry, and aerial combat (with shuttles and other aircrafts). There weren't a whole lot of action scenes compared to the overall length of this novel, but the ones present were well written and had my pulse racing.
- 3) Good secondary characters. Though the book had a good handful of these secondary characters, they didn't steal the spotlight from Jarrat and Stone. This, I was grateful for.
- 4) Interesting twist with the mind bonding (even though it doesn't occur until about 70% into the story). It left me wanting to know more of how this will develop in the later book.

I will definitely be picking up the sequel in the near future!

Rhianon says

Keegan's first in a series of science fiction m/m and I had high expectations. Sadly, as much as I wanted to like this one, it had some issues and left me disappointed.

Keegan's world-building is solid, riveting. Her character development is deep and complex. The romantic involvement is something the story and characters build up to, over time, instead of simply falling in bed together and ignoring the consequences. All wonderful, positive aspects of her story-telling.

The detracting aspects, however, ruined the experience, pulled me out of the story -- to the point where I stopped reading, stopped caring. Firstly? Too many secondary characters whose development and background were deemed equally important. The stage was stolen entirely too often. Too much detail, when reducing and/or limiting would have tightened the pacing, increased the tension, and kept the reader turning the pages. Main characters off-stage too much, or in the background. Not the optimal method for telling a story wherein the romantic involvement takes so long to develop. This latter method is okay, it is feasible -- but if a writer is going to employ it, the breadth of the story really should focus on those main characters, not wandering too far afield. When one permits this to happen -- when the secondary cast steals the stage -- the reader is left wondering just who the story is supposed to be about. What the main/sub plots are supposed to be.

In the end, I lost interest in finishing this book -- and this series -- because of these detracting qualities. Do I care about the secondary cast? Certainly. The quality of their characters is crucial to the strength of the world-building, in sinking the reader into the experience. Keegan takes it too far though, spending too much page-time on characters that the reader cares very little about. Much of it should have been cut from the prose. The story would have been strengthened for the tightening. If these secondary cast became important in later books, playing a larger role, that's fine; they could step to the fore at that time without any great issue.

GigaBuri (PeachyFishyBooks) says

I loved the overall plot to the story. I have a weak spot for military and cop romances. What brought down the rating for me was the excessive amount of rape, and unnecessary sex. Also, the prostitute apparently had

been training from a young age. Are you kidding me?! Since when is grooming children to be sex workers okay??? One of the main characters, instead of advocating for a healthier lifestyle, tells him to go find a good sugar daddy...

I can't even with this book.

coflo says

4.5 stars. Exciting, intense sci-fi story. Maybe a bit too exciting in the battlefield for my taste. But their love is satisfying as well. The depiction of them sharing Angel dreams quenches my thirst for the romance part.

Paul says

*****READ THIS NEWER UNABRIDGED VERSION*****it has an extra +30,000 words

Now this was an epic, literally. I don't see 18hrs very often when I set text-to-speech off and running. It's also, from what I can gather the authors original copy, so it's unabridged. The book described by GR is not the book I read but a bridged version. I also loved it. Not bad for 2003
