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Philip Palmer

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The Hell Ship hurtles through space. Inside the ship are thousands of slaves, each the last of their race.

The Hell Ship and its infernal crew destroyed their homes, slaughtered their families and imprisoned them forever.

One champion refuses to succumb. Sharrock, reduced from hero to captive in one blow, has sworn vengeance. Although Sai-as, head of the alien slave horde, will ruthlessly enforce the status quo.

But help is close. Jak has followed the Ship for years and their battles have left Jak broken, a mind in a starship's body, focused only on destroying the Ship. Together, can hunter and slave end this interstellar nightmare?

Hell Ship Details

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From Reader Review Hell Ship for online ebook

Nikki says

I'm not sure what to make of this. In many ways it's wonderfully creative -- its aliens are alien, it's a quick read, the whole idea feels fresh... But it's also gory for seemingly the sake of being gory, there's very little of hope, and there's very little point to all the riches he creates except for destruction. It's definitely not compelling in the same way as Palmer's other books. It feels like it's just an excuse to fling together a bunch of ideas and disparate characters. Like the reality show, Big Brother, only with a lot more death (and bodily excretions).

It's more of a (stereotypical) teenage boy book than something for a serious adult reader, I think. There *are* good parts, but I felt like I had to read a lot of filth to get to them, where Palmer's other books like Version 43 and Artemis were more immediately compelling and accessible.

Karen says

Interesting concept but I just did not enjoy this book whatsoever. The last 100 pages or so were the most interesting but still in no way was that able to save this book for me.

There wasn't a single character I liked and more to the point I really did not care what happened to any of them. Especially when the whole book was more or less the same characters doing the same exact things over and over with pretty much the same ultimate result....In short an exercise in insanity that I was just not feeling. The book just dragged on and on and never seemed to go anywhere. And the ridiculous insults and "terms on endearment" got old insanely fast and they **never** stopped. It was interesting the first couple of times then it just killed what little interest the book could pull out of me.

The story was murky at best and the writing style especially with the insults was horrible. And unfortunately I only read the excerpt for one of Palmer's other books after finishing this one. That excerpt was a thousand times better than this book, however having read this one first I don't know if I'd ever give any of his other works a chance.

Dave P says

"I found it," said the reviewer, "very irritating how dialogue was often split arbitrarily, with no consideration of clause or phrasing.

"It reminded," he continued, "me of a Year 6 child trying to vary speech sentences unsuccessfully.

"When it happens on every," he sighed, "page, it gets extremely annoying.

"I did," he confessed, "not finish the book."

Jade Lopert says

I feel like I should start by saying this is the first Philip Palmer book I've read. It makes me not really want to look into any others, but based on reviews this is apparently one of his worst books. That being said, my review:

This book. I don't even know where to start. It's not that it was all bad. There was good here. Palmer has a gift for throwing you into a story with aliens and nothing remotely human without a whole lot of back story and expansive descriptions on what they're like. Those things are there, but they come out over time and in a far less obnoxious way than most authors manage. He doesn't shy away from carnage, which is always nice when talking about a race of aliens that are obliterating entire galaxies and species. It's gritty and, at base, the story isn't bad.

Two things that drove me crazy about this book: typos and awkward cursing. I have no problems with cursing. I curse like a pirate and think (when done right) that it can greatly enhance a story to not shy away from large amounts of it. In this book, it was just awkward though. I get that he was trying to convey the feel of alien speech patterns and yadda yadda yadda, but it just didn't work. Reading something like "mother-raper-whose-children-ought-to-turn-into-mutant-freaks-so-they-can-fuck-your-arse-then-eat-you-alive" every other page just gets grating. The typos were just.....no. I don't mind the periodic typo, but when that is also occurring every other page, hire a proofreader. I promise it's worth the money you pay them.

The other thing is that this drags. About half way through I just stopped caring. About anyone. Before that Sai-ias fascinated me, but she was really the only dynamic character for me. Even her, by the end of the book, I was just meh about.

This book earned two stars, because (despite how some of this may have read) I didn't hate it. I was just completely indifferent to this book and it was kind of a waste of my time. I am not, by nature, indifferent to any book, even my daughter's picture books, so in a way, that's a feat in and of itself.

Empress says

I read Hell Ship because I loved Artemis, and I also loved this book though Artemis was more emotional. However Hell Ship is more grand. It takes time to build up. I would not even try to review this book as there is so much going on, but it follows three (first person) points of view. Be warned there are no humans in this novel, only many different cultures and aliens and universes. And while this is a science-fiction novel, to me it read as fantasy. It had more of a fairy-tale feeling to it. Topped with a lot of cursing and violence. I've come to realize that this author is a hit and miss for many readers, but for me he has been a hit as I don't read fast so I don't go back to an author often.

*Multiple Alien POV [no humans, first person];

Soho Black says

Some time ago, I read Philip Palmer's debut novel "Debatable Space". Whilst there were aspects of that novel I didn't feel entirely worked, it was a well paced read for the most part and I marked Palmer as a writer to watch. His subsequent novels, "Red Claw" and "Version 43", have been well received and his fourth, "Hell Ship", isn't bad either.

As is Palmer's style, the story is told from the differing points of view of various characters. There is the warrior Sharrock, who returns from a mission to find his home destroyed and his friends and family dead, only to be captured by the Hell Ship and see his planet destroyed. There is Sai-ias, a monstrous alien who has been on the Hell Ship for long enough to have become accustomed to her situation and helps Sharrock acclimatise. There is also Jak, an Olaran explorer who finds various planets the Olarans hoped to trade with destroyed and then loses his own crew in a battle against the Hell Ship and vows revenge.

The first person story telling doesn't seem to work as well in science fiction as it does in other genres, but Palmer has been writing this way since his debut, so it no longer feels as out of place as it did. This being the second of his novels I've read, I've become more familiar with his style and, after four novels, so has Palmer. In a world so different from our own, the differing perspectives help the reader come to terms with the vast array of creatures that make up the cast list, varying from humanoid forms to monsters I found it impossible to imagine.

It is this which has long been Palmer's strength, in that he has some weird and wonderful ideas. The vast array of alien creatures on display here is staggering. He has populated an entire world with unique characters, from tree dwelling animals that use compressed balls of their own faeces as weapons to a large being whose urine has healing properties thanks to drinking the water on the ship. Add in sentient trees, a tower protected by storms and air that can translate languages as well as be breathable to creatures from all kinds of atmospheres and you sense Palmer's imagination knows no bounds.

If there is an aspect that lets the book down it is in the execution. There is a segment late on where Jak chronicles the civilisations he finds destroyed, which slows the pace down quite significantly. Thanks to the pace of the story being so high generally, this is quite noticeable and a bit of a distraction. Palmer's imagination may have free rein, but he's not always adept at bringing these characters to life. Many of the characters here are difficult to picture, as we only get aspects of their physiology, rather than a clear picture.

I also felt that the ending disappointed. The build up was so exciting and detailed that the end felt a little rushed by comparison, as if Palmer had reached the limit of what he could do with his ideas and had to conclude. It was an effective ending, but it felt a little weak by comparison. But these minor things aside, it's still a decent read. But whilst Palmer's imagination sustains him in the way it has thus far, he'll remain readable and enjoyable.

This review may also appear, in whole or in part, under my name at any or all of www.ciao.co.uk, www.thebookbag.co.uk, www.goodreads.com, www.amazon.co.uk and www.dooyoo.co.uk

William says

Hell Ship was the 4th Palmer novel that I've read and I had fairly high expectations. Palmer's unique SF style, visceral, shocking and punchy writing style really 'caught' with me and I quickly became a fan. Hell Ship has a great premise (I give nothing away here the back of the book doesn't); an alien ship goes around eradicating entire species, planets, universes except for one chosen individual and they are doomed to live on the Hell Ship with other species.

Sound great? And it is until it drags on and on and on. And you can't wait for it to end.

And then it does.

The ending was such an amazing let-down that it felt as if reading the book itself was completely pointless.

If you are considering reading a Palmer novel, don't start with this one, start with Version 43, Debatable Space or in my opinion his best, Red Claw.

mark monday says

D?UNK REVIEW #? (prob the second this year, i guess)

so before i went out to fuckin drinks with my favorite fuckin co-worker, i had a short convo with another co-worker, a seasoned mom who knows her fuckin way around teens because she's raised three of them. she gave me a fuckin warning: *mark, you curse like a fuckin fucked up sailor... I know you are meeting with a group of high schoolers tomorrow to discuss active listening and the peer support model. my advice is that you should try not to curse so fuckin much in front of them because those little fuckers will fuck with you about your fucking cursing and then your whole talk will go off the fucking rails. teens are the fucking worst when it comes to cursing.* i thought that was some good fucken advice and imma take it. but it also made me think of some fuckin awful reviews i've read about this book, some trifling fucking complaints, and so imma address that here at the start of this so-called review.

ATTENTION REVIEWERS OF BOOKS LIKE HELL SHIP: if you are going to read a novel about various survivors of various planets that have been wiped out, various survivors who are literally the last of their kind and who have witnessed the genocide of their entire race... maybe don't fucking concentrate in your review on all of the fucking curse words your poor little eyes have to read *in this novel about genocide*. have some sense of fucking priority, fuckwits! that was exceedingly fucking disagreeable for me to read and i fuckin resent it! it should go without saying that in a book about multiple genocides, maybe nasty curse words should not be the thing that gets your fucking cage rattled. right?

AND ONE ADDITIONAL VERY FUCKING SPECIAL NOTE: that one reviewer who says that this book condones pedophilia is out of their fucking mind! that is fucking ridiculous beyond belief. where is that anywhere in this book for fook's sake? unless this fuckin fuckwit somehow thinks that that one fucked up alien who describe's her (now completely obliterated) species' habit of eating their young to be some form of pedophilia? it fucking aggravates me that this one nonsense review is actually the top rated review of this book and so that's what most people reading about this book are going to read first. fuckin' A!

ACTUAL REVIEW: Palmer is an ingenious novelist. so playful, so mordant, so full of wit and liveliness and new, fun ways to tell stories and to make his creations come alive. he makes his bizarre characters sympathetic and relatable; he constructs a narrative that is fascinating and original and full of awesome mysteries. he's a joy to read. mainly.

i'd like to say i loved this book. i really wish i did. there's so much to love about it! but man, despite all of the vibrant creativity and sweet empathy, there's such a mean, uncaring core. this is one of those rare novels that was incredibly energizing to read but also intensely depressing. it bothered me how little love Palmer eventually displayed for his wonderful creations, and how willing he was to make every path lead shitward. no need to push this reader's face in the toilet, author! i didn't appreciate that insensitivity; by the novel's finale, i was not only depressed but also sorta angry - at Palmer's unnecessary brutality (despite what amounts to a supposedly happy ending). at one point he describes the horrific villains of the tale as being like brutal, callous children fascinated by an insect, and who then proceed to tear that insect into little pieces. in

the end, that's sorta how i felt about Palmer because of what he does to many of the wonderful characters he created - and to their histories, their stories, their whole existence and purpose for being. it made me feel like a chump even caring for these characters and their stories. and that wasn't a good fucking feeling.

Daniel Roque says

After reading some negative reviews I thought I had made an error buying this book, it turns out that the negative reviews I read were from prude people.

Contrary to what I read, the book doesn't have an excess of vulgar or bad language, there is bad language, there is graphical violence but it's there for a reason, its not gratuitous or offensive.

But back to the book itself, the book pace is excellent the alien species are truly alien, not just in looks but in morals, life perspective and feelings.

The story itself reminded me a bit of a book called "Riverworld" from Philip José Farmer.

The story is all about tragedy, horror, despair and finally redemption, with a wonderfull side story related to a race of traders which by itself could provide ideas for several books.

If you are not easily offended, if you like truly alien characters, this book is for you.

I'll wait for a book on the traders by Philip Palmer, it will be worth my money for sure.

Kfdowner says

Some really good concepts, but ultimately the process of reading it became a slow walk on a hell ship.

Jonathx says

Hell Ship is a hell of a book. It's chock full of graphic, over the top violence, wanton murder and destruction, certainly the most graphic swearing in one book ever and probably the highest body count in a book ever. And for all it's one of the most sophisticatedly philosophical books I've had the pleasure to read, too.

I was truly amazed and deeply moved by this book, especially by the character Sai-ias who will forever remain one of my favourite heroines in fiction.

Hell Ship was absolutely never boring and there was nothing I read about that didn't blow my mind in one way or another. It constantly surprised me, entertained me and introduced my imagination to beings and places and things that were genuinely alien. I absolutely loved it.

Ove says

Philip Palmer is new to me but he comes highly recommended so I had high expectations. Hell ship lived up to my expectations for the most part.

A mysterious vessel travels the universes and destroys all life in them. One survivor from each race is taken to the observation deck to watch their world destroyed before being made a slave forever. The slaves live in an artificial world inside the ship. This is the story of Sharrock who just saw his home world explode. He swears vengeance like all the survivors. Trouble is that Sai-Sai the ruler among the slaves is all for happiness and live the day. So she tries to convert him to acceptance and her way of life. Their struggles are the heart in the story. This is where Palmer does a good job of characterization.

The third point of view character is Jak an Explorer and former trader. He sees the ship from outside as he strives to destroy it. The social life of Jak and his fellow aliens are amusing and might hold a few pointers for real life.

You know characters are important to me so another part that I liked was the flashbacks into the pasts of the main characters which made them make sense. Sai-Sai's makes one of those inner journeys that are at the center of good tales. Jak does too but to a lesser extent. For him it is more about equality.

The hard sciences are not important here. Palmer writes about the characters and the story they create. He does a great job at it. This makes it so sad in the end when he jumps over major resolutions in bylines and implications. The whole book was well written up until the ending and would have been five out of five if it wasn't for a rushed ending.

Bottom line I liked Hell Ship. It was an engaging read about aliens, clashing cultures, secrets revealed and the fight for freedom. But it has, in my opinion, a weak ending, though not a catastrophic one. Hell Ship has a lot of things going for it so I would recommend you to read it but don't expect too much.

Nick says

Imagine Howard Stern and Quentin Tarantino donning star wars costumes and co-writing a science fiction novel. The reader (IMO the victimized reader) is subjected to a concurrent diatribe of profanity (Stern) while being doused with buckets of viscera (Tarantino). It's cool to shock, and people who are numb to this should consider reading 'The Breeds of Man', by F M Busby. This is another one-star SF novel because it contains scenes that portray pedophile behavior as acceptable. If that shocks you, and hopefully it still shocks everyone, then consider that it should be equally unacceptable to use the F word or equivalent, oh, 10 times a page, and over-the-top gratuitous violence with roughly the same degree of purpose as a snuff film.

On a positive note, there was a nice attempt by the author to use 'deep time' and a sense of epic sweep that makes science fiction a great genre, but ultimately it didn't go anywhere. A much better alternative to this novel are the works of Greg Bear, and many others.

Ivan Mkrtchyan says

It feels like a book written by a 14 year old for 14 year olds. Truly, Palmer's weakest novel. I do not have a problem with excessive violence, but even violence in this book seems naive and uninspired, like B-level trash horror movie. The worst part is, of course, his Mary Sue over-the-top characters. Do not recommend

wasting time on this wordy novel.

Rob says

A planet-sized ship crosses galaxies and universes, subjugating planetary inhabitants into near extinction save for the one or two beings this Hell Ship brings aboard for undisclosed reasons. Life on the ship is harsh, almost post-apocalyptic in the barrenness of the landscape and harshness of the beings living on it. The story begins as the Hell Ship conquers its latest planet and brings aboard Sharrock, the sole survivor or a warrior people. During the attack, Sharrock seemingly died via lava-drowning though we soon find that he wakes fully healed. We see Sharrock's story from his Point-of-View, providing one of three first person narrative perspectives in the novel. The second POV is that of Sai-ias, an almost Lovecraftian alien resembling a flying squid. The third POV is that of Jak a trader whose sentience has merged with that of the AI on his ship. It's a clever trick of storytelling and one that works very well to convey the story of the novel.

...

From their own points of view, Sharrock, Sai-ias, and Jak are completely believable and sympathetic in their plights. When Sharrock is telling the readers of his frustrations regarding Sai-ias, and vice versa, their urgings and convictions made me share those same frustrations. Palmer did a great job of putting me in the characters heads. I found myself questioning what I would do in their respective situations.

Excerpt above links to full review SFFWorld.com
