



## Aurora: Darwin

*Amanda Bridgeman*

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## **Aurora: Darwin** Amanda Bridgeman

A distress signal on the edge of inhabited space. A mission that is far outside normal parameters. Two very different people with one common goal - survival.

When a distress signal is received from a black-ops space station on the edge of inhabited space, Captain Saul Harris of the UNF Aurora is called in from leave to respond. But the mission is not what it seems. Female members of the United National Forces have not been allowed to travel into the outer zones before, but Harris is ordered to take three new female recruits.

For Corporal Carrie Welles, one of the Aurora's new recruits, her first mission into space seems like a dream come true. Determined to achieve the success of her father before her, and suddenly thrust into a terrifying mission, she must work with her new captain and the strained Aurora crew to make it home alive.

When the Aurora arrives at the station Harris and Welles soon find themselves caught up in a desperate fight for survival. Station Darwin is not what they expected. The lights are off. But somebody is home.

## **Aurora: Darwin Details**

Date : Published 2013 by Momentum

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Author : Amanda Bridgeman

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## From Reader Review Aurora: Darwin for online ebook

### Rachel Amphlett says

I'll say this up front: I don't read sci-fi. I love sci-fi films, but it's my husband who's the science fiction fan in the household. I picked this up because I've taken on an Aussie author reading challenge through Goodreads this year.

And boy, am I glad I selected Aurora:Darwin.

The set-up is brilliant - right from the start, you've got one up on the crew of the Aurora - you know what they're walking into. They don't. And you wonder how the heck they're going to cope with three new recruits - all female - up against an experienced all-male crew who resent their presence on their well-ordered ship.

Sent on a classified mission to the other side of Mars, Captain Harris and his crew are on their way to fix what they think is a simple communications problem. The only bit that slowed the story for me was the journey there - the training and how the new recruits began to be sized up by their superiors. However, the way in which the characters interact and the description of their arrival at the eerily silent Darwin is such that you just have to keep reading.

When they reach the Darwin, the build-up to the action is measured and intense.

And once you're there, you can't stop reading.

Parts of this book left me reminiscing about the movie "Event Horizon" - not because it's similar in story line (it isn't), but because there is always that sense of menace, especially once the body count starts building.

This is a brilliant debut novel and the author gets 5 stars from me because she wrestled me out of my reading comfort zone - and won.

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### Dantegideon says

I quite enjoyed it, but it was slightly over-long and she deliberately left everything up in the air so we'd buy the sequel, which always pisses me off.

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### T From says

Aurora: Darwin was a great read - interesting, realistic characters who pulled you in straight away. The story develops at a great pace with plenty of action along the way. Although it is 'sci fi', it would appeal to range of readers. Its not overly 'techy' and you get the sense that (scarily) this story could really happen in the not too distant future! There is obviously more of this story to come - can't wait for the next installment.

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## Elizabeth says

Originally published at West Coast Book Reviews.

*Aurora: Darwin* is the first in a science fiction series by Amanda Bridgeman.

I feel like I've been a fan of this series since before I read it. Book 3 *Aurora: Meridian* was available on Netgalley so I bought the first two to get ready for the third but instead of reading them, I put them away, then bought *Meridian*, tucking it away as well. That was months ago. I didn't start them until a week ago since I was waiting for the 'right time' like waiting to enjoy good chocolate, coffee, bubble bath or a really fine pen. I didn't want to finish them and be in that place where I couldn't read them again for the first time.

So with book 4 *Aurora: Centralis* out in a few of weeks I took the plunge and devoured all three in a matter of days.

*Darwin* juxtaposes its two main characters, Welles and Harris, in terms of rank and gender.

The biggest challenge for Welles is the simple fact she's a woman. Her presence and that of the other two women on the *Aurora* is treated as a joke by the existing crew, a fact that doesn't sit well with her. I was engaged and angry for Welles since I know full well what it can be like to have to work twice as hard for half the respect.

Wait, did Ms. Bridgeman just knock me out of my 'sci-fi females are just as bullet proof as the men so don't even think about making me imagine myself as anything less' fiction comfort zone?

Yup, she sure did.

As a forty-something woman, I realized my escapism reading allowed me to avoid the realities of many women in service everywhere, even in the fictional future. That isn't to say I don't completely enjoy immersing myself in a story in which I can imagine myself as something I'm not (it's why I read fiction, after all.) But I suddenly found myself identifying with a female lead in a whole other way. She isn't super-tough, indistinguishable from the men except for the fact her 'plumbing' is indoors and their's is outdoors. Welles is a woman and she's strong; she's a strong woman. She's great.

She also makes decisions I can identify with, doesn't accept that her best isn't good enough and won't stand for dismissal or BS from anyone. To me, she's believable and real and the heart of the story.

Captain Saul Harris is the second heart but in a very different way. As the man in charge of the *Aurora*, he has to be. To me, he's also a strong lead even though I connected more with Welles. I appreciated how well he could be the commander each of his soldiers needed.

I also liked the rest of the crew, Doc in particular, as he weaves between Welles' perspective and Harris'.

*Aurora: Darwin* combines science fiction, adventure and action through the lenses of both the bottom ranks and top ranks of *Aurora*'s crew. As the secrets of *Darwin* Station reveal themselves, Ms. Bridgeman challenges the developing bond of the crew with mystery, violence and the dark side of the UNF. I loved this great start to the series.

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## Patty Jansen says

I'll try to write this without too many spoilers.

Overall: this is a book that sees some very tense action and good characterisation, but suffers a bit from a lacklustre ending and lack of believable detail about space travel.

The good first:

There were some times that I didn't want to read any pages of this before going to bed. Parts of this book are downright scary and very, very tense.

I loved the characters and their interaction.

This is an easy and enjoyable read.

Concerns (other people may not care much about these, but what the hey, and I'm sorry if it gets a bit ranty. Remember that I did enjoy reading this book):

I think the plot peaked too early. The last fifth of the book is all debriefing and while reading this, I kept waiting for THE BIG REVEAL, but I got to the end and there hadn't been one.

At times it felt like the plot was contrived. You know the feeling where you watch a movie and the only reason the story happens is because some guy does something that makes little logical sense? I felt like that sometimes. Mind you, the "something's going on in the space station" makes for a damn tense story, but there's got to be some sort of payoff where it's made clear why all this stuff is happening in a way that I'll say: "Ah, now I see..." and where at least someone is punished, but that didn't happen, at least not in a satisfactory way.

## LAWS OF PHYSICS!

Seriously!

A space ship of a size where the crew can run laps down the corridors is big. Do you know how big the Space Shuttle is? They have a replica at the Powerhouse Museum. It's a lot smaller than a 747. This ship sounds bigger than a 747, judging from the description. Do you remember those big cigars on the side of the Space Shuttle at take-off? They're for fuel. More than 90% of the weight of that whole assemblage was fuel. For every kilogram you add to the weight of the ship, you need FOUR TIMES the amount of fuel to lift it into low orbit like 300km above the Earth (saying nothing about taking it to Mars in two days). Realistically, this means that you can't take vehicles of this size to the surface. It makes so much more sense to have an off-surface lift system (small shuttles, space elevator, whatever) to an orbiting space port where the behemoths dock.

Also, to fly in the atmosphere, a craft needs wings, quite sizeable ones for a craft this size. In space, wings are useless.

(see also this: <http://pattyjansen.com/2011/10/12/spa...>)

Also: orbits! Mars is only one planet down from the sun... except when it's on the opposite side of the Sun compared to where we are. Timing is essential.

Similarly, I never got much of a feel for the fact that we're in space, as the obvious inconveniences of space travel (hoy, lack of gravity!) don't rate a mention except once very briefly. So, we have coffee jugs, dinner trays, shooting ranges (!!!) in space, without mention of why the coffee stays in those jugs. Showers?

Barring magical gravity devices (not mentioned), artificial gravity comes from rotation of the habitat. This has serious implications for life aboard such habitats (Coriolis forces) and also docking with another ship or station could be tricky. These are interesting and wonderful opportunities for Science Fiction to show that we're actually, y'know, in space.

Also, why would any sane person carry BULLETS on a space craft? And worse, fire them in a space craft? When all that separates you from vacuum and death within seconds is a thin shell of plastic and metal and a bit of padding?

Sorry about the ranty bits, but I kinda cry a little inside when half a day googling this information could have done so much to make the space setting more convincing.

Ultimately, I think that it's symptomatic of the story's somewhat murky identity. It's certainly not hard SF, lacks the sensawunda of space opera, does thriller very well until the last part, tries a bit of romance that doesn't come to a satisfactory conclusion, but leaves too much hanging to be a satisfactory mystery. I'm not sure how to describe it.

The above may not be an issue for all readers. It is an enjoyable read. It also looks like there will be another volume.

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## **S.B. Wright says**

Aurora: Darwin is the debut novel from Perth author Amanda Bridgeman. The folks at Momentum publishing have done a great job with the cover art (reminiscent to my mind of the Astropolis covers that Orbit did for Sean Williams) and associated extras. They can be found here. Not entirely necessary for your enjoyment but good art can shape your perceptions.

Bridgeman is a fan of sci-fi thrillers and that shows in Aurora: Darwin. If you are a fan of Aliens 2 and other Sci-Fi films of that era then you'll like the mix of action and suspense that Bridgeman delivers.

*A distress signal on the edge of inhabited space. A mission that is far outside normal parameters. Two very different people with one common goal survival.*

A group of soldiers are sent to investigate a comms error on a classified military station near the asteroid belt. Three women are added to the all male crew as part of some PR exercise. There's tension between the crew, between the Captain and Command and information on the situation is almost non-existent.

There's some interesting comment here on the treatment of women in the military that seems to be more about current problems that women have to face. Though I must admit I am not sure if its unrealistic to think that attitudes won't have changed in the future or that its a case of (as with a large amount of science fiction) science fiction commenting on the issues and culture at its time of writing through the lense of the future.

If you are looking for a solid scientific underpinning and the lack of such ruins your enjoyment then perhaps Aurora: Darwin isn't for you. If you are just here for the thrill and the tension then, well it's worth it.

The above point aside, Aurora: Darwin was not without its problems for me and I think this can be put down to it being a first novel. The beginning was a little slow and I think there was an over use of narrative summary, a focussing on detail that was largely irrelevant to the story. I am a pretty tolerant reader and I read widely. I am not sure that other readers would stay as long as I did.

But...

I did and the middle 50% of the book is nail-biting edge of the seat action and suspense that I expect from much more seasoned writers. The tension that Bridgeman maintained here was brilliant.

The story is nothing new (and I mean this as no slight against Bridgeman) but there's skill in taking a trope or a well used scenario and making it seem exciting and fresh. The reader knows what's likely to happen and it's the way in which the author sustains the tension, between that knowledge and the characters edging closer to danger, that makes this part of the novel and ultimately carries the rest of it.

The ending seemed a little off the pace for me, there was renewed tension but I found the team's last obstacle a bit of an anti climax, the action and tension was highest at the end of the second act.

While Aurora: Darwin feels a little unbalanced structurally, on the middle part of this book alone, I will read Bridgeman again. I dare say she's got a bright future ahead of her writing Military/Space Opera thrillers.

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### **Danny Mckenzie says**

A very good read in the genre of hard Sci-fi. This book has everything, good plot, solid characters of depth and feeling, sound settings and plausibility. So believable it could almost be a documentary from the future. The story follows three new recruits on their first mission amongst seasoned soldiers. What have their superiors got planned for them, who can be trusted. There's hostility, hidden agendas, action, deception, betrayal, heroism, danger, death and a whole lot more in store for everyone.

The science is sound with a full, rich cast experiencing the full range of emotions and complications that come with being human.

Amanda Bridgeman gives this book all the necessary ingredients in the right proportion to deliver a very satisfying and solid start to the Aurora series. I definitely want to journey again with the captain and crew of the Aurora!

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### **Josh says**

A United National Forces (UNF) Space Patrol crack team is dispatched to a deadly and secretive corner of space to investigate a breakdown of communication at a classified government facility known to have been dabbling in dangerous scientific experiments. Aboard the Aurora, Captain Saul Harris knows this isn't a simple mission – for one, he's been given three additional crew members; all female, something unique to space patrol, secondly; command are sketchy on the details of the communications breakdown and have an open reluctance to divulging information about the facility and the research/breakthroughs made deep in the outer limits.

The newcomers, lead by Carrie Welles, the main member of the group to feature prominently in proceedings, find themselves victims of inexperience and gender segregation as the male members of the Aurora test and taunt the new recruits to determine their mettle and capacity to do more than cook and clean. Welles and co bridge the gender divide by pure will and determination. In a world/universe of hard men and hard action, these women bring brass balls and a dead aim.

Author Amanda Bridgeman has provided readers with a plausible space story that's grounded by its deep characterisation and tension filled plot. From the moment the crew of the Aurora disembark from Earth, the palpable and ever impending sense of doom kicks into gear. Never knowing what's around the corner, where the threat will arise or from whom heightens the anticipation for action and blood curdling terror – in which Bridgeman delivers in spades.

I didn't know what to expect from *AURORA: DARWIN* and found myself instantly hooked on the premise and impressed by the delivery. Each character brings something to the table, from Doc, Harris, Welles, to Command – all elements in a broader game of deceit, violence, and cover-up. Utterly addictive.

The follow-up, *AURORA: PEGASUS* was released in December 2013 and has shot near the top of my TBR.

This review also appears on my blog: <http://justaguythatlikes2read.blogspot.com/>

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### **Kristian Thoroughgood says**

Near-future military sci-fi with some great tense action and a dark conspiracy. What's not to love?

Well...

It's not amazingly original, and I felt some of the tropes a little worn. But by far the biggest crime was acres and acres of exposition at the beginning.

This book is walking on well trod ground, but it does do credit to its source materials. Excepting the exposition at the start of the book, it had enough character, drama and action to keep me turning the pages.

Overall an entertaining read.

Detailed review here: <https://uncertaintales.wordpress.com/>

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## **dennis barron says**

### **Aurora: Darwin Amanda Bridgeman**

This is a sci-fi thriller set in the future. We are exploring other planets..earth has become crowded, somewhat depleted, that's a given. A space vessel is dispatched on a routine mission. Its crew is very special, highly trained, and for the first time, women are aboard. Is the mission real or a ruse? This is an explosive and extraordinarily well written novel. Its primary characters are extremely talented, professional, the best. Action explodes on every page...to the last one! I mentioned sci-fi thriller? Try action packed kick ass thriller!!! My highest recommendation. Can't wait to read the next book in the series!!

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## **Andrew says**

I've been sitting on this review for a while now as I've been trying to think of some nice, polite and constructive way of writing it. I really cannot be bothered wasting any more time thinking on it, or gathering extensive citations from the text, so here is my overall view.

Aurora: Darwin has a great premise and a long-time Aliens fan I was immediately hooked. Colonial marines! Aliens! Action!

Sadly however, this doesn't deliver on the promise and is a limp and mediocre shadow of a greater theme. (Light spoilers ahead)

The interaction between the marines is as shallow as the characters themselves, with forgettable paper-thin outlines, no development and hardly any meaningful interaction or dialogue. They are completely unprofessional, disrespectful, bigoted and generally unlikeable. I find it hard to believe that in a professional military body, the level of antagonism, obstructionism and purely sexist behaviour would be tolerated; especially in a close-knit team working in dangerous remote sites with no support. None of them has any particular redeeming qualities, nor is any reader emotional investment built up. The main character is dithering, emotional, and annoying person with daddy issues, who just happens to be awesome with a firearm. The quintessential Mary Sue. Despite seeking a professional military career, it seems she can't stop constantly thinking of her peers except as sexual objects either. Go feminism?

On the pulp side, it fails also, with some cringeworthy lines being delivered from supposedly rock-hard tough and wise-ass marines, there's quite a bit of 'char' dialogue too to fill it out, which also falls flat with the author having long-time career military personnel seemingly confused and freely mixing up civilian and military time references, some of the simplest military jargon to get right.

The novel unfolds wearily slowly, with interminable attention to the nascent romance of the main character. Ho hum, and yes I read romance also, this is badly done. Even the action scenes have hardly any zip and are lackluster. There's a real sense of telling, not showing, and no immediacy.

The aliens, when they appear, are almost completely forgettable, have almost no impact or scare factor, and are generally underwhelming. Logic cast aside, they regularly pull out Deus ex Machina to destroy the

marines, who actively help them by apparently forgetting every single military doctrine regarding intelligence gathering, comms discipline, security, tactics, close support, or even simple things like covering their flanks, looking behind them, and even forgetting how to use their guns.

Note: I am not in the military, but I know people who are and I think they would shred this like a Sunbeam set to Puree.

It ends with a completely predictable machine-stamped generic closure leaving it open for possible sequels, just like the B-movies it emulates.

Ultimately disappointing, *Aurora:Darwin* promises a lot in a number of areas but fails to deliver on almost all of them. Personally, I would find it very difficult to summon the enthusiasm to read any more of Bridgeman's work. Perhaps I'm being over critical, but there just wasn't enough depth in for me, nor enough suspense or action to make it a good pulp read.

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### **C.A. Larmer says**

#### **An Action-Packed Ride**

I don't often read sci-fi but this one had me intrigued from the start, and I could barely put it down. Great, realistic characters, superb writing and, most importantly for me, a clever, nail-biting plot. I so look forward to joining the Aurora crew on their next assignment (although I'm kind've terrified, too!)

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### **Wayne McCoy says**

'Aurora: Darwin' by Amanda Bridgeman is a pretty fair space opera full of decent suspense and action. That sort of tails off in an ending that seems to drag on too long.

In a not too distant future, we have conquered space flight and we are out fighting space pirates. That's what Captain Saul Harris and his crew of the Aurora do for the United National Forces. This time around, they are responding to the lack of communication from a science station. To make things more interesting, they have three female recruits aboard to test the waters of allowing females to travel into the farther reaches of space. In this future, there is still sexism though, so the women won't have to easiest time of things. Added to that, they've been ordered to stay on the ship and not board the science vessel Darwin when the Aurora docks with it. Strangest enough is what awaits them when they get to the Darwin.

I'm used to my United Federation of Space, so the idea of advanced technology and sexism was a bit jarring, but probably not unrealistic. The character interactions weren't too bad. I liked the mystery and action, but the wrap up seemed to take a long time. A lot of it is set up for future books, but I'd have preferred a quicker finish to things, especially because they seemed a bit inevitable. It's a good first outing, and I'll gladly read the next book.

I received a review copy of this ebook from Pan Macmillan, Momentum and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you for allowing me to review this ebook.

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### **Ingrid Jonach says**

This book was a total adrenalin rush. I rarely read action novels (although I do like the occasional action movie), but this had me hooked from the first page. It read like a movie with very clever dialogue, and very thorough character descriptions and back story.

Aurora: Darwin is edge-of-your-seat stuff. A team of soldiers go to check out an unresponsive space station called the Darwin with some surprising (and extremely terrifying) results. I spent at least one sleepless night jumping at shadows after reading this book. It is not for the faint-hearted!

And speaking of hearts... Doc. Sigh. I think I was crushing on him from the moment he entered the story (short brown hair, chocolate brown eyes, smooth features and a nice smile - yes please!). I was really glad he ended up being the focus of the romance in this story.

I also felt the story gave me closure. There was a debrief at the end of the novel that I really enjoyed, because normally once the deed is done the heroes ride off into the sunset (or fly off into the galaxy) and leave you wondering what next.

Even so, there was enough of a cliff hanger to allow for a sequel. And I can tell you that if the sequel was available now I would be reading it immediately!

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### **Christine says**

Oh wow! I LOVED this book. I'm a huge fan of space operas without the heavy sci fi details that can sometimes drown a good story. This is perfect for sci fi fans who also love a story about capable women who are more than Decorative figures, strong characterization driven stories, and a sense of adventure without having to run into aliens or distant galaxies.

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