

Zenith, by Sasha Alsberg and Lindsay Cummings

A breath of fresh air for young, female fans of an ever-growing sci-fi genre.

By Emma-Ann Cranston

Having been a follower and friend of Sasha Alsberg since her reviewing days on YouTube, I was brimming with anticipation to read her debut book, co-written with established author Lindsay Cummings. The novel follows an all-female crew, traversing the Mirabel galaxy in search of their next deadly deed, led by Captain Androma Racella; her ship, the Marauder, is one to rival Han Solo's Millennium Falcon. Titled 'the bloody baroness' by her foes, Androma (or Andi to her friends) cuts down all those in her way.

"I want the floor stained with their blood!" Andi yelled.

Willing to take on any job that will pay, Andi and her crew are ruthless in their search for an income, but this is not all that defines them. From the young and excitable Gilly, to trigger-happy Breck, to the scaled alien Lira, Andi's crew are behind her 100% of the way. Loyalty runs truer than money.

Or so it seems. Andi is plagued with nightmares from her past, and when one very demon manages to catch up to her, the loyalty of the crew, along with Andi's own mental state, is put to the test. The crew are thrown into a job that strains their relationships and calls into question whether Androma is worth risking the balance of the galaxy for.

It is not only the crew that finds themselves stuck in a 'to Andi or not to Andi' dilemma. Dex, the demon from Andi's past, is still in love with the Bloody Baroness, and to make matters worse she still has feelings for him; a star-crossed romance at its finest.

Some reviewers found that Gilly was too young, and that the plot was boring and clichéd in its attempt at science-fiction. However, I found myself wondering if these people, mostly men, had read a different book entirely! Gilly's character, in terms of her age and her actions, reminds me of Percy Jackson, or Harry Potter in the early novels - a young teenager with determination. Regarding the plot, *Zenith* does what all young adult novels do; sets up a world we want more of. We can't expect the first book to tell us everything, or be perfectly finished – if it were, what would be the point in writing more?

If I were sixteen again, I would've embraced the novel with gusto. It passes the Bechdel Test (a test that asks whether two women characters are seen talking about something other than a male love interest), with no talk of boys or romance appearing til the middle of the novel! And though the novel *is* aimed at Young Adults, it is certainly enjoyable to those of an older age with a passion for fantasy.

A sequel to *Zenith* is in the works, with Alsberg confirming the first draft was finished mid-March. With *Zenith* having been at the top of the New York Times bestsellers list, it is with great anticipation that I wait for its as-yet untitled sequel.

HarperCollins: London, 2018

RRP: £7.99

ISBN: 978-0-008-22833-0