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Review: Paranoia seeps through a starship in 'Providence'

By JEFF AYERS March 31, 2020

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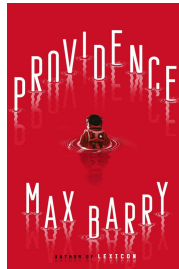
"Providence" by Max Barry (Putnam)

A crew of research scientists makes first contact with an alien species of creatures that look like salamanders and it

all goes horribly wrong. The violence is captured on video, and now Earth is at war.

Seven years into the battle, four people go through extensive training to be chosen as the crew of the Providence Five, a warship designed for long-term travel and support for soldiers on the front. The four are chosen for their knowledge of weaponry, engineering talents, ability to not panic in tense and claustrophobic situations and how they appear on the cameras back home. It's a reality show set in outer space, and the ship itself is run by artificial intelligence.

The long periods of isolation and vast space take their toll anyway, and they soon struggle with their tasks and patience with each other. It becomes difficult for them to interact without distrust, paranoia and hostility. It doesn't help that even after all this time, the enemy's motives remain a mystery.



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Barry mixes the classic sci-fi novels of Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke



...nomen's starship troopers, but Barry makes the story compelling and innovative. In unpredictable ways, he uses his flawed characters to comment on artificial intelligence, propaganda in a social media landscape and how isolation affects people differently, even when they're trained to handle that challenge. Barry takes a story that has been done countless times before and makes it seem original.

Ultimately, "Providence" is really about how we can all overcome adversity even when answers and resolutions are not clear-cut.



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