



The Swarm

Orson Scott Card , Aaron Johnston

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Orson Scott Card and Aaron Johnston return to their *Ender's Game* prequel series with this first volume of an all-new trilogy about the Second Formic War in *The Swarm*.

The first invasion of Earth was beaten back by a coalition of corporate and international military forces, and the Chinese army. China has been devastated by the Formic's initial efforts to eradicate Earth life forms and prepare the ground for their own settlement. The Scouring of China struck fear into the other nations of the planet; that fear blossomed into drastic action when scientists determined that the single ship that wreaked such damage was merely a scout ship.

There is a mothership out beyond the Solar System's Kuiper Belt, and it's heading into the system, unstoppable by any weapons that Earth can muster.

Earth has been reorganized for defense. There is now a Hegemon, a planetary official responsible for keeping all the formerly warring nations in line. There's a Polemarch, responsible for organizing all the military forces of the planet into the new International Fleet. But there is an enemy within, an enemy as old as human warfare: ambition and politics. Greed and self-interest. Will Bingwen, Mazer Rackam, Victor Delgado and Lem Juke be able to divert those very human enemies in time to create a weapon that can effectively defend humanity in the inexorable Second Formic War?

The Swarm Details

Date : Published August 2nd 2016 by Tor Books

ISBN :

Author : Orson Scott Card , Aaron Johnston

Format : Kindle Edition 464 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Audiobook

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From Reader Review The Swarm for online ebook

James says

Starts out OK but to make a long story short, it should have been shorter! There is much to be said for a build up to the next book, but this one was not really developing the characters much from the previous novel. You are required to read the previous one or else you will be lost, not a good sign for any author.

I'm wondering if Orson would have done better without a co-writer here. The story is very slow-paced, the characters I really don't care much about.

I did like the adventure of exploring the asteroids the Formics are using for weapons against Mankind. And that a giant ship is approaching. At the end of the novel, the ship is still approaching and the Formics have yet to do much of anything!

I might go onto the next one, not sure yet!

Andy says

Good fun for Enderverse fans, so 4* for that crowd. Not the best in the series and not worth it on its own.

What is different in this episode is that the International Fleet is completely dysfunctional. In the other books, the governmental authorities have a level of omniscience and infallibility that is godlike. Generations ahead of time, they can predict future battles, adopt the appropriate strategies and select the perfect leaders to win the war. I think, sadly, that it's a sign of the current times (2016) that this is too implausible even for science fiction, and so the future has changed to match the present culture of corruption and incompetence. It will be interesting to see how they overcome that in the story.

Chris Friend says

Builds well. Fills in gaps nicely. Pays tribute to characters from both the original story and those we've met in the Formic Wars series. In short, it functions very well for what a story has to do in its slot in the timeline of prequels.

Stylistically, I hand it to Johnston—he got me to cry with the beauty of one chapter's end. That's all I'll say, so as to avoid spoilers, but he deftly used a character who's been built up over the past few books to effectively tug at heartstrings and make me commit my emotions. I don't often cry from the events in the extended Ender series, so when those moments come, I relish them.

And one final note I feel compelled to make, especially for those keeping score from the recent books: The authors' LDS-inspired views of Family Uber Alles™ still show up in this text, but on the whole they're kept well enough in check that I don't roll my eyes. Romantic dialogue got a wee bit shallow on a couple occasions, but things moved along soon enough. The importance of family in this volume exists less as a

moral lesson to the reader and more as a hat-tip to folks in uniform. The romantic tensions we see aren't glaring examples of how to raise a wholesome family with 18 kids; they're an exposition of the challenges of being in love while being at war. The families, in other words, are so essential to the characters that we can't live with the people and come to understand them without also understanding their (views of) relationships. I appreciate the minor shift in emphasis, and I think it works well to take the shine off a coating applied to previous stories in this series.

Overall, this was one of the more enjoyable books in the recent set. Admittedly, not terribly much happens, plot-wise. Most of the events obviously set us up for things to come—the grand climax of the whole series has already been written and is in this book's future—but enough events bear significance, especially given the context within that full series, that it holds up well. An enjoyable, worthwhile read, if you need something quotable. :)

Tyler says

I've read every book in the Enderverse, while I enjoyed The Swarm I must admit it is relatively weak in comparison to other books in the series. Fans of the First Formic War series will enjoy revisiting many of the same characters in this series but not much else. There's plenty of the Card charm and intrigue but it's clearly written to be a trilogy and as a result there's not much of a climax and I have a feeling only hardcore fans will enjoy it.

Homer says

I really enjoyed the book, but it definitely feels like book one of a trilogy and doesn't stand alone well. I liked how Johnston used the character Lehm to poke fun at the "coincidence" that brought the main cast from the previous trilogy back together. If you enjoyed the previous trilogy like I did, I think we are set for another fun adventure as the next two books are released!

Jane Stewart says

Note to myself: don't get the audiobook. You can hear the narrator's breath. I understand the best narrators use editing software to remove their breaths. This was released in 2016. You'd think current day publishers and narrators would solve this. I will wait until the rest of the 3 books are out then consider buying print - not audio.

Alyssia Cooke says

I really enjoyed this, far more in fact than I enjoyed the works on the first Bugger wars. The characters seemed far more developed and the narrative all but flew past. The issues with the IF are well explored and although Mazer is perhaps wasted a bit, the events that surround him are interesting enough that you don't really mind.

Edwin says

To start off I really enjoyed Ender's Game, the movie. I know it wasn't a big hit, but I like the nuances and what have you. As such, I figure I pick up something by Orson Scott and get into the universe.

I started with this as it was the first of the trilogy before the actual Ender's Game.

Well, cringe, it wasn't good.

What I liked, was some of the research of weapons as they figure out how to defeat the Formics (furry bug alien things). This went across Lem's and Mazer's story lines.

Also like the exploring and solving the mystery of the asteroids. Across Victor's and Mazer's story arcs.

What I didn't like...the massive story arcs of boredom

(view spoiler)

So to summarize, too much fluff and filler, not enough meat. Some basic logic fails as well. Many times along the way I was debating if I should quit and not finish, but kept talking myself back into it. If I am thinking like that, then I know the book wasn't good at all. The beginning and ending were good, the rest....

Cody says

I waited too long to write this. The specific details are fading.

The Swarm is another solid book in the series. Like the first formic war series, it's interesting knowing the ultimate results hundreds of years later. And yet again the story that unfolds has many twists and unexpected details.

One new thing I picked up that seems common in other Ender books is what I'd call a sketchy emotional subplot. In this version it's a couple characters that in one encounter go from engaged to confused and unsure about their status. It seems shallow, yet it's not distracting from the overall plot.

Old characters are the center of attention, similar to the last series and many plotlines are left incomplete in anticipation of the next couple books. It's all ramping up again, and the most important plotlines reach a satisfying climax to lead us to the next book.

I'm looking forward to the completion of the series. I don't think any of these are life changing, but for an Ender Universe fanboy they are definitely worth the time.

Pros: Pleasing the fanboys, interesting and logical plot. Building anticipation!

Cons: Maybe not a con, but the pacing is a little slower than I expect and hope for. Not much bad to say though.

Sean says

masterful storytelling. the characters here are so insightful, and the alien race's technology marvelous. the infuriating careerist military leaders and criminals are loathsome, the goodness and wisdom and character of the heroes are inspiring. I don't know if I've ever read a book that engaged my interest, imagination, and wonder so fully, other than the other books in this series. My thanks go out to Card and Johnston.

Virginia says

Gah! Why is it that I just found out about this book and now have to wait for the next one?!?

It doesn't matter that we "know" the big picture of what happens. It's the how. I want to know HOW sooner than later.

As with all the best space operas, it is the people and the love and ultimately, family and perpetuating the human species that makes these lives worth living.

Crew says

I have been anticipating the continuation of the prequels to Ender's Game since the last trilogy ended. However, so far I am somewhat disappointed. This book wasn't bad, it was just - meh. The story didn't advance as far as it could have. It was definitely written as the first book in a trilogy rather than a stand-alone in a trilogy. I like trilogies or book series, but I think it is a cop out when the author purposefully drags things out to fill up space and make a series of books from one stories. Orson Scott Card didn't like it when Peter Jackson did that to the Hobbit, and that's what it seems like is happening with this next trilogy - Johnston and Card purposefully dragged stuff out to have a long enough book.

Now time for some real criticism. I don't consider background of what the book is about a spoiler, so I am not hiding anything yet, but I will hide what I do consider spoilers. In the epilogue Johnston explains that they decided that the main conflict in this book would be Mazer's first court-martial. That would have been all well and good, if that's what they did. It might have been interesting to have a science fiction court-room drama book - like Grisham in space or A Few Good Men. Instead, they barely spent any time preparing for his court-martial or even in the court room. And what time they did spend dealing with Military Justice, I cringed every step of the way. I understand that the Fleet military justice system is still in its infancy and is attempting to merge the justice systems of several different countries, so it won't look like the US military justice system. But as a JAG for the United States Air Force there was a lot that frustrated me. If English is the language of the fleet, I would expect that an English/American justice system would be the primary model. If that is the case there is a lot that needs to be corrected. Did Card or Johnston even consult with a JAG officer? Johnston said he consulted with many military members, but did not mention a JAG. I would be happy to provide some advice if they need a JAG consultant for Mazer's second court-martial. I would be happy to go through everything that was wrong with the system they created, but I won't do that here. But I

will note one: (view spoiler)

The other conflicts out in space with the formics were not bad. There were some intense scenes and interesting world building. I did find the dialogue between characters, specifically Victor and Imalla dragged quite a bit. Card in his old age is more interested in relationships than action, and I find relationship building to be a good thing in some stories, but I found myself speeding up my audible app, just to get through it faster.

Okay, now to end on a high point. I liked the the Battle School foreshadowing.

Just know that while I was disappointed in this book, it didn't disappoint me enough to keep me from reading the next book when it comes out.

Radek says

Very good action s-f book. Nothing like Ender or Shadow series in terms of wisdom, but a good fun to read.

Eric Allen says

An interesting idea for the beginning of a story ruined by completely uninteresting characters, and series shattering continuity errors.

Unless you REALLY enjoyed the characters from the previous trilogy about the First Invasion, you will probably want to pass on this one until the rest of the Second Invasion trilogy is out. I found it to be horribly boring, and full of characters that I haven't given a shit about for years, if I ever did to begin with. The only part of this book that I found even mildly entertaining was Mazer Rackham's storyline, and even he was somewhat bland and colorless in this book. I mean, the guy is one of the most badass characters in the Enderverse and what does he do in this book? Complain. Period.

Don't care about Victor, his family, and their drama. His family overstayed their welcome in the previous trilogy to a ridiculous degree and I'm still annoyed by that. Certainly don't Care about Lem, he's still a slimy, contemptible piece of shit. Absolutely do not give any shits about Bingwen, and never did. And I forget her name, but the new character, the Thai chemist, oh my god, I hate this character. This character has no reason to exist, except to have ideas contrary to every single other human being, because the plot says it will be important for the coming war. She's an extremely lazy and badly written character. We never see how she came to any of these world-changing realizations or discoveries, she just knows them all, because the plot says someone needs to tell Mazer Rackham about them for the final battle. And I don't mean to shit on other religions or anything, but when an alien menace appears on earth and begins murdering innocent people by the millions... THAT ALIEN CREATURE IS NOT ON THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT
ACCORDING TO YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS!!! I mean, even the book immediately points out how absolutely fucking stupid this character is for believing it through another character's dialog, and pokes every sort of hole in the belief possible, but then she just keeps talking about it like it's not the most idiotic thing

she's ever said in her life. Some characters you just want to reach into the book and strangle to death, and this is one of them.

Canonically, Mazer Rackham noticed that the Buggers/Formics/whateverthefuckyouwanttocallthemnow were acting oddly, Earth was losing, badly, and he was on one of the last ships left in the fight. He made a last second guess that maybe a queen was controlling them all and attacked the mother ship, winning the war. NO ONE KNEW OR EVEN SUSPECTED BEFORE THAT MOMENT IN THE FINAL BATTLE!!! FUCK THIS STUPID FREAKING NEW CHARACTER!!! And that doesn't even take into account that in Ender's time, decades later, it is not common knowledge at all, and here, every single person on Earth seems to know about it. The continuity errors here are absolutely enormous. Hey, if you want to go back and tell the back story, that's fine. But it CANNOT directly contradict the material that you have already published. I'm looking at YOU George Lucas!!! If you can't make it work as a good story on its own without making continuity shattering changes to preexisting material then DON'T WRITE IT!!! How is this a difficult thing to figure out? Seriously!!!

This book is probably necessary for the overall plot of the trilogy, but it's a bit of a chore to read through with boring characters, and lazy writing. It also breaks previously set continuity in a big way. My advice would be to wait for the rest of the trilogy before touching it, and treat it as non-canon to the overall series, unless you're a huge Enderverse fan and absolutely have to read anything and everything connected to it as soon as you learn of their existence. Throughout the entire book I was thinking to myself, "why am I reading this when I could be re-reading Ender's Game right now instead...?"

Andrew Jaffe says

Damn you, Card and Johnston. Damn you for creating such a uniquely vibrant world that sucks me in like literally no other. Damn you for putting out only one of these a year that I'm almost literally forced to read in a single sitting.

Now that that's over with, The Swarm, the most recent entry into the Ender's Game prequel series-es, was an absolutely outstanding component of the series that you absolutely cannot fully appreciate without reading (and probably enjoying) every other book in the Enderverse. This presents a host of problems as a book, but I'll disregard those for now, because reviews are subjective and this particular reviewer is a long-time fan of said Enderverse.

As a component of the wider series, The Swarm fills one of the most genuinely fascinating narrative roles I've ever had the pleasure to encounter. Brief diversion: I love to play games while I read a book; largely, I read the last few pages of a book and try to constantly fill in the blanks as I read it from the front. This approach is regarded as wildly sacrilegious by many, but makes reading a much more active challenge for me, which makes me pay attention to every little detail the author(s) chuck in that much more. The Swarm provides a borderline unparalleled opportunity for this game, as it masterfully spins the world that Card and Johnston built in the First Formic War series into the universe that birthed Ender's Earth, dropping hints, clues, and origin stories left and right. This kind of backstory prequel work tends to be very hit-or-miss for me from most authors, relies wholly upon the gelling of said origins in context of both the narrative of the book in question and the wider universe, a massive challenge for any creative to undertake; additionally, distinct characters are relied upon even more heavily in these cases, as they're the reader's only viewpoints into this plot-dense transition time.

And holy cow, does The Swarm check EVERY box above, and absolutely blow its peers out of the water. The same characters I fell in love with in The First Formic War series have grown up over the meantime, and their new status quo feel perfectly natural and fitting to who they are. Established relationships feel like destiny in action, new relationships drag me in immediately, new characters grab my attention from their first couple of paragraphs, then totally undercut my expectations, just as I've come to (not) expect from this tag-team writing duo.

As many other reviewers have pointed out, there is not much action in this book, and it's largely table-setting; but it's table-setting undergone in a borderline perfect manner, which is something to be truly celebrated as a key component of the series. With each entry into their wonderful prequel series, the Enderverse grows exponentially fuller and more vibrant, literally all a long-time fan could ask out of a book like this.
