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Armada: A Novel



Synopsis

The new novel from the best-selling author of Ready Player One It's just another day of high school for Zack Lightman. He's daydreaming through another boring math class, with just one more month to go until graduation and freedom - if he can make it that long without getting suspended again. Then he glances out his classroom window and spots the flying saucer. At first Zack thinks he's going crazy. A minute later he's sure of it. Because the UFO he's staring at is straight out of the videogame he plays every night, a hugely popular online flight simulator called Armada - in which gamers just happen to be protecting the Earth from alien invaders. But what Zack's seeing is all too real. And his skills - as well as those of millions of gamers across the world - are going to be needed to save the Earth from what's about to befall it. Yet even as he and his new comrades scramble to prepare for the alien onslaught, Zack can't help thinking of all the science-fiction books, TV shows, and movies he grew up reading and watching and wonder: Doesn't something about this scenario seem a little too...familiar? Armada is at once a rollicking, surprising thriller, a classic coming-of-age adventure, and an alien-invasion tale like nothing you've ever heard before - one whose every minute is infused with author Ernest Cline's trademark pop-culture savvy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Oh boy. Where do I begin with this one? I really wanted to like this book, especially given I am such a fan of Cline's "Ready Player One." But after forcing myself to the end of this mind-numbingly boring and unimaginative story of clichéd alien conquest, I can't help but feel extremely

disappointed. For one, the blatant rip off of ideas from "Ender's Game" made me cringe as I consider this book to be a much less engrossing and developed adventure than Orson Scott Card's classic. I understand the concept of paying tribute and drawing inspiration from previous works, but Armada takes ideas from great works of science fiction and then inserts cheesy, one-dimensional, and predictable characters into its storyline. Speaking of characters, the protagonist is just so darn unlikeable, that I can't stand it! An angry-at-the-world, oppositional defiant, geeked out gamer with daddy issues has got to be one of the most unappealing hodgepodge of character traits you can place into a protagonist. Sometimes a story can be saved by really well developed supporting characters, but there are none to be found in this book. There are so many one-dimensional archetypes in this book that it was impossible to develop an attachment to any character whatsoever. All the love interests are completely forced and the romantic dialogue (and I'm being generous by calling it "romantic") sounds like stuff you would read in cheap Valentines Day cards. Heck, the old school "do you like me, check yes or no" is more romantic than any love scene this book has to offer. Another area of insult to me was in dealing with the military rank structure as portrayed in this book. As an armed forces member myself, the blatant disregard of proper military customs and courtesies was appalling to say the least. Captains saluting lieutenants, same ranked individuals saluting each other, and admirals being higher ranking than generals were just a few of the gaffes I suffered through as Cline attempted to depict the Earth Defense Alliance as an actual military organization. There is no excuse for not having this nailed down as the author's brother is a marine I believe. And then lastly, the actual flying/dog-fighting/drone-killing sequences were complete snooze-fests as the protagonist and company shoot down mindless legions of spacecraft in a very predictable manner. In fact, once you read through the first battle scene, the rest of them are pretty much carbon copy showdowns of what happened previously. Also, due to the very nature of the plot design, there was always a lack of suspense in each battle (without giving too much away, think of the whole issue of "drone-fighting" as it relates to our current engagement in conflicts around the world). The only slightly redeeming quality was found in a neatly packaged (albeit predictable) ending that set the stage for a possible sequel while avoiding the all too popular "cliffhanger/unexplained plot holes" trap. The book is also a fairly quick read, though I almost abandoned finishing it multiple times due to sheer boredom. I hope Cline's next book restores him to the former glory of Ready Player One, but until then, I recommend you pass on this dud and re-read Ender's Game for a much better experience.

I don't know what publisher wrote the book's description for Armada but it's

terribly misleading. Armada's only subversion is the way that Cline bucks against the works of sci-fi greats by only using tired character stereotypes to populate the story. Everyone is flat, unendearing, and so painfully boring as to make Wade Watts from Ready Player One look like Daniel Plainview from There Will be Blood. The inter-character dialog is so simplistic and unrealistic that it could almost be mistaken for satire. There are a few moments where it almost seems natural but the vast majority comes off as childish. Nor is there anything in the least that qualifies as thrilling. There's no suspense as major events and twists are literally mused over chapters in advance of when they actually happen. Not once, not twice, but three times with every major plot point. Not to mention Cline constantly references the stories Armada takes inspiration from with a wink wink, nudge nudge. Cline also managed to take the multitude of references peppered through RPO and remove any meaning or plot importance. They're now merely shoehorned side notes that overwhelm with the blunt force of a hammer. Many of these references come in twos, a single sentence where the subject is compared to two separate pop culture references at the same time. After enjoying Ready Player One several times it's heartbreaking to see how badly Armada missed the mark.

I loved Ready Player One and I wanted to love Ernest Cline's new book Armada just as much. Unfortunately, I did not. (I apologize to Mr. Cline for comparing his second book to his first, but it's just the easiest way to review the book.) Ready Player One was original and inventive. Armada is neither, and it is very predictable. It's so predictable that I thought it would surely end in another way, as the author points us so strongly in the direction of the predicted ending. Plot points along the way were also predictable, and Armada falls back on tired clichés (like the school bully accompanied by his two big and dumb thugs). I totally bought into the world of Ready Player One. I can fully imagine our world disintegrating into the chaos of Ready Player One by 2044. I did not buy into the world of Armada, which is set in 2018. The whole scenario of sentient beings on a moon within our own solar system, a secret plan to prepare all of Earth's citizens for war through popular culture and video games did not seem plausible. I felt like I was reading a script for a forgettable alien invasion movie. I did not get caught up in Zack's world. Zack was also not nearly as likeable as Wade from Ready Player One, and Zack's band of compatriots felt clichéd (African-American, check; gay, check; middle-aged, check; Asian, check). I'm not a gamer, but that bothered me not a bit in Ready Player One. The gaming in Armada is much more focused on one type of space invader shooting games. I was bored by the long descriptions of game playing and

combat. The popular culture references in Armada feel forced. I didn't get a lot of the references in Ready Player One, but they came so fast and furious, and were built so seamlessly into the dialog and plot, that I didn't care. Multiple times while reading Armada I found myself feeling annoyed that I didn't get a reference. Although I couldn't help but read Armada in the shadow of Ready Player One, if I'd never read Ready Player One I would not have enjoyed Armada any more. In fact, I probably gave Armada an extra half star because I love Cline and his first novel so much. Armada is not without merit. I was amused off and on. I enjoyed Zack's online call sign of IronBeagle, a combination of the hero from the movie Iron Eagle and Snoopy fighting the Red Baron. Cline has a nice way of putting words together (I reminded myself that I was a man of science, even if I did usually get a C in it.) Armada was a quick read, and there are worse ways to pass some time. I will definitely read his next book.

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