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Armada: A Novel By The Author Of Ready Player One



Synopsis

Zack Lightman has spent his life dreaming. Dreaming that the real world could be a little more like the countless science-fiction books, movies, and videogames he's spent his life consuming. Dreaming that one day, some fantastic, world-altering event will shatter the monotony of his humdrum existence and whisk him off on some grand space-faring adventure. But hey, there's nothing wrong with a little escapism, right? After all, Zack tells himself, he knows the difference between fantasy and reality. He knows that here in the real world, aimless teenage gamers with anger issues don't get chosen to save the universe. And then he sees the flying saucer. Even stranger, the alien ship 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. No, Zack hasn't lost his mind. As impossible as it seems, what he'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. It's Zack's chance, at last, to play the hero. But even through the terror and exhilaration, he can't help thinking back to all those science-fiction stories he grew up with, and wondering: Doesn't something about this scenario seem a little familiar? At once gleefully embracing and brilliantly subverting science-fiction conventions as only Ernest Cline could, "Armada" is a rollicking, surprising thriller, a classic coming-of-age adventure, and an alien invasion tale like nothing you've ever read before—one whose every page is infused with the pop-culture savvy that has helped make "Ready Player One" a phenomenon.

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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.

Not all "classics" of history age as well as Garrett Mattingly's "The Armada," which was first published in 1959 to coincide with the quadricentennial of Philip II's failed attempt at the so-called "Enterprise of England." His scholarship may be subject to legitimate contemporary scrutiny and reassessment, but his writing is timeless. The naval commander of the Spanish Armada, the duke of Medina Sidonia, emerges as the unlikely hero in Mattingly's narrative of the epic events in the fateful year of 1588. Medina Sidonia has for centuries been the primary scapegoat for the failure of the Armada, a fate that the duke himself perpetuated by taking blame for the disaster and frequently

admitting that he was not up to the challenge. Mattingly's rejoinder is "hogwash" - Medina Sidonia did an admirable job in leading the Armada to within a whisker of success despite the tremendous odds stacked against it for a variety of reasons. The author suggests that Horatio Nelson himself could have done no better than the much-maligned duke. As far as finger pointing goes, Mattingly condemns the duke of Parma, the Spanish land commander in the Netherlands and generally considered the greatest general of the age, for his failures to be adequately prepared to meet the Armada and sail on to the invasion of England. (Modern scholars such as Geoffrey Parker have vigorously defended Parma's performance recently.) Mattingly focuses on several aspects of the naval engagement itself that are worthy of note and rather counter to conventional wisdom. To begin with, he rightfully stresses the unprecedented nature of the sea battles that ensued when the Armada met the English fleet off the southern coast of England in the first week of August 1588.

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 "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 "space invader" shooting games. I was bored by the long descriptions of game playing and combat. The popular culture references in Armada feel forced.

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