



Swarm

John Graham

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In the frightening science fiction novel Swarm, a soldier takes on challenges in a universe that's filled with menacing alien life.

In John Graham's electric science fiction novel *Swarm*, a supersoldier works to keep people safe from alien evils.

Gabriel, who was bred to fight monsters, takes on the Swarm, an alien menace that controls people via hive mind, and that was released by engineers on a backwater desert planet. He works for a shadowy government agency in order to do so; his work keeps him away from home for long stretches of time.

Gabriel's efforts to keep human spaces free from the ravages of aliens, lost worlds, and creatures that would love to swallow them whole are covered best in the book's opening chapters, where tantalizing hints about past civilizations and ancient worlds arise. This complex backstory leads into the book's presentation of a future wherein most humans have been encouraged to regard aliens as mythical. Gabriel lives in a tense between space, doing work that few would believe while trying to maintain a quintessential family life, too.

Over the course of the novel, Gabriel grows from a rogue agent who struggles with his past mistakes, and who finds it difficult to interact with his family because of them, into a real hero who puts his life on the line to save the human race. That Gabriel is a family man results in some heart to his characterization, though his wife, Aster, is left to care for their children most. Their son, Orion, follows in his father's footsteps, as his special genes carry that burden; he is sent to a prestigious school to learn about himself.

Gabriel's quest is supported by a rotating cast of characters who help to drive the plot forward, including delightful and strange alien life forms; one sings about past ages, using a futuristic light show to aid Gabriel on his quest. The Swarm itself is seen in occasional glimpses that render its outsized evil a perfect foil for Gabriel's powers. There are some stock figures, though, including Gabriel's second in command.

As Gabriel's space ship, the *Fear No Evil*, blasts across the galaxy, spinning through wormholes with "ferocious turbulence" with its alarms wailing like "a choir of demons," the story becomes great fun. It covers potentially world-ending battles with Swarm-controlled zombies, working toward an intense ending in which Gabriel's crew battles to defeat the Swarm menace. It is a sweeping and cinematic conclusion, though one in which Orion's counter narrative about his own mission to understand himself is unresolved, leaving room for further adventures.

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JEREMIAH ROOD (June 18, 2021)

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