



Swarm

Lauren Carter

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In the not-too-distant future, thirty-seven-year-old Sandy lives a challenging and unfamiliar life. She survives by fishing, farming, and beekeeping on an isolated island with her partner, Marvin, and friend, Thomson. When the footprints of a thieving child start appearing in their garden, the family must come together to protect both the child and their fragile community.

In the face of scarcity, Sandy still dreams of being a mother. The thought of a child compels her to revisit her earlier life in a city plagued by power outages, unemployment, and protests. There she met Marvin and joined his violent cause, initiating a chain of events that led to tragic and life-altering consequences.

A powerful debut novel, *Swarm* is about persevering in a time of shrinking options, and coming to terms with regrettable choices.

Swarm Details

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Author : Lauren Carter

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From Reader Review Swarm for online ebook

Alexis says

Some beautiful writing in this and a great structure.

I had to read it in fits and starts because of circumstances beyond my control.

Aaron Shepard says

A dystopian novel about a not-improbably future. I enjoyed the low-key nature of the story. Instead of a grandiose vision of destruction, we see characters clinging to the little details that mean the difference between mere survival and actually living - family, human connection, honesty, compassion and so forth. A great ending, too.

Drew says

This was just a damn fine piece of fiction. I was initially interested when the Toronto Star posted a review calling it dystopian sci-fi, but it was much more than that. A story of futuristic survival, sure, but one with such realistic characters and beautiful, tragic writing that it transcends the genre. Highly recommended.

Jennifer Farquhar says

A beautifully written and relatable novel about life after peak oil. Walking through the grocery store after reading Swarm, I felt so grateful for all that we have at our fingertips---oranges from Spain, noodles from Japan, a mini-computer in everyone's pocket, and so aware of how quickly we could lose it all and return to a pre-industrial society. Looking forward to reading Lauren Carter's next book.

Lisa says

For a lover of post-apocalyptic novels, it's rare for me to be so disappointed as to not finish the book. Ultimately I found the trope of the book being addressed to a phantom child annoying and kind of unbelievable, although it started out fun. I did not like any of the characters in the alternating "City" sections, including Sandy. As other reviewer's have pointed out, the most interesting character in the book is Phoenix but by the time I was 3/4 of the way through the book I had lost interest in even her.

I enjoyed the "Island" sections much more because, as always, I love the world building and learning the details of how people survive.

As a beekeeper myself, I thought I would enjoy her descriptions of interactions with the bees, but they were

rather pedestrian and did not really explore the mystical/sacred nature of bees.

Finally, I resorted to just skimming through the last 50 pages. Disappointing overall.

Moira says

Clean and affecting prose in the service of a group of characters about whom I found I couldn't really care.

Scott Overton says

Swarm is a story of our own society only a few years from now after the collapse has begun (from the end of oil, climate change—take your pick). Lauren Carter juxtaposes two time streams in the main character's life with great effect, deepening the impact of both storylines with their parallels and counterpoints. Swarm also has the depth of characterization we expect from literary fiction with a setting from dystopian science fiction. Some will compare it to Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam series, but Carter's vision feels closer and more real. It gave me a strong urge to go into survivalist mode and prepare my summer cottage for a very long stay.

Jen says

I wanted to like this more but found it a bit of a chore.

Lauren says

'Swarm' was really middle of the road for me. This is a genre I love, and I especially love realistic takes on how food production and survival would work after a societal collapse. And I love beekeeping! So I wanted to love Swarm, but I didn't.

Lauren Carter is a good writer - a lot of her prose sections were really great. Unfortunately, I think her biggest weakness is characters. There were several I liked, primarily Pheonix and Thomson, but most of them didn't grip me at all, and I think when you're dealing with a story like this, character is crucial. A lot of them felt real, more or less, but it was hard to care about them.

I was frustrated with Sandy for being so weak-willed and flimsy a lot of the time. I was frustrated with Marvin for just being annoying and with the writing for giving me no reason to care about him, and with his relationship with Sandy also being so... empty.

Pheonix was the most compelling character in the book, and it almost seemed like Carter realized this towards the end of the book, but didn't have time to go rewrite it all to give her a stronger presence. While I appreciated the connection between Sandy and Pheonix in the last section of the book, it was too little too late. And honestly, have two female characters start something romantic/sexual and immediately having one die is a tired and homophobic cliche.

A rewrite where Pheonix was alive and with Sandy would have made a much more interesting book, honestly.

Tani says

I liked the book, but it kind of made me sad too. Not because of the post-apocalyptic future where everything has fallen to dust. That was interesting. To be honest, my favorite parts were on the island with just the everyday minutiae of life and how it goes on, even in the darkest of times.

What I didn't care for were the scenes from the city. I didn't care for young Sandy. She was so clueless and naive... I can forgive a little, but having watched her parents lose everything, you'd think she wouldn't be quite so bad as she is. Plus, I never liked Marvin, so I didn't get her attraction to him.

Still, I felt like it was a good debut. The language was really pretty at points, and I did find parts of the story very intriguing. You could certainly find worse out there without even looking hard. 3 stars.

Lara Stoudt says

Swarm is an intelligent and moving narrative. The topic is relevant and the story has lessons to teach. Lauren paints her characters brilliantly and I know a good book when I am sad when I come to the end. I highly recommend.

Alex McGilverry says

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Brindle and Glass Publishing

Swarm follows Sandy as she and her partner Marvin and their friend Thomson struggle to survive on an island. The novel weaves from past to future to show Sandy's story. On the island a mysterious girl is taking food from their already meagre stores. Marvin has no sympathy for the girl. They don't have enough for themselves. Yet, Sandy dreams of being a mother. She desires the opportunity to do impossible mother and daughter things in a world that no longer exists.

The bees, the swarm of the title inhabit both parts of the novel and are a symbolic link to both what has gone wrong with the world and the possibility of hope. Swarm explores and all too likely scenario of economic collapse that leaves the largest part of the population hopeless.

Swarm reminded me of Margaret Atwood's work in which everything carries weight. The story is built on the warp and woof of time and meaning. We feel Sandy's desires and sometimes get impatient with her refusal to anchor her life in what is real rather than hopes that seem little more than a will-o-the-wisp. Then we see Marvin's harshness and the way he's been reduced by their subsistence living to focus only on what will help them survive and we hope that Sandy might succeed.

Between Sandy and Marvin, there is Thomson, a dying father figure, the inspiration to Marvin's violence

who rejected violence and yet refuses to reject either Marvin or Sandy. He is the one who forces a recognition of the value of death and it is no accident that he is also the bee keeper of the book.

Swarm is a challenging and occasionally a difficult read, but all the more valuable for that. It points to our present reluctance as a society to change. We are moving toward the brink, and Sandy's story could be anyone's story in a few years. The book is about not just the choices of a few characters, but the choices we've made as a species. I highly recommend it.

Ruth Linka says

This is one of the most memorable manuscripts I've read in a long time. I didn't even think I'd like it, as I'm not keen on 'futuristic' or 'dystopian' stories. But, because the world is much like ours is now, and could be our world soon, it didn't feel like a robots-gone-bad kind of future. The characters are people we know and just find themselves in a situation unfamiliar to them (and to us). And how they make it work, how they not only survive but continue to build community and live good lives is what got me. Lauren Carter is a writer to watch and I'm very privileged to have worked with her on this book.
