



Exo

Fonda Lee

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It's been a century of peace since Earth became a colony of an alien race with far reaches into the galaxy. Some die-hard extremists still oppose alien rule on Earth, but Donovan Reyes isn't one of them. His dad holds the prestigious position of Prime Liaison in the collaborationist government, and Donovan's high social standing along with his exocel (a remarkable alien technology fused to his body) guarantee him a bright future in the security forces. That is, until a routine patrol goes awry and Donovan's abducted by the human revolutionary group Sapience, determined to end alien control.

When Sapience realizes whose son Donovan is, they think they've found the ultimate bargaining chip. But the Prime Liaison doesn't negotiate with terrorists, not even for his own son. Left in the hands of terrorists who have more uses for him dead than alive, the fate of Earth rests on Donovan's survival. Because if Sapience kills him, it could spark another intergalactic war. And Earth didn't win the last one...

Exo Details

Date : Published January 31st 2017 by Scholastic

ISBN : 9780545933438

Author : Fonda Lee

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Young Adult, Dystopia, Fiction

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From Reader Review Exo for online ebook

Cori Reed says

This was a YA sci-fi novel that was *smart*. Taking place on an earth that has been colonized by an alien race, it explores the ideas of colonialism, suppression, indoctrination, rebellion, trying to retain culture, and the many shades of grey involved.

Other people have written wonderfully thought out reviews. I particularly recommend the review of CW (Read Think Ponder). She breaks it all down brilliantly!

I literally bought this book because of a blind book shopping challenge, having not known anything about it. This book is *seriously* under-hyped. Go read it!

S.J. Kincaid says

This book was such an unexpected, fantastic surprise, since I'd heard absolutely nothing about it beforehand.

The MC, Donovan, is an incredibly sympathetic character, the plot roars forward from the beginning and doesn't stop, the characters and opposing 'sides' are all multifaceted and complicated, and this world - 150 years into an alien colonization - is vividly fleshed-out.

I highly recommend this. I ordered Zeroboxer about halfway through reading this because I enjoyed it so much.

Heather (The Sassy Book Geek) says

Originally Posted On The Sassy Book Geek

3.5 Stars

**** Thank you to Scholastic for sending me a review copy of this book in exchange for an honest review****

I was on and off with "Exo" a lot because there were many things I enjoyed and a few that I didn't so I was debating between a 3 star and 3.5 star rating which in the end I decided 3.5 was a good rating since I did actually enjoy myself.

The Plot

"Exo" gets into the action immediately at the start of the book with Donovan and his partner going to capture some rebel humans and Donovan getting kidnapped instead. It really grabs your attention and makes you

want to read more, however, that fast pacing does NOT last. The pacing (and my interest) slowed down considerably after Donovan is captured and it all seems really boring and pointless, it took a lot of effort to make it past this point in the plot for me. This actually happened a few times so the pacing overall was very uneven.

I was also left kind of wondering what exactly the main conflict was in this book because as stated in the description Donovan is kidnapped by human revolutionaries but this is actually resolved pretty early in the story. So after that I didn't really understand what was happening and why. Is there going to be some war between humans and aliens? Aliens versus other aliens? Who knows? I didn't really like this free floating feeling I had through the plot....

However, I did really like that what conflicts there were in the plot weren't black or white they were all very much in a grey area. No side is strictly good or evil, they both have their reasons for doing what they do. So I thought that was very interesting and added a lot of complexity to the story.

Also the main reason I rated this book higher than I probably would have is because of the world building, which was absolutely excellent. Fonda Lee does an amazing job of building a very complex world in which humans have been "conquered" by an alien race and now co-exist with them. There's a caste system, different technologies, and everything from the language to the biology of the aliens is provided. There's a lot of imaginations and detail put into this world and I very much appreciated it, even though I wanted to learn so much more! Plus there's no info-dumping!

The Characters

So we actually get a male POV in this book which I thought was a big plus since it isn't something we normally see, especially in YA. Just a fun tidbit!

To start off I will say that all of the characters, including, Donovan were pretty flat and reading I felt very distant from them. I didn't relate and I didn't really care what happened to any of them because I felt I didn't actually get to know any of them. That's not to say I didn't learn anything about the characters, I did learn quite a bit, I just felt that no one was really developed at all.

Donovan, however, I came to have a certain degree of respect for because he is put through absolute hell in this book but some of the actions he took were stupid and therefore annoying. That's really all I can say for our main character.

I also found that all of the characters that received any degree of development all had a significant relationship with Donovan, any other secondary characters lacked any development or even "screen time" so to speak. Even the relationships weren't depicted as being really strong either, they all felt really bland to me such as Donovan and his father and Jet (his BFF).

I especially felt that Donovan's romantic interest Anya was completely unnecessary because of how underwhelming and underdeveloped it felt. I felt that this was only added for the sake of having some form of romance and I felt like asking "But why?" a lot.

In Conclusion

Overall I did like this book even though there were times that I felt very bored and wondered if I would even finish. I think the world building is very unique and I liked the fact that this was alien-scifi because who

doesn't love aliens? I am excited to continue the series and see what happens next even though it hasn't been confirmed yet that this is a series, with that ending there better be more though!

What I Liked:

- The world building was amazing, detailed, and imaginative
- No info-dumping
- The action parts that were fast paced were awesome
- No side in the conflict was black or white, everything's a shade of gray
- Male POV
- Aliens!

What I Disliked:

- Uneven pacing
- Not much character development
- Main conflict was confusing and obscure
- Romance was very underwhelming and unnecessary

Recommend?

This is kind of "meh" as far as recommending goes I would say if you're a fan of YA science fiction or want to try out a sci-fi book that involves aliens then give this a go! It's overall a pretty decent read.

Fonda Lee says

The second book in an author's career is often harder to write than the first, so as much as I love ZEROBOXER, I am especially proud of EXO. I set out to break a lot of tropes in this book, to completely twist the old "aliens conquer Earth" narrative, and to write an action-packed science fiction novel about soldiers and aliens and terrorists in a story that's ultimately about reconciling yourself with the choices made by your parents. Also, I would really like to have an exocel, wouldn't you?

Skip says

I was initially drawn to this book by the cover art, although I did not win the GR giveaway. Donovan Reyes is an exo soldier, and the son of the Prime Liaison between the aliens now ruling the Earth and the surviving humans. When Donovan was five years old, his father decided over the objections of his departed wife to have him "changed," undergoing an operation to create a hardened shell. Donovan is captured by the resistance, Sapience, on a routine patrol, and becomes uncertain of his loyalties when one of his captors saves his life and one of the resistance leaders (view spoiler). Donovan is rescued in a horrific attack on the resistance, and then has to decide about his loyalties, especially when the resistance leader is going to be atomized. I thought the world building took too long, but liked the characters enough to enjoy the book.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Pages read: 49

Characters are flat, voice is bland, and I'm not invested in fifty pages. Buh bye now.

Tim Hicks says

I'm not going to downstar this because it's a YA book and I am decades away from being a YA. I think it does a good job of being a YA book.

There's a solid enough plot, and a good array of non-obvious moral choices.
Our hero's extreme moral righteousness is for once well explained as inherited.
The world-building is believable enough.

The characters? Well, lookit, I just finished the book an hour ago and I've already forgotten the hero's name.
The characters are mostly there to surround him ((Donovan)). Saul's too soft and Jevid too hard to be credible.

But I award a point for naming a character Vercingetorix (Jet) - go on, Google the V name -- and I award one for Donovan making exactly the sort of mistakes someone his age would be expected to make.

I'll read the next one of these, although I'd rather read Jade City 2.

jv poore says

Peace Day may be quickly approaching, but a battle is about to go down while something more sinister, bigger, bubbles beneath. Tension between the Global Security & Pacification Forces (SecPac) and humans is palpable; the humans' hatred, disgust and raw fury with the zhree is tangible, yet they plan to celebrate a century of coexistence. Coexistence applies to the fifteen percent of mankind approved to exist among the zhree. The remaining eighty-five percent faded into shadows of themselves or morphed into fierce, determined resistance fighters.

Having survived the Hardening process that transforms a zhree-approved human child into an exo, the only son of the Prime Liaison appears as a firmly committed SecPac soldier. Donovan is confident and unquestioning in his fight against human rebels; until a raid goes wrong. Held hostage where humans are the apex species, his perspective shifts. It becomes impossible to see the individuals around him as the cohesive, carbon-copy-collection he has been fighting against. What he fought for blurs out of focus. Who he really is becomes crystal clear: not human enough for mankind, "nothing but human" to the zhree. Although it feels as if everything is different now, one thing is very much the same: the entire planet is in danger and Donovan is helpless as a hostage.

Exo is brilliant example of Science-Fiction feeling oh-so-real. Ms. Lee packs powerful punches in action scenes, soothes with sympathy in some situations, but bites with wit and humor in others. Entertaining, empathy evoking, surprisingly relatable and utterly thought provoking, this is a book for everyone; not just

Science-Fiction fans.

This review was written for Buried Under Books by jv poore.

Lindsay says

One hundred and fifty years ago the Zhree came to Earth to invade. After a thirty year war they won. Now Earth is a Zhree colony on the edge of their space. Humans are a servant race, some of which have been taken into Zhree culture and marked as part of Zhree families/castes. A small elite of whom have undergone "hardening" as children, modified with Zhree biotechnology to have exocels, a retractable covering of armor and weaponry.

Donovan Reyes is an Exo with one of these exocels working for the Global Security and Pacification Forces (SecPac) and part of a soldier erze, one of the Zhree family/castes. He's also the 17-year old son of the Prime Liason, the most powerful human in the collaborator government. Even over a century after the Zhree took over, there is still a human resistance called Sapience and SecPac's main job is to deal with the activity of this terrorist group.

When Donovan is captured by the terrorists he's challenged by a wide range of opposing view-points including one that's a big surprise to him personally. But very few things are black and white.

I found this book to be very frustrating.

One one hand you have an absolutely fascinating colonization/conquest scenario where generations after the invasion the Zhree living there consider Earth home as well and have substantial affection for their humans. By placing the collaborators in the righteous role and exploring the motivations of the Prime Liason the book smartly addresses one of the more problematic elements of the colonization narrative: that the outcomes of colonization are actually a mix of good and bad. Events during the story highlight this even further with the consequences of a potential pullback of Zhree from Earth and what that would mean.

On the other hand the main character is incredibly annoying for much of the book with a good dose of daddy issues and abandonment issues that make him an emotional basket case. He is uniquely placed and absolutely at his best when he's operating to bridge the various groups in the story, but he spends far, far too long being a whiny dope. I found myself flashing back to the worst emotional conflict elements of Shinji from Neon Genesis Evangelion, but Donovan is supposed to be a highly trained soldier.

To be clear, I love the world-building, and the narrative choices are clever as well (although the timing of the High Speaker's arrival is stupidly coincidental). Probably enough to balance the persistent and prolonged immaturity of Donovan to make me want to pick up next year's sequel. It's just annoying that the worst sequences around that element were so much of the book, otherwise I can see this as being a clear 5 stars. Unfortunately it ranks probably closer to 3.5 IMO.

Alice says

This book was lacking in everything but potential.

I picked up *Exo* because it had an interesting premise. Aliens have colonized Earth and the Prime Liaison's son has been captured by human extremists -what's not to love? Indeed, Fonda Lee delivered on the action and drama promised within the synopsis. However, the promises that pulled me in were entirely dampened by the fact that I didn't care about any of the characters. Not. A. Single. One. The cast simply came off as flat and ill-defined. Littered with insta-love and unrealistic parental relationships, I quickly lost investment in the well-being of the characters and their fragile society. For a book that hinges a lot on the concept of picking sides, I could not have cared less for either.

Considering all of the action going down in this book, I'm truly amazed at how boring it actually was.

Angela Blount says

Originally reviewed for YA Books Central: <http://www.yabookscentral.com/yaficti...>

Suit up, sci-fi fans—this isn't your standard fare alien invasion plot.

Several generations after being overtaken by a vastly different and technologically superior alien race called the zhree, humanity is divided on their perception of the occupation. Those who've strived for a peaceful and mutually beneficent co-existence live close to the zhree and enjoy their technological benefits. Those who've proven problematic or of no particular use live in early 21st century conditions. And those who openly continue to resist have formed an underground terrorist network called "Sapience."

"In a war, you wield every weapon you have, including words. Especially words."

The story is told in third-person past-tense, entirely from the viewpoint of Donovan Reyes, the 17-year-old son of the Prime Liaison (essentially the most influential human on Earth, given his rapport with the zhree.) Donovan is also an Exo—physiologically augmented at a young age with alien technology that provides him with a reflexive armor skin. Ever striving to please his distant, unpleasable father, he works as a somewhat gung-ho officer for the Global Security and Pacification Forces (SecPac.) Donovan's eagerness to prove himself lands him in tremendous danger when he is captured by Sapience and held for collateral. But the terrorists are a bit more complicated than the mindless hate group they appear to be... and to some of them, Donovan may prove to be more inconveniently human than they would prefer to believe.

Fonda Lee's fresh voice for the futuristic comes through with unique strength and solid worldbuilding. This book bears some execution similarity to her debut stand-alone, *Zeroboxer*, in that it is told from the lone POV of a young, standout male. But from there it diverges tremendously. Having read her first book, this reader found *EXO* more notably memorable and compelling. A large part of this is owed to the complexity of the issues being covered, and the author's multi-dimensional handling of them: parental neglect/abandonment; politics; nebulous ethics; prejudice; hatred; propaganda; group loyalty; fear-mongering; sentience; terrorism, supremacy, and extremist mindsets... all received different angles of examination, and little by way of black-and-white conclusions. There are no easy answers.

The Trope Twist

Speaking of "no easy answers," extra kudos for premise originality.

The aliens featured in this book aren't genocidal, resource-greedy, or evil—but they are ALIEN in nearly every sense of the word. Lee does a remarkable job of making theirs a flawed-yet-sympathetic race. The

zhree are at a severe relatability disadvantage--having no reference for understanding humanity's drive for "freedom" from perceived oppression, and no comprehension of their familial units (as they are egg-laying hermaphrodites.) The cultural and technological differences between their civilization and humanity is immense, and much of the tragedy of their initial arrival is owed to misunderstandings and miscommunications on both sides. In the eyes of the zhree, they are benevolent overseers. By their logic, Earth needed to be made into an outlying colony to protect it from the very real threat of their enemies, the Rii—who DO operate on a planet-raping genocidal level.

In some ways, this book almost feels like two different works welded together. The first half of the book moves along at a steady, rapid clip—fraught with compelling character exploration and tense plot development. There is a fascinating element of Stockholm syndrome, as well as its opposite (which, this reader discovered through research inspired by this book, is referred to as Lima syndrome.) But at the halfway point, the paradigm shifts—and with it the pacing and drive of the story. Some readers may find it more of an effort to get through the second portion. Those reading for the romantic angle may ultimately be disappointed with the way that thread resolves—however open-ended. (This reader could have done without it altogether. There just wasn't enough substance for me to feel invested in Donovan's love interest.)

Overall, this is a rare kind of read—one that begs difficult questions and opens up potential talking points on a myriad of speculative (and not-so speculative) topics.

Sabaa Tahir says

This book is original and fantastic and asks questions that I can't stop thinking about. Highly, highly recommend.

Sabrina says

Checkout my full review on my blog! <http://omgbooksandmorebooks.blogspot....>

An action packed sci-fi adventure, Exo is a exhilarating from start to end. This book captures violence, politics, and fighting. These kinds of books are unique in YA. I haven't found a sci-fi book with this much adventure and action packed goodness. I was on the edge of my set the whole time. One wrong move could, literally, start a war.

I love the world building. It is well thought out and very imaginative. The author creates a world where humans and aliens have a shaky relationship. One wrong move could lead to chaos. This book isn't about good vs bad. The lines are blurred and Donovan has to figure out what is right and what is wrong. The grey areas in this world make it hard to understand the truth of what's going on.

I read Exo in nearly one sitting. That was how ensnared I was from this story!

Justine says

Last year I read Fonda Lee's debut novel, *Zeroboxer* and was surprised by how much I enjoyed it. I went in to *Exo* expecting to like it, and I loved it. Enough so that I'm adding it to my favourites 2017 shelf.

Lee has a gift for emotive storytelling and creative worldbuilding, which she puts to good use here. Questions of alien integration into human culture, the use of different technology and biotechnology, and who gets access to those things, all play out within the context of a story ultimately about family, friendships, and identity.

The pacing is tight and interspersed with some excellently written scenes where confrontations come to a head. This is one of those books that took me on a bit of an emotional rollercoaster as the main character went through various difficulties only to have them become even more complicated as the story progressed.

What I liked about *Exo* was something I also liked about *Zeroboxer*; the story doesn't deal in black and white, but in varying shades of grey. The main character, Donovan, is likeable because he understands this clearly, even though he wishes that he didn't. That would be so much easier.

Originally this was written as a standalone book, but a sequel is in the works and will be released in summer 2018. I think there is still a lot of story to tell in the world Lee has created, and I am certainly looking forward to reading it.

** A note on the audiobook - I listened to the audiobook version of this read by MacLeod Andrews, and know I have said this about him before, but his audio performances are absolutely first rate and really added to my enjoyment of the book.

CW (The Quiet Pond) ? says

While reading, *Exo* by Fonda Lee, I just kept thinking, 'Finally. FINALLY.'

Finally, a young adult dystopian/science-fiction novel with a writer that understands the nuances and complexities of colonialism and oppression. *Finally*, a story that isn't just about the suppression of individualistic expression and calling it oppression, but **a story that understands that oppression is systemic, involves power, and is more than about teens spearheading a revolution for the sake of plot and action.** *Finally*, a book that has delivered a very nuanced story that shows that systemic oppression and overcoming it is not simple, but can be morally grey.

For this reason alone, I loved *Exo* instantly.

Exo is set in the future where Earth has been colonized by an alien race called the Zhree. But rather than portray Zhree as a violent and autocratic oppressive power, the Zhree have made a home on Earth as well as a strategic outpost in the midst of a galactic war. They are seemingly 'benevolent' after centuries of a bloody colonial war over Earth's hegemony, and have in their hands the subservience of humankind in exchange for humankind's protection from other alien species that want Earth to gain an edge in a greater galactic war.

The Zhree as oppressors are complex individuals, with a fascinating power dynamic that realistically echoes the power dynamics we can witness within our own society. Indeed, Earth has been conquered and invaded by aliens, but is that such a bad thing? *Exo* asks these powerful and compelling questions with no

clear cut answer.

"We're still fighting for the same thing we were fighting for back then ... There's nothing more precious than freedom. Freedom is worth any cost."

The book follows Donovan, a member of the eponymous Exo - humans who have been genetically enhanced using Zhree technology and are formidable human soldiers. **Donovan has never questioned his station as a soldier and follows the doctrine laid out by his Zhree superiors** -- that is, until he gets kidnapped and entangled with a pro-human and anti-Zhree organization called Sapience. They're terrorists - or freedom fighters, depending on which side you ask - and their agenda threatens everything that the Zhree and Donovan stand for. Therefore, ***Exo* poses some fantastic and thought-provoking questions about the price of freedom, conflict, and subjugation, what it means to be free** - and not just ideologically, but the 'practical' consequences as well, such as who dies in your endeavour for freedom?

Exo's brilliance is captured and evidenced by its boldness to ask questions that, perhaps, we don't even have the answer to. For once, I felt like I was reading a book that seriously questioned perceptions of freedom fighters/terrorists. Historically in young adult fiction, freedom fighters are often the 'good guys' who challenge an unambiguous 'bad guy', leaving no nuance or ambiguity of the moral positions of either side. **In *Exo*, however, both 'sides' are discerned and scrutinized, all through the eyes of a confused soldier who doesn't know what is right or wrong.** I loved the intelligent discourse that was not only compelling and fascinating, but also very down-to-earth in its perspective.

"Why do humans still hate us so much ... ? Haven't we governed them fairly, given them all advantages of exocels, shared technology with them?"

A large proportion of the characters in *Exo* were morally grey. And I *loved* it. The leaders of either 'side' of the conflict were fascinating characters, both with valid perspectives who just want to do what they think is best for humankind. Chief of all was Donovan himself; he begins as an individual who knows who or for what he fights for, but **when his views and ideology are challenged and another side is presented, he begins to question himself and his superiors.** Like leaders of either side, he too wants to do the right thing, but struggles immensely to discern what the right thing is. There was a romance in the story, a component that wasn't as interesting, but thankfully it didn't overshadow the narrative and, against the backdrop of the book's events, makes Donovan's character development much more interesting.

Listen. You need to read *Exo*. Not only is it one of the best science-fiction books I've read with excellent political and social discourse, but it's a book that doesn't *present* a clear-cut answer. ***Exo engages, provokes, and challenges, and encourages you to make your own decision and judgement.*** *Exo* is a brilliant book, one that will inevitably probe fascinating discussion and thought.

Rating: 4.5 / 5

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Is this book for you?

Premise in a sentence: The life of a human soldier who serves Earth's alien masters is turned upside down when he is kidnapped by an anti-alien organization.

Perfect for: Readers who love science-fiction, political and social discourse, and war/revolution/freedom

narratives.

Genre: Young adult, post-apocalyptic, science-fiction.

Recommended? Tired of poorly-written and -conceived science fiction novels? If yes, then YES.

Trigger/content warnings: death, terrorism, violence, torture, executions.

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This review can also be found on my book blog, Read, Think, Ponder!
