

Armada Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Zach Lightman's father died when Zach was one. Zach has been consumed with the desire to know his father for as long as he can remember. His only other remaining family is his mother, who is a nurse. She has never remarried.

The other people in Zach's lives are his two best friends both named Mike, whom he calls by their last name Cruz and Diehl. He also has an ex-girlfriend he can't forget about, not to mention an arch-nemesis who threatens to be his undoing. Zach works at the Starbase Ace, which is a used video game store. His boss and owner of the store, Ray, acts as his surrogate father.

Zach's life consists of playing video games, obsessing about his father, pining after his ex-girlfriend, hating his nemesis, loving his mother, and working at Starbase Ace. He is two months away from graduating high school. Despite his mother and Ray's concern, Zach's only post-high school plan is to work full-time at Starbase Ace.

Everything changes one day when he spots a spaceship from his classroom window. It's not just any spaceship. It is the spaceship from the video game he plays. At first, he questions his sanity because no one else seems to have seen it and there are no news reports of alien space ships. However, the next day when he gets to school, a spaceship lands on his school's lawn. This is not the alien spaceship he saw the day before, but the government spaceship from his video game. Ray walks out of the spaceship looking for Zach. Zach is taken on to the spaceship in front of the whole school and the spaceship flies away.

On the spaceship Ray explains some things to Zach. The government has been preparing for an alien attack. Video games were made to train civilians without causing panic. It was also a way to recruit top talent. Zach has been recruited because he ranks in the top 10 of the video game that is a simulation of the alien attack. This is the reason he actually saw an alien space ship that looked like the space ship from his video game and why he was sitting in a government space ship that looked like it was from the video game. Ray was actually stationed in Beaverton, OR to train and keep an eye on Zach. Zach wants to know about his father but Ray does not have information about that.

Once at the base, which is in Nebraska, he is taken to a large briefing room where all the new recruits were brought. He immediately sees and falls in love with a woman with tattoos. Her name is Alexis, nickname Lex. He sits next to her and they become friends. In the briefing they are told that the government has known about the alien attacks for more than forty years and now they are down to 10 hours before there will be a three-tiered attack that is meant to obliterate the world. There are details about the briefing that leaves Zach unsatisfied. For example, why have the aliens taken 40 years to attack, giving humanity an opportunity to technologically catch-up if they could have eliminated the earth back then? However, nobody seems to think this is worth thinking about.



During the briefing, the base is attacked and the new recruits must immediately go into combat. They fight with drones, controlled remotely. Zach disobeys orders and causes the destruction of a fleet of drones. When he is called into the admiral's office he expects to be court martialed. However, he is only mildly reprimanded. He is then told that his father, Xavier Lightman, is alive. Xavier was recruited seventeen years ago and the government staged his death so he could work in the service. He's been stationed on Moon Base Alpha (MBA) where Zach is also being sent.

Zach meets the other top recruits on the spaceship traveling to MBA. There are five of them there. Zach is ranked five and the others come right after him. When he gets off at MBA, his father is there to meet him. They have only a few hours before it's time for combat. His father gives him a flashdrive with every letter he's written to Zach the last seventeen years. There are also videos of his father talking to him. The first video he sees, his father says that there is something he needs to tell him in person.

When Zach seeks him out, he finds out that his father also has the same question as he does about the alien's motive. However, because he's had seventeen years to think about it, he also thinks he's figure it out. His father believes that, like the popular science fiction trope, the aliens are testing them. If humanity uses their secret weapon on the aliens, they will be immediately obliterated. However, if they voluntarily destroy the weapon themselves, they will pass the test and survive. He has been unsuccessful in getting the authorities to listen to him.

Zach does not know whether to believe his father or not. The time for combat comes with Zach still doubting his father. However, once they are in combat, Xavier risks his life to pass to first "test." When Zach sees this, he decides that his father is right. Xavier is injured and Zach saves him. There is a reprieve of a few hours between the first and second round of attacks. Zach uses this time to take his dad home to his mom, rally his friends (old and new), and comes up with a plan.

The plan is for Zach to destroy the secret weapon controlling the drones his dad set out in space, his friends to protect him from the alien attacks of Starbase Ace where Zach is physically controlling the drone, and his father to physically distract the pilots that are controlling the drones that are escorting the secret weapon so Zach can destroy it. The plan works, humanity passes the test, and Zach is a hero. Unfortunately, Xavier is killed in battle.

It turns out humanity was fighting only itself. There is no intelligent life on Europa, only a computer placed there to be an Emissary of a peaceful intergalactic community called Solarity that wanted to test humanity. When Zach passed the test, the Emissary offered humanity membership to the community. Zach accepted on humanity's behalf. The benefits that came with membership were knowledge about medicine and technology that greatly improved quality of life on earth. However, Zach is suspicious of Solarity's motives. He doesn't trust an entity that killed his father and millions of innocent people just for a "test."



His father's brief homecoming visit resulted in the conception of Zach's baby brother J.R. Zach's relationship with Lex also blossomed and she moved to Beaverton to be with him. Thinking of these people that he loves, Zach realizes that he cannot just sit on the sidelines and let things happen. He accepts the ambassadorial role offered to him in relation to Solarity. He hopes that by figuring out the real motive of Solarity, he will be able to protect those he loves and humanity in general.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

Zach Lightman has waited since the first day of Kindergarten for something amazing. Now, two weeks before high school graduation, he looks out his math class window and sees a space ship zipping around. It isn't just a spaceship - it is a spaceship that looked exactly like the one that was in his favorite video game, Armada. His two best friends, Cruz and Diehl (who both have the name Michael) are in the class. They are deep in a conversation with each other and don't notice. The teacher, Mr. Sayles, is doing a crossword puzzle. He is too close to retirement to care about what's going on in his classroom.

Zach's arch-nemesis, Douglas Knotcher is also in the class. Doug and Zach have managed to avoid each other since junior high when they had "the Incident" that earned Zach the nickname Zach Attack. Doug is spitting spitballs at Casey Cox, which drives Zach crazy. Casey is not defending himself. Finally, Zach can't restrain himself any more. He walks over to Doug and takes the pile of spitballs Doug has made and makes it into a ball. He smashes this ball into Doug's head.

Zach's ex-girlfriend and current love interest is also in this class. She and the rest of the class refuse to make eye contact with Zach after his aggressive confrontation. Mr. Sayles finally notices and tells Zach to go to his seat. Zach does not. He walks out of the school and through the parking lot to his car.

The car used to be his father's. Zach's father died in a work-related accident when Zach was less than one. His name was Xavier Ulysses Lightman, and he was only nineteen. The only thing Zach knows of him are from the artifacts his mother saved for him. She put them in moving boxes and stored them upstairs. In these boxes are old videogames, his old computer, VCR, science fiction movies and TV shows, clothes, cards, letters, and role-playing materials. The box with his role-playing material had a notebook that was titled "PHAËTON. In this book, Xavier discusses his conspiracy theory. PHAËTON is the name of a video game that was supposedly taken away by men in black after only a day. Xavier believed that the U.S. government is using video games as a tool to recruit high scorers. The question is, what do they need these high scorers to fight?

When Zach first read this notebook eight years ago, he wrote off his father as a lunatic. Now, after he thinks he's seen a spaceship, he's returned to these notebooks. Half of him thinks he's just inherited the crazy gene from his father. The other half wonders if maybe his father was right.

Analysis

The first chapter introduces the main protagonist, Zach. It introduce some other characters who will likely become important later: His arch-nemesis, Doug; his ex-



girlfriend, Ellen; his two best friends Cruz and Diehl (who both have the same first name, Michael).

Immediately, the reader is told in expository form the points that will be important to this story. 1) Zach has always hoped for something amazing to happen. 2) Zach sees a spaceship that no one else sees. 3) Zach's father has been dead since Zach was an infant. 4) Zach has friends who might be allies if the spaceship proves to cause a conflict. 5) Zach has an arch-nemesis who had a drunk father and who may become either a true enemy or his best ally. 6) He has an ex-girlfriend whom he's still in love with.

The reader understands what the problems are for the main character. A spaceship is always a problem. A human enemy will be a problem if he is forced to interact with him—therefore, the spaceship problem will most likely force Zach to interact with the human problem. The reader also knows what's at stake if the spaceship turns out to be a threat. Zach has friends and an ex-lover-still-love-interest who are important to him. He also has a mother. The dead father and the mystery he left is problematic for Zach in his everyday life, but may end up being the key to the solution. He may even end up alive.

The second chapter goes into detail about his father's conspiracy theory and develops mystery. Although Zach admits that he himself dismissed his father's notes as the ramblings of a lunatic, in light of his own inexplicable experience, he comes to doubt his dismissal. Since the perspective is first-person limited, the reader is also put in a position of doubt.

These first two chapters bring the reader into the story by introducing key characters, problems, and a sense of urgency (for a spaceship is always an immediate problem). They also raises questions in the reader. 1) Is there really a spaceship? 2) Did Zach's dad know something no one else did? 3) Will Zach end up back with Ellen because of the spaceship? 4) Is Doug really a bad guy or a guy desperate for friendship? These questions motivate the reader to continue reading.

Discussion Question 1

What evidence is there in the book that the spaceship might be real/imagined?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the author not disclose the details of "the Incident" that got Zach his nickname Zack Attack?

Discussion Question 3

Is the first sentence of the story an effective way to begin a book?



Vocabulary

skeptical, fragmented, avalanche, triggered impact, salvo, melee, rivulet, astronomically, oblivious, intense, vicinity, engrossed



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

Chapter 3 takes place in the video game store Zach works in and introduces Ray, the owner. The chapter describes the history between the two. Zach was young when he first started to bike to Ray's store, Starbase Ace. He used to come to hang out between the hours that school was out and his mother was still working. Eventually, Ray offered him a job. The job consisted of mostly hanging out with Ray, playing video games and eating junk food. Ray had made money selling stocks during the dot-com boom and Starbase Ace was a way for him to spend his early retirement playing video games and talking about video games. For this reason, Ray was not interested in the business making money.

On this day, the brand-new Armada Interceptor Flight Control System had come into the store—a month early. Zach is enamored with it. Ray gives it to him as a generous, early birthday gift. This leads to a discussion about Zach's future, and the reader learns that Zach's plan is to work full-time at the Starbase Ace after graduation. This concerns Ray, who tells him that he's destined for greater things. Zach shrugs this off.

In Chapter 4, the reader meets Zach's mother when he goes home after work. Her name is Pamela Lightman and she is a nurse at a cancer treatment center. She has been working a lot of overtime lately, so Zach is surprised that she is home before him. Zach adores his mother and thinks she is the most beautiful, smart, wonderful mother in the world. She has also remained single after Xavier's death, which Zach attributes to the fact that she's still in love with his father.

Pamela had come home early from work because the vice principal called to inform her of his antics in math class followed by his truancy. The details of "the Incident" are revealed, as well as the details of Xavier's death. Zach has beat Doug unconscious when Doug teased him about his father dying in a shit-factory accident.

The discussion turns once again to Zach's future. Zach re-iterates his plan to continue working at Starbase Ace and his mother also echoes Ray's sentiment that Zach is destined for more. Zach remains disbelieving.

Analysis

The coming of age theme takes center stage in these two chapters that introduces both the significant, living adults in his life. Both Zach's boss and his mother voice that they think Zach is destined for greater things. Yet, Zach is bent on maintaining his present life sans school. This means that without being pushed by an external factor, Zach is not willing to test his potential. Although Ray and Pamela describe him as smart and capable, Zach does not see himself this way and does not want to find out if it is true or not.



Enter spaceship. The spaceship, symbolic of the unknown, will force Zach to step out of his comfort zone. The spaceship will be the impetus for him to discover his higher self. This is something he has wanted all along, somewhere deep inside, since he has always hoped for something amazing to happen. Although Zach himself is not completely convinced that the spaceship he saw that day is real, the reader knows it is. The spaceship is from a popular video game Zach plays and the backstory is an ominous one. The spaceship is here to overtake Earth.

Zach is aware of the tropes, the logical inconsistencies, and scientific inaccuracies of the game. However, he also gives it credit for subverting some of these tropes. That the character is aware of the narrative problems presents an interesting challenge for the book itself, for it brings in a meta-element to the work. Armada is a science fiction novel about a protagonist who sees the spaceship from his video game, Armada, appear in real life. The protagonist of the novel Armada is aware of the science fiction tropes and logical problems inherent in the video game Armada. Thus, the novel is aware of the tropes and problems of the genre it is being written in. How will the novel reconcile this awareness with the tropes that will be used? Zach's commentary about Armada, the game, alerts the reader to expect scientific tropes to be subverted in this book. It adds a different level of intrigue for now the question is, "how will the author resolve the narrative problem he has set up for himself?"

Discussion Question 1

How does Zach feel about his future?

Discussion Question 2

What is Zach's attitude about the sci-fi tropes used in the Armada game?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ray act as a surrogate father to Zach?

Vocabulary

retaliation, perturbed, kinks, extravagant, disowned, reconcile, obituary, dread, monastery, genuine



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

These chapters detail the actual playing of the Armada game. Zach has an elaborate set-up ritual to prepare. Also, the politics amongst the gamers is revealed. Zach ranks number six, and has earned the coveted position of being hated by the other players.

Today, there was a special mission, a supposed one-time-only mission that takes the game to enemy territory. Zach used his new VR helmet gifted to him by Ray. His friends, Cruz and Diehl are on the mission too. The admiral debriefed the players. The SS Doolittle, the first interstellar Drone Carrier had reached the enemy's home planet Sobrukai. The plan was for the SS Doolittle to launch the weapon of last resort, the Ice Breaker.

It takes only a few minutes for the mission to fail. Zach played valiantly, but to no avail. After the game is over, Zach finds himself seeking out his father's old baseball jacket. Although he vowed earlier that he would stop living in the past surrounded by his father's artifacts, he realized that he was not yet ready to let go.

Analysis

These chapters physically describe how Zach plays the game and what the game itself looks like. The game creates a sense of climax by proclaiming this mission to be a one-time-only mission with the "last resort" weapon. Once again, Zach makes comments that show his awareness of the game being a game. For example, he says that the company hired a convincing actor to play the admiral's role. His friends Cruz and Diehl also complain that the game is undermining itself by making it un-winnable for the players. It's a critique against the game's lack of self-awareness as a game—or the game makers lack of awareness that the game must satisfy the needs of the players.

Paradoxically, the more the characters discuss the gameness of the game, the more the reader becomes suspicious of the gameness of the game. The reader begins to think, "Why would the game maker make the game too difficult to win, if it truly were just a game?" Combined with the knowledge given in the first sentence of the novel that there is a spaceship that looks exactly like the enemy's in the game, the reader is confident that this game was not created to be just a game.

Chapter six ends back with Zach and his personal battle. Once the game is over and the mission has failed, the story goes back to Zach's obsession with his father. In this way, the story ties the game to the father and his death. It foreshadows that Zach's father will have an important part in Zach succeeding in the mission against the enemy in real life.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Zach look for his father's old baseball jacket?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author create real life tension through a game-playing scene?

Discussion Question 3

What differentiates Zach from his friends Diehl and Cruz?

Vocabulary

custom, launch, gleaming, virtual, wraparound, plasma, spatial, sanity, sentry, reinforcements



Chapter 7

Summary

This chapter is the end of the first section and much is revealed. When Zach gets to school the morning after the mission, his nemesis, Knotcher is waiting to have two huge friends beat him up. In response, Zach pulls out an iron rod that he'd snuck into his backpack. This draws a horrified audience. However, before this drama can culminate, something larger appears: an ATS-31 Aerospace Troop Shuttle, one of the ships used by the Earth Defense Alliance in the Armada. It lands in the yard of Zach's school and Zach's boss, Ray walks out. He asks for Zach, Zach is immediately given up to him by his peers, Zach boards the aircraft, the aircraft takes off.

Once airborne, Ray starts to small talk with Zach, and Zach becomes angry at Ray. Confused, scared and feeling betrayed, he begins asking Ray questions. He uses many expletives. To summarize the information revealed in this chapter:

- The Earth Defense Alliance (EDA) is real. It was formed over four decades ago to defend earth against aliens.
- Although Sobrukai is a fictional name given to the aliens, Armada and Terra Firma were created to train citizens all over the planet to operate drones that will defend against the aliens.
- The Glaive Fighter in the game was modeled after the enemy's ship. The Glaive Fighter Zach saw the day before was real, and there have been several sightings of them in the last twenty-four hours.
- All the details of the Armada and Terra Firma game made by Chaos Terrain are accurate, based on direct observation of the enemy in previous engagements.
- Video games and sci-fi movies were funded by the government as a way to subliminally prepare humanity for alien attack and to train them.
- Just as Zach's father had claimed in his notebook, Star Wars was funded by the government back in 1977 for this reason.
- Ray was stationed in Beaverton for the last six years to keep an eye on Zach because the EDA has been tracking him since he first played a video game online.

Once Ray answered all the questions, Zach had one last question. Realizing that his father had known this all along, Zach wanted to know if his father's death was caused by the EDA to prevent him from leaking the information. Ray did not have an answer to this.



The aircraft is headed to Nebraska where there is a top secret EDA base. Zach will be given a more thorough briefing there. To get there, the aircraft will go via space.

Analysis

This chapter is the “great reveal” chapter, when Zach finds out that the game he’s been playing is indeed a training program created by the government. His greatest dream comes true as well. Ray tells him that he was identified as having rare and unique talent.

Via Zach questioning Ray, the secret history of the book’s world is explained. This is important from a narrative perspective because it propels the story forward. From this point on, it is explicit that Zach is the hero with special ability. He is, literally, the chosen one. The reader’s expectation is established. This story will be a traditional hero’s journey tale. A quest will be articulated. The stakes will be established. He will be the leader on this quest. There will be several obstacles (probably three.) A girl will be won. He will grow and come into his own.

The book will either follow this arc or subvert this arc, depending on its goal. There are some clues that point towards subversion because of the book’s awareness of the tropes of its genre. However, thus far, it has yet to go against the narrative tradition, so the first section sets the book up to follow it.

It should also be noted that while the Earth Defense Alliance’s quest for Zach will be about saving the earth, Zach’s personal quest is to find out about his father.

What’s important about this chapter is for the reader to be aware of the expectations the story has thus far met and the expectations the story is setting up. As the reader continues on with the book, it should be noted by the reader when these expectations are met or subverted.

Discussion Question 1

Has Zach's role as the chosen one been sufficiently validated?

Discussion Question 2

How does the story support the traditional narrative arc?

Discussion Question 3

What is Zach's greatest drive in this story and why?

Vocabulary

unblemished, heed, distress, orchestrated, confrontation, clenched, epic, dwarfed, gargantuan, sneer



Chapters 8 - 9

Summary

Chapter 8 is the first chapter of the second section titled, “Phase Two.” Zach arrives at the EDA station they call “Crystal Palace.” This chapter gets him through the security corridor. The corporal at this checkpoint, Floyd, gives him a Quantum Communicator (QComm), which is a smartphone without range, a tricorder, and a small laser pistol. Zach meets Captain Dagh, another recruit whom he had been playing Armada with for years unknowingly. Zach has to say goodbye to Ray, which proves hard for both of them.

In Chapter 9, Zach meets and falls in love with Alexis Larkin. Alexis is a tattoo-toting, hard-booze drinking, rough and tough girl Zach spots and is instantly drawn to. She is ranked seventeenth in the Terra Firma game.

Analysis

Chapter 8 is where the story introduces the new world Zach will live in. He physically enters a new place. He says good-bye to Ray, who feels even more like a father in this moment to both of them than ever before. The separation is difficult. The way Ray deals with it is to envision a future where they return to the life they shared in the past. Zach dreads leaving Ray. He misses his friends, whose skills were not at his level and thus is not part of the selected group. He longs to hear his mother’s voice, but is not yet allowed. In this way, all his connections to the past are severed.

The entrance to the new life happens like lightning bolt. He falls in love instantly with a young woman. His old love, Ellen— a child still in the old world—fades and is replaced. Now all connections are gone. Nothing is as intense as a crush. Zach is catapulted into his new life. Immediately, he is forced to identify as an adult by drinking hard liquor such that he can show himself her equal.

Thus, these chapters treat the theme of coming of age theme efficiently: out with the old, in with the new.

Discussion Question 1

How does Zach feel about parting with Ray?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Lex's presence important for Zach's self-realization?



Discussion Question 3

What does Zach's inability to communicate with his mother symbolize?

Vocabulary

clutch, anxiously, cobalt, indication, apogee, pneumatic, astounding, ravaged, pulsed, drone



Chapters 10 - 11

Summary

The true history of humanities alien encounter is revealed to the recruits in Chapter 10. According to the briefing, in 1973, NASA saw a swastika on the face of one of Jupiter's moons, Europa. In 1976, they landed a spacecraft on Europa to drill a hole into the surface to investigate the potential of life forms on Europa. Apparently, the action caused the beings on Europa great anger, and Nasa received a message via radio. You have desecrated our most sacred temple. For this there can be no forgiveness. We are coming to kill you all."

For the last forty years, the government has kept this a secret from the general population while preparing them for the reveal with subliminal messaging through sci-fi movies and video games. They also attempted to make amends with the beings to no avail. Simultaneously, they prepared for the inevitable attack through video game training and recruiting. Meanwhile, the alien enemy were building drones by the thousands in preparation for the attack. NASA got ahold of one of these and reverse engineered the technology to build their own drones. Zach and the others were recruited to operate these drones.

In the middle of the briefing, the enemy began to attack. The recruits were immediately sent to their drones. Zach had to first agree to enlist, much to his irritation. Then, fully confident, he entered combat and scored the first enemy kill of the battle.

Analysis

This section is informative. It reveals the secret history that was unbeknownst to most of humanity for the advancement of the plot. It's expository in nature. Some cultural references from the world we know are made to connect the fictional world to the real world. For example, Carl Sagan is delivering the history. Zach is sympathetic to the decisions the government made. He's uncertain about the enemy's motivation for several things. For example, why did they wait 40 years to attack, giving humans time to prepare? Why did they allow one of their weapons to be reverse engineered? These are practical problems he can't come to terms with. Lex does not think his questions are relevant.

Overall, however, Zach does not feel betrayed by his own government. He finds their reasoning logical and correct. He understands their train of thought. He is not angry.

He does not feel too much fear either. He feels excitement. It is the moment he has been waiting for, the moment he has been preparing for since he first started to play video games. He's confident and assured. The last sentence of Chapter 11 does imply that things will get bad. Even without this hint, however, the reader, having an



understanding of the traditional narrative arc, knows that things will go poorly three times before the resolution.

Discussion Question 1

How does Zach feel about the news being delivered?

Discussion Question 2

What part of Admiral Vance' explanation makes him feel uneasy?

Discussion Question 3

Why did the authorities hide the truth from humanity?

Vocabulary

animated, vast, hurtling, void, starry, synthesized, ridiculous, console, hissed, wraparound, personnel



Chapters 12 - 13

Summary

Chapter 12 describes Zach's first real combat which will come to be known as the Battle of Crystal Palace. Zach does well but then willfully ignores the admiral's command to cease fire. He continues to chase down the last Glaive, which results in the Glaive self-destructing in the hangar full of drones. The drones are destroyed. Naturally, afterwards, Zach is called to the Admiral's office for reprimand.

He does not get court marshaled however. In Chapter 13, he is told that his father is alive and is a general for the EDA. His death was faked in order for him to serve the EDA. Zach will be sent to the base where his father is—on Moon Base Alpha. Also, he had been playing his father all along. Xavier was RedJive, always ranked first in the Armada game.

On his way to his flight, Zach runs into Lex, who will be based in Montana. Zach admits his attraction to her. She kisses and hugs him. They part.

Analysis

These chapters reveal Zach's defiant personality in a way not yet seen. It also shows his stubbornness. Even when he sees that he is in the wrong, he does not accept accountability. While this attitude is rewarded in the story, it shows his immaturity to the reader. His attitude that he should not be held accountable for situations that never happened in a game is the perspective of a child.

Zach does not yet see that his actions impact those of others. He also does not consider that his knowledge of a situation is limited and therefore potentially misguided. He defies orders because he assumes he knows better without any grounds. Later in the story he will once again disobey orders, but the situation will be different in that he will have reasons to substantiate his conviction.

At the same time, this scene shows that Zach is a person who does not blindly follow the authority figure. He is not afraid to go against it if he firmly believes that it is the right thing to do. He is not scared of the consequences.

Zach' second interaction with Lex shows development in their relationship and with him. The first time, he was concerned about his image. His efforts were spent on his attempt to impress her. This time, he is comfortable enough to be vulnerable and honest with her. This risk is rewarded.

The news that his father is alive is shocking to Zach, but not as much to the reader. There have been hints throughout the first chapters that pointed to this possibility. For



example, Zach's mom's inability to forget about Zach's father and Zach's obsession with his father acts as a literary tool to foreshadow the father's return.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Zach feel that he is not blamable for his mistake?

Discussion Question 2

How has Zach's relationship with Lex changed since their first exchange?

Discussion Question 3

What hints did the reader have that Zach's father was still alive?

Vocabulary

avert, fierce, hoisted, default, skeletal, decapitated, flailing, turrets, deactivated, abrupt, impact, formation, squadron, detonation



Chapters 14 - 15

Summary

Zach meets the other recruits who were ranked in the top ten after him in the Armada game. According to the rankings the night before, Lila from New Orleans (call sign is Whoadie) was seventh. She was orphaned by the hurricane. Jiang Chen (CrazyJi) from China was eighth. He doesn't speak English and communicates through a computer translator. Debbie Winn (AtomicMom) from Minnesota was in ninth. She is a widow with three kids and is religious. Milo (Kushmaster5000 or KM5K), from Philly was tenth. He is not religious. This causes a small dispute that is smoothed over. They are all impressed when they find out that Zach is Iron Beagle.

The founder of Chaos Terrain, Finn Arbogast comes to meet them before the spacecraft takes off. He reveals to all of them who RedJive is, which leads to the other recruits finding out that Zach is his son. He also tells Zach that Xavier will be waiting for him when they land. Which he was.

Zach's first meeting with his father is awkward but not terrible. They are mutually happy to meet each other. Zach's father makes the mistake of referring to Zach's temper, at which Zach flares his temper. However, they get past that. They don't have too much time, but on the way to the briefing room, Zach gets a glimpse of his father's quarters and sees that it is plastered with pictures of him and his mother.

Analysis

This chapter introduces a few more characters. These people will be fighting with Zach. There seems to be a nod to multiculturalism and diversity. The members come from different walks of life. In addition, excepting Milo, they've all lost important people in their lives. This makes Zach realize that he is not the only one who has suffered. This chapter also shows the different layers of tension between people. Different religious beliefs and ignorance of people's background lead to uncomfortable moments.

Zach's reunion with his father goes as well as could be expected considering the circumstances. They are both nervous. The theme of fatherhood comes up as Zach's father struggles with the guilt of having abandoned his family. Zach is happy to see his father. However, at moments, he finds opportunities to say hurtful things. This makes him feel guilty and good at the same time, revealing a complex emotional reaction.

Zach's thought process and language reverts back to that of a child's at these vulnerable moments. Complicating this reunion is the imminent danger of the alien invasion. Both are scared and this fear also leads to them saying careless things to each other. Ultimately, Zach assures his father that he is happy to see him and that his mother would be happy to see his father as well.



Discussion Question 1

How does Xavier react to his first meeting with his son?

Discussion Question 2

How does Zach feel about meeting his father for the first time?

Discussion Question 3

How do differences in background cause tension between the new recruits?

Vocabulary

disguised, prepped, concealed, sarcasm, cataclysmic, spooked, gutted, pang, mingled, adjacent, inherited, winced



Chapters 16 - 17

Summary

In Chapter 16, Zach meets his father's two friends and comrades, Major Shin Hashimoto and Graham Fogg. They have been up here with Xavier this whole time. Admiral Vance was also amongst them until he was promoted. He and the other recruits find out more about the details of the alien attacks. It has happened every 398.9 days when Europa is the closest to earth. They are shown a video of a particular attack where Vance and Xavier perform an incredibly brave and lucky maneuver. Xavier does not believe it's luck.

At dinner (a lavish affair), it comes out that both Graham and Xavier think that the aliens have purposefully not obliterated the earth. Their views are the same as Zach's who thinks that it makes no sense that the aliens have allowed humans time to catch up to them technologically. They think that the aliens' real motives are not what humans believe them to be. Shin does not agree with this and is frustrated with Graham and Xavier bringing this up at this critical time. He leaves the mess hall.

Zach also expresses frustration at his father's leadership and leaves the mess hall. However, he goes to his room and read the letters his father had put on a flash drive and given to him when he first meets him. The letters convey the hardness of his father's life in the last seventeen years. Zach comes to feel compassion for his father and realizes that it has been harder for his father these last seventeen years than it has for Zach.

He also watches one of the video clips on the flash drive. He watches the most recent one. There is evidence that his father's mental health is not always the most stable. In the video clip, he is speaking to Zach and tells him there is something he needs to tell Zach in person. After seeing this clip, Zach goes to seek his father out in his quarters.

Analysis

These chapters introduce people in Xavier's life. Zach meets two people who have spent the last years with his father on the moon. Zach gets a glimpse into the sacrifices that all of them have made in order to save the earth.

Through letters his father wrote through the years, Zach comes to understand the depth of his father's sacrifice and suffering. This understanding leads to his compassion.

These chapters also deepen the intrigue of the actual conflict between the aliens and the humans. The questions Zach immediately had when he was debriefed by the Admiral turns out not to be trivial. Both Xavier and Graham also believe that something does not make sense. Unlike Zach, they have been thinking about this for quite a long time.



Chapter 17 seeks to unite Zach and his father on two levels. First, through letters, Zach gets insight into his father's life, thus evoking sympathy for him. Second, through their mutual discomfort with the status quo explanation, they are united. This is the point at which Zach and Xavier's relationship is accelerated such that they can face the enemy together.

Discussion Question 1

How has life on the moon been for Xavier, Shin, and Graham?

Discussion Question 2

What do Shin and Graham disagree about?

Discussion Question 3

What does Zach do after he leaves the mess hall?

Vocabulary

rigid, gaped, acutely, outnumbered, access, counterpart, plaque, compilers, subsequent, harnesses



Chapters 18 - 19

Summary

Zach and Xavier go to the now shut-down observation station, where they can speak privately. Xavier shows Zach an area where he has pinned up notes, pictures, and documents in his attempt to solve the problem.

Xavier shares that he has gained access to every one of the aliens' attempts to communicate with humanity. Every year, on the eve of their annual attack, the aliens send a video clip that is cobbled together from news footage and science fiction movies and shows. From having watched these videos, Xavier believes that aliens have the technology to easily take out humanity and have only been staging pseudo attacks to test humanity. He believes this battle is the last test and if humanity chooses to use their greatest weapon of defense in an attempt to obliterate a civilization they know nothing about, they will fail the test and be destroyed for certain.

Zach does not know what he thinks about this. In the meantime, the time remaining before the battle is whittled down to just over an hour.

The others have paired off: Chen and Whoadie, Debbie and Graham, Milo and Shin.

When the countdown is at an hour, the imminent alien attack is announced to everyone on earth. If news footage is to be believed, humanity has stepped up. They have accepted the news as calmly as could be hoped and have joined the fight. All over the world, people have taken up their video game consoles and prepared to fight.

After the announcement, the EDA unlocked the recruit's QComm's to access the public phone system. Zach calls his mother from his father's phone and first breaks the news that he's fighting the battle from the moon, then the news that he is standing next to his father. Both parents fall apart when he says this so he hands the phone to his father and gives his parents space to speak privately. Then he calls Lex and has a warm, honest conversation about their fears and their wishes. They also exchange music. Lex also tells him that she is assigned to protect MBA and asks for his identification number so she can personally protect him. They part with the promise of a date if they survive the battle. Then, the countdown is complete and Zach and the seven others on the moon fly out to meet alien invaders.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the counter-concept of non-aggression as a means to salvation. Xavier believes that an attempt to destroy the enemy will end in certain defeat. He brings up the sci-fi trope of aliens testing humanity. Here again, the book becomes self-aware of its own genre. Zach points out to his father that sci-fi tropes do not explain reality. Xavier asks him if anything about their current situation is faithful to real life as



they know it. He counters that if anything, events have been following a narrative arc consistent with a sci-fi story. This meta scene makes the reading experience interesting since the characters in this sci-fi story is referring to their lives in the sci-fi story as mimicking ones in a sci-fi story.

This scene also complicates the story by causing the reader to wonder if the story will fulfill narrative expectations or subvert it. The potential of narrative subversion was hinted at in the beginning of the book. As the book comes close to resolution, this possibility is discussed again.

The theme of fatherhood is also complicated. Xavier is an untraditional father figure. Zach notes too that he felt as if their roles were reversed. Instead of Zach needing the approval of his father, it is Xavier who needs Zach's approval. He confesses his true belief to Zach and is made vulnerable by this confession. Before going into battle, it is Zach who seeks to comfort his father instead of the other way around. Also, it is Zach who forces his father to speak to his mother.

Zach comforts his father by giving him back his jacket. Zach had put the jacket on himself just that morning because he felt a need to be protected by his father. By giving his father his jacket back shows that Zach no longer needs this, nor the need to take on aspects of his father's identity. This addresses the coming of age theme. Zach, who started the story as a child in need of both mother and father, now needs neither. In fact, Zach is not in the position of taking care of their needs and does so confidently. Once he has made this transition with his parents, he contacts Lex, who was his first motivation to grow-up. While their first interaction highlighted their age difference, this conversation shows them to be equals. They are both comfortable to be vulnerable and honest. Even though Lex promises to protect him, Zach is in the better position of saving all of humanity. In this way, their relationship is reciprocal. This equal relationship symbolizes Zach's status as an adult. He has graduated relationships where he is reliant on someone else to take care of him.

Discussion Question 1

What is Xavier's theory?

Discussion Question 2

How does humanity react to the news of the impending alien attack?

Discussion Question 3

What meta elements are present in these chapters?

Vocabulary

maze, suspended, arbitrary, conviction, hastily, ensuring, genocide, scrambled, Funrlwra, collapse, regret, wail, hysterical



Chapters 20 - 21

Summary

Chapter 20 begins the actual combat against the aliens the book has been leading up to. The eight on Moon Base Alpha (MBA) commence to fight with their drones. They are outnumbered and very quickly overtaken. The base is compromised with enemy. Shin and Milo stay on the base to allow the others to evacuate. They are killed. The others are in a capsule hurtling down the tunnel towards the emergency bunker. On the way, Graham is killed. At a point when the whole capsule is about to be crushed, Lex saves them with a drone. Then, she is off to fight in Shanghai. MBA is destroyed and the five who are left get to the emergency bunker where special manned Aerospace Interceptor prototypes await them. They get into these and head to earth.

On earth, they fight the Disruptor—the enemies secret weapon, that disrupts all radio transmissions and communications. The disruptor renders all the drones on earth useless. Only the five manned Interceptors are still functional. Quickly, though, Debbie's Interceptor goes down. She ejects herself, Whoadie catches Debbie but her ship is struck and has to land.

Meanwhile, Chin gets the news that Shanghai had gone down and has a breakdown. In a crazed rage, he makes a kamikaze maneuver and dives directly at the Disruptor. Right before he reaches it, his ship detonates. This explosion impacts the Disruptor's shield and makes it fail.

Before Zach can do anything, Xavier heads his ship right at the Disruptor. It's well known that the shield will only stay down for three seconds, which is not enough time for Xavier to reach it and destroy it. Not wanting to lose his father, Zach frantically pleads for him to abandon the futile attack. Xavier, however, believes that the aliens are testing his courage and will keep the shield down until he reaches it. Zach starts to count and realizes that his father is right. The shield stays down long enough for Xavier's ship to reach the Disruptor. Right before the ship hits the Disruptor, Xavier's ship expelled him in a sealed escape pod that plunged into the ocean. The Disruptor exploded. Xavier dives his ship into the ocean after his father.

Analysis

These chapters describe the actual confrontation with the aliens. Of the eight on MBA, three are killed right away. Five escape and head back to earth. On earth, two are shot down and grounded. One commits a suicidal maneuver out of grief at the news that his sister is dead. Finally, only Zach and Xavier are left. Chen's suicidal move presents an opportunity for Xavier to act on his conviction. It turns out that his conviction is right and he saves the earth. Zach, however does not care about this. He is sure his father is dead and is heartbroken at losing him on the day that he finally found him.



To culminate the coming of age theme, there must be a symbolic death of the father such that Zach can fully come to his own. The book has been leading up to this, preparing Zach to fully take on the responsibility of an adult. From this point forth, Zach must take become fully accountable for his actions and decisions.

Upon Xavier's symbolic death, Zach sees that his father was right. Zach will integrate the knowledge his father imparted on him but will make his own decisions. Now, finally, he has no one to rely on but himself.

Regarding the theme of fatherhood, Zach wants to believe that fate would not be so cruel as to take his father away from him twice. Yet, he realizes that this disbelief is unrealistic, thus showing his maturity. He also realizes that this loss is greater because he is losing a father he knows and loves. His devastation is such that the entire world and his own life is meaningless in the face of his loss.

Discussion Question 1

How did Zach benefit from this short time with his father?

Discussion Question 2

What's a sign that Zach has matured?

Discussion Question 3

What does this chapter say about personal grief?

Vocabulary

tactical, concealed, armored, aft, stern, vanguard, waxed, primal, hull, overlapping, faceted, dispersed, transparent, overload, deflector, millisecond



Chapters 22 - 23

Summary

This is the beginning of Phase 3 of the book. Thanks to the hacking method Lex taught Zach, he finds his father in the water. Xavier is unconscious but alive. Zach flies them both home. The news speaks of victory all over the earth. He has his mother meet them there with a first aid kit. There is a euphoric family reunion. Xavier is loopy from the painkillers administered to him by the pod's medical hook-up, but he only has a concussion and a laceration. Zach's mom takes Xavier in to take care of him, but Zach goes to Diehl's house because he has a plan. Diehl is there talking to Cruz on his computer and Zach tells them everything.

Although the humans won the first battle because of Xavier, it is well known that there would be two more waves of attacks—each worse than the one before. Zach knows that they cannot win again and also believes his father's theory. Xavier's valiant selflessness passed the first test. The next test is to see if humans can refrain from blindly retaliating. The aliens are waiting to see if the humans will aim the Icebreaker at Europa. This is Xavier's theory and Zach now believes it. His plan is to stop the Icebreaker launch.

His first attempt is to convince Finn Arbogast (the founder of Chaos Terrain). This does not go well. The phone call was not in vain. By using the hacking method Lex taught him, Zach obtained the numbers of the Armistice Council Members from Finn's QComm. This council is made up of the top five scientists of the world, including Neil DeGrasse Tyson and Stephen Hawking. Zach conference calls with them and tells them everything. They are surprisingly receptive. They put him on hold to discuss privately amongst themselves. When they come back on the line, they say that they have classified information that supports Xavier's theory. At this point, Xavier is also on the line. The council tells them that contrary to what the public has been told, humans were the first to attack Europa. The last 42 years have been the cycle of retaliation between humanity and the sentient beings of Europa. The recent Icebreaker attack launched at Europa was the last straw that instigated the attack against Earth.

Admiral Vance hacks into this conference call and ends it after informing Zach and Xavier that he has locked all of the QComms. He does not listen to Xavier. When he hangs up, Xavier cheerfully announces that now him and Zach must stop the Icebreaker themselves. Just then, Lex, Whoadie, and Debbie come on line and ask to be included. Naturally, the two Mike's want to be included too. To this motley crew, Xavier tells them his plan.

Analysis

There is a moment of reprieve as Zach finds out Xavier is alive and the enemy has retreated. There is a homecoming scene that simultaneously acknowledges the



happiness of the moment and the grief of the last seventeen years. However, this is a defined time of happiness. Everyone knows that the second wave of attacks will come in two and a half hours. Since his father is injured, Zach must take matters in his own hands and figure out a plan to save the planet. The happy moment, however, is important for it articulates Zach's motivation. Having both his parents together back at his house, he realizes what he's fighting for. The stakes become very clear. If he does not save the planet, he has a lot to lose.

Friendship as a theme is revisited. The two Mike's, his constant friends of his previous life come back into the picture. They are still ever supportive of him. While conversation dips down in maturity, Zach still gets the reassurance he needs. Despite the immense growth he has made, the friendship still endures. At the same time, his friends act to highlight his growth. While he has traveled to the moon and back, his friends have stayed at home. Zach's ability to navigate a complex problem is remarkably greater than his friends.

Zach's return to his old friends does not negate the value of his new friends. They reappear now as allies too. It is his new friend Lex that has given him the skills he needs to orchestrate a conference call with five of the greatest scientists in the world. The end of chapter 23 is a scene where his friends old and new are in the same room (virtually), prophesizing that the combined skills of all Zach's friends will be necessary for victory. It also symbolizes the unity that will be important in the battles to come.

The theme of authority is also revisited. Admiral Vance as the authority figure is unreceptive of what Zach and Xavier has to say. He becomes the enemy they must first defeat in order to defeat the real enemy. The message is that while authority may have good intentions, if they lack imagination, they are detrimental. Those with imagination must overcome the authority in order to complete the greater mission.

Discussion Question 1

Why is the happy family reunion important to the story?

Discussion Question 2

What is the message about friendship in these chapters?

Discussion Question 3

What do these chapters have to say about authority?



Vocabulary

reflexes, predatory, magnitude, strafed, bridled, drooled, mumbled, injected, concussion, dethrone

Chapters 24 - 26

Summary

Zach, Xavier, Pamela (Zach's mom), and the Mike's go to Starbase Ace which is replete with gaming devices necessary for combat. Xavier is searching for the intranet node so that they do not lose control when the second Disruptor lands on earth. Xavier can't find it so Zach calls Ray. Like all his other friends, Ray is immediately on-board with supporting Xavier and Zach's plan to stop the Ice Breaker.

Before escaping MBA, Xavier had set on autopilot the three extra Interceptors towards Europa. Now the plan was for Zach to take control of them in order to stop the Icebreaker. However, the Icebreaker would have escort drones. These drones would be flown by pilots that were better than Zach. One would be Admiral Vance himself. In order for Zach to have an advantage, Xavier was going to physically break into the control room where these pilots were controlling the drones and distract them momentarily. Lex was able to find the location. In the meantime, the job of Zach's friends and mother was to protect Starbase Ace from the enemy drones.

Xavier successfully distracts the pilots long enough for Zach to defeat them. However, in the process, he is blown-up. When Xavier destroys the Icebreaker, a twenty-sided computer erupts from Europa and talks to him. It explains that this had all been a test (just as Xavier had believed). There was never any intelligent life on Europa, but there is a galactic community of peaceful civilization known as the Sodality. It is the Sodality that created the computer as an Emissary that built the armada to test humanity. Zach's destruction of the Ice breaker apparently was enough for humanity to pass the test. The Emissary offered humanity membership to the Sodality but revealed nothing about the other members.

Membership, however, comes with great benefits like medical and technological knowledge. Zach accepted on behalf of humanity. This was broadcasted all over the world so everyone knew. The third wave of drones arrived and began helping humanity build back its civilization. The world celebrated. Zach and his mother, however, mourned the loss of Xavier.

Analysis

Chapter 24 outlines Xavier's plan to save the planet. Chapter 25 fulfills this plan and Xavier's vision. However, it costs Xavier his life. Chapter 26 reveals the true motives of the aliens. Zach and the world finds out that his father was correct the entire time.

With the literal death of his father, Zach inherits both his father's vision and his responsibilities. He must fulfill the vision without his father. He must also make the decision on behalf of humanity. He has now completely come of age.



His father too, has fulfilled his role as guide and protector. The theme of fatherhood has come full circle. Xavier dies again, but he has evolved from being just an idea of a father to an actual father. In a span of a day, Zach has gained a true father. Although his father is cruelly taken away from him immediately, the day has transformed his relationship with his father.

His need for knowledge has been fulfilled as well. His driving desire to know is father has now realized. All the other questions that were expressed in the beginning of the book have been answered too. Yet, the end of the book finds Zach asking new and different questions. Readers are left with the understanding that the pursuit of knowledge will lead to more questions.

Zach's self-identity has fully integrated his father. Zach believes and respects his father, so he holds his own action accountable to what his father would be proud of. Even after his death, his father is able to guide him to find the strength to do the right thing.

Discussion Question 1

How did Zach integrate his father's identity into his own?

Discussion Question 2

What was the purpose of the 'test'?

Discussion Question 3

How did humanity pass the test?

Vocabulary

outposts, array, makeshift, unison, deflected, earsplitting, contraption, tethered, hissed, orb



Epilogue

Summary

Zach and his friends received medals of honors. Xavier and Pamela's reunion tryst resulted in the conception of Zach's little brother Xavier Ulysses Lightman, Jr. Lex and her grandmother moved to Beaverton, OR. Zach inherited Starbase Ace as he'd always wanted to. It became the most popular game store in the world. His archnemesis from high school Douglas Knotcher, missing several limbs approached him one day for an autograph. He and Zach exchanged condolences regarding each other fathers. Zach was awed at Doug's growth.

As the Emissary had promised, the world was a better place. Cancer and other diseases had been eradicated and there was clean energy. Yet, Zach found himself distrustful of the Sodality that revealed nothing about itself and bestowed gifts of knowledge in a condescending manner. He felt suspicious and bitter about alien beings who'd devised a horrible test that killed his father and millions of other innocent people.

Zach had been offered an ambassadorial role to the Sodality. Originally, he had declined. However, the day after the unveiling ceremony of his father's statue, he decided that he couldn't remain disengaged from the world. He went home and accepted the offer in hopes of finding out the truth about the Sodality's motives.

Analysis

The theme of authority comes back. In the beginning of the book, Zach is trusting of authority and finds the conspiracy theories in his father's notebook to be the ramblings of a crazy man. Even when Zach finds out that his father's conspiracy theories were right, he is still understanding of the government's motives and remains unsuspecting. When his father reveals to him his true thoughts on the matter which conflict with the authority, Zach is resentful towards his father for instilling doubt in him.

Once he almost loses his father and realizes his father was right, Zach is willing to work against authority to do what he believes will save the world. Even after his father is killed because of the authority's unwillingness to listen to him, Zach does not display a bitter attitude towards the governmental authority. Admiral Vance speaks at the unveiling of Xavier's statue. Although he is directly responsible for Xavier's death, Zach does not hold it against him. He sees the admiral's true remorse and agrees with his father's view that Admiral Vance is a good man.

However, Zach has developed a suspicion of the greater authority of Solarity. He has adopted his father's inclination to be drawn to puzzles. Zach is suspicious of the Solarity's motives and is not comfortable with what is given at face value. Although Xavier was suspicious of the human government, Zach is suspicious of the alien



government. In this way, the book looks at how there is a generational change in point of view.

Also, there is a baby at the end of the book, which symbolizes a new beginning. It is also literally and metaphorically the next generation. Zach must think past himself, which requires maturity. It is his ability to think of himself in the role of the protector (instead of the protected) that guide his decisions.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Zach suspicious of the motives of Solarity?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Zach change his mind about taking on an ambassadorial role with the Solarity?

Discussion Question 3

What significance did the character of Doug have in the story?

Vocabulary

headstone, impose, primitive, machination, immoral, eradicated, extinction, bouquet, scrawled, looming, robotic, unveiling



Characters

Zachary

Zach is a high school student two months away from graduation. His father died at the age of nineteen when Zach was only one. He has two best friends, both named Michael. He calls them by their last names Cruz and Diehl. He also has an ex-girlfriend he can't get over and an arch-nemesis he can't get over.

Zach's mother is raising him alone. While Zach's father's parents used to be a support system for him, they are now both dead. Since kindergarten, he had hoped for something amazing to happen. Then, two weeks before graduation, he sees a spaceship from the window of his math class.

Zach only knows his father through the artifacts his father left behind. Amongst these things is a notebook his father titled PHAËTON where his father wrote in all the details of his conspiracy theory. When Zach read it at eight, he wrote his father off as crazy. After he sees the spaceship, he returns to the notebook to see if his father's notes actually do illuminate something.

Shortly after, Zach is recruited to fight against aliens. By the time a day has passed, Zach has saved the planet, gained and lost a father, found the love of his life, and come of age.

Douglas Knotcher

Doug is Zach's arch-nemesis. In seventh grade, they had an altercation that is only referred to as "the Incident" in the book. This event earned Zach the nickname Attack Zach. Doug is a bully and the first chapter shows him spitting spit balls at Casey Cox who sits in front of him. Zach mentions that Doug's home life is the reason that Doug may be so nasty. Doug's father is a drunk. Zach, however, does not think that this is an excuse.

Once Zach goes to combat, Doug is not mentioned again until the epilogue. By then, both Zach and Doug have suffered much. They have both grown in the process. Although they never become friends, they act as mirrors for each other.

Xavier Ulysses Lightman

This character is Zach's father. Xavier allegedly died at the age of nineteen in a work related accident. The only thing Zach knows about him through his mother and his paternal grandparents are that Xavier loved both his son and his wife very much. What Zach knows about his father through the artifacts left by him are that he loved video games, science fiction movies, and that he believed in a conspiracy theory. When he



first sees the notes, Zach thinks that his father may have been crazy. However, in light of his own space ship viewing, he reconsiders his judgment.

After Zach's first combat and failure, he is told that Xavier is alive and well. In fact, he is a general for the EDA. His death had been staged so he could serve the EDA. Zach is introduced to him after his first combat. Xavier will die in his attempt to save the world and Zach will only have known him for 24 hours. However, this 24 hours makes all the difference.

Ray

Ray is Zach's boss at the video game store. Ray struck it rich in stocks during the dot.com boom and is retired. The video game store is his way of spending his days playing video games and talking about video games. He has no interest in the business making any money and is there for a terrible small business owner. Zach began hanging out at the store before he could drive during the hours that he was out of school and his mother got home.

This is what Zach knew of Ray for the first six years he knew him. However, in Chapter 7, Zach finds out that this was not the case at all. Ray works for the Earth Defense Alliance and was stationed in Beaverton specifically to watch Zach and train him because Zach had been identified as having rare and unusual talent playing an on-line game.

Once on the base, Ray has to part with Zach. However, he reappears at the end of the book to help Zach and his father fulfill their quest. This time, it is clear he is a good friend and not a father.

Pamela Lightman

Pamela is Zach's mother. According to Zach, she is the coolest, hottest, smartest, toughest mother ever was. She raised her son as a single mother without any support. Her own father passed away and her religious mother disowned her when she got pregnant out of wedlock with Zach. Although after Xavier's death, the mother attempted reconciliation, a crass remark made by her caused Pamela to disown her right back.

Pamela is a nurse in the cancer treatment center. She herself was a serious gamer in her time, but now is a casual player. She has not re-married or been in a serious relationship. Zach believes that this is because she is still in love with Xavier. Although he finds this comforting, he also worries that she will be alone forever, despite her good looks.

She is concerned about Zach's lack of ambition regarding the future, which causes some tension between the two. However, Zach realizes that her concern comes from love and the two navigate the territory without any animosity.



Alexis Larkin

Lex, as her friends call her, is a recruit that Zach falls immediately and madly in love with. She is older, with a job at a software company that makes apps and operating systems for mobile devices. She plays Terra Firma, ranked at 17. She has tattoos of Tank Girl and the words EL RIESGO SIEMPRE VIVE. She is also drinking liquor from a flask and has disassembled her QCOMM when Zach approaches her the first time.

Lex and Zach becomes friends immediately. Before they fly away to their respective stations Zach tells her how he feels and she reciprocates with a kiss. During combat, Lex saves him. She also teaches him the important skill of hacking which ultimately helps him several times.

Once the war is over, Lex moves to Beaverton with her grandmother to be with Zach. She ends up to be his true love.

Admiral Archibald Vance

Admiral Archibald Vance is the admiral in the game who is in charge of the mission against the Sobrukai. Zach makes a comment about Chaos Terrain (the game company that made Armada) chose the perfect actor to play this part. However, this comment only makes the reader feel that the admiral is an admiral of a real life battle and not an actor. In Chapter 11, it is revealed that he is, indeed, a real life admiral.

Zach comes to know that the Admiral and his father have been friends for a long time. They lived and fought together on Moon Base Alpha before Vance got promoted. However, Xavier and Archibald did not see eye to eye when it came to strategy. Archibald did not believe Xavier's theory. This led to him indirectly causing Xavier's death.

Michael Diehl

Diehl is one of Zach's best friends. Since both Zach's friends are named Michael, Zach calls them by their last name. Like Zach, Diehl and Cruz also loves video games. All the Michaels ever talk about (argue about) is which superhero is better.

When Zach is recruited and taken away by the EDA, he is separated from his best friends. However, later in the book, both the Michaels help him to play out his father's plan. The Michaels are indistinguishable from each other.



Michael Cruz

Cruz is one of Zach's best friends. Since both Zach's friends are named Michael, Zach calls them by their last name. Diehl and Cruz also loves video games. The two only ever talk about which superhero is better.

When Zach is recruited and taken away by the EDA, he is separated from his best friends. However, later in the book, both the Michaels help him to play out his father's plan. The Michaels are indistinguishable from each other.

The Emissary

Once Zach follows out his father's plan and destroys the Icebreaker that was sent to destroy Europa, a 20 sided computer emerges from the surface of Europa. It is the Emissary. No intelligent life lives on Europa. Humanity has been fighting itself for the last four decades. The Emissary was sent by a peaceful galactic community called Solaris to test humanity.



Symbols and Symbolism

Spaceships

Spaceships are symbolic of the unknown. When a spaceship appears, all status quos are destroyed. For this reason, everybody fears it. Also, because of the existing paradigm regarding exploration and colonization, people fear the arrival of a spaceship. However, current literature suggests that the arrival of a spaceship can be an opportunity to become greater. In the face of danger, humanity needs a hero. This may be the reason for Zach's original excitement at seeing the spaceship... in fact in hoping for something of that nature all his life. The spaceship is an manifestation of Zach's desire to become greater than he is.

Boxes

Boxes symbolize the past. Things are put into boxes when they are not being used. Gifts are given in boxes, but are taken out to be used. Zach's mother packed all of Xavier's things in a box and put it in the attic. She then closed the door and locked it with a brass key. Zach goes to the boxes when he is ten to discover the past. He believes his future depends on his ability to understand the past, i.e., his dead father. However, he finds nothing in the boxes that help him in his quest to discover himself. Only when something significant happens to him, does he see the contents of the box in a different light.

Keys

Keys are the symbol of the unlocking of knowledge. Zach's mother gives Zach the key to the attic when Zach turns 10 and realizes that she cannot give him the knowledge he seeks. The key unlocks the attic where all of Xavier's things are locked up, packed away in boxes. The key opens the physical door to the physical things but does not unlock to door to the knowledge that Zach seeks.

Nurse

Zach's mother, Pamela, is a nurse, symbolic of healing. Pamela is a cancer treatment nurse, a field of nursing with a grim success rate. She became a nurse after Xavier's tragic death, which might mean that her grieving made her seek out a way to heal others. She herself has not healed, if what Xavier says is true, and she sought to work in a field where success is not assumed. Zach is also grieving his father's death. The presence of a nurse is symbolic of the book attempting to address a way to heal the grieving heart.



Jacket

After the mission (game), Zach feels a need to put on his father's old baseball jacket. Since the loss of the mission made Zach feel vulnerable, the donning of his father's jacket symbolizes Zach's desire to be protected by his father, for donning the outerwear of your father symbolizes taking on some aspect of the father. It also symbolizes Zach clinging to the past. The jacket (or coat) has also been thought to carry the magical powers of the wearer. For example, when the prophet Elija ascended to heaven, he left the mantle(coat) behind for his successor Elisha. Thus the mantle represented the prophet's power and role, to be assumed by his successor.

The fact that Zach is wearing his father's jacket when he boards the Earth Defense Alliance shuttle means he will be wearing it during the quest. At some point, this jacket will act to protect him or his group. However, at a later time, the jacket will become compromised and Zach will most likely have to part with it. In this way, his relationship with the jacket will mimic what his relationship to his father would have been. First, he will be protected by it, but eventually he will have to go into the world and fend for himself without the jacket in order to come of age.

When he meets Lex, he ends up lending it to her during the briefing because she is cold. Ultimately, he gives it to his father as a peace offering before they take off together on their first combat.

Tattoos

Alexis Larkin has a tattoo on each arm. Zach falls immediately and intensely in love with her the moment he lays eyes on her. Her tattoos call notice to his ambiguous age. He has just turned 18, thus an adult—but barely. Up to this point, he has identified himself as a child. He has a mother, he is obsessed with his dead father, and he just separated unwillingly from his surrogate father, Ray. His friends are children who only debate about which super-hero is better. The love of his life is his girlfriend he started dating in junior high.

The fact that Alexis has tattoos immediately places her in the realm of adulthood (she could not have gotten any if she weren't 18) Her tattoos also make definite statements. One is of Tank Girl, and the other is a quote inscribed on the chest plate of the tough female character in the movie, Alien. This is not a woman that will be a surrogate mother. She does not exude maternal. If Zach wants to associate with her, he must show himself to be a man.

Uniform

Clothing is a visual representation of a character. What a person chooses to wear is meant to tell a great deal about them. The fact that Zach changes into a uniform is symbolic of many things. First, the timing is interesting. Zach is not given a uniform



when he is first told of the role he will play in the military. He is not given the uniform before the debriefing. He is not even given a uniform before he is sworn in. He fights his first combat in his civilian clothes. In his civilian clothes, he willfully defies the commands of his superior. It is only after he sees the consequences of defying orders, warned of the consequences of subsequent defiance, and enlightened of his lineage that he is given the uniform. In this way, the uniform represents Zach becoming an insider to the group (the military) and Zach's acceptance of the rules of this authority.

Underwater

The underwater symbolizes the subconscious. It is when Zach goes underwater in search of his father that he first comes to realize the bond he has formed with him and the trust that he feels. Water is symbolic of emotion, so by becoming submerged in water, Zach accesses his emotions. Being underwater and having the ability to breathe often symbolizes a retreat back into the womb, as well. Since he is in his spaceship, he is able to experience this womblike environment. As he approaches a critical moment in life when he is forced to face serious consequences, it is natural for him to long to return to a time that seems carefree in retrospect.

Statues

Before Milo dies, he asks that a statue be erected in his honor in his hometown. After Xavier dies, a statue is erected in his honor in Beaverton. Statues symbolizes the respect and honor of a community. A statue being erected in a person's likeness is the epitome of acknowledgment.

Both Milo and Xavier did not have the community's respect before their death. They were marginalized. Xavier refers to his life before recruitment disdainfully. Milo also refers to the life he led before recruitment as worse than death. Statues being erected in their honor symbolize their ascension in societal acclaim.

Baby

At the end of the book, readers see that the reunion tryst culminated in another child between Xavier and Pamela Lightman. A baby is symbolic hope, new life, and future. Also, Baby J.R. is a concrete way to symbolize that Xavier's homecoming, albeit short, was not for naught.

In addition, in reference to Zach, a baby brother is symbolic of his own growth. He's no longer the child that needs to be taken care of. Although it is not his child, the age difference is such that he feels responsible to be the father figure and to pass on what he learned from his father to his brother.



A baby also stands for innocence. J.R. represents humanity's innocence regarding Solarity. Zach sees this innocence as naivete, much as a baby who is naïve about the complexity of his benevolent caretaker.



Settings

Mr. Sayles' Classroom

The story begins in Mr. Sayles' math class. Mr. Sayles is close to retirement and puts no effort into his job. He sits and does crosswords puzzles while the class falls apart. In this classroom where anarchy reigns, Cruz and Diehl are talking about video games, Doug is lobbing spitballs at Casey, and Zach is watching a spaceship. This mundane, familiar environment grounds the story into a realistic setting. It makes it clear to the reader that this story takes place in our world, where the expectations are the same as ours. A spaceship, therefore, is something amazing and unbelievable.

The Attic

The attic of Zach's house is where all of his father's artifacts are stored. It is not the house his father lived in, for his mother bought it with the settlement money from his father. His mother had boxed all of his father's things into boxes when they were moving into this house, put it up in the attic, and locked the attic. When Zach's questions became incessant at the age of 10, she gave Zach the keys. Since then, Zach has been obsessed with his father's belongings in hopes of finding his father somewhere amongst it.

Starbase Ace

"The Base" as Zach calls Starbase Ace, is a video game store run by Ray. Ray made a fortune in stocks during the dot-com era and is now living his early retirement playing video games and talking about video games with like-minded people. He has no interest in the business making money, it is just a venue to indulge his passion. Zach began coming there on his bicycle before he could drive to spend the time between school and his mother's return from work until one day Ray hired him as part time help. The work entailed very little actual work. He provided Ray with companionship more than anything else. Zach's plan is to work at Starbase full-time after graduation, but Ray and his mother think he is destined for greater things. Zach disagrees.

At the end of the book, Zach returns to Starbase Ace, but with a much different perspective. He actually does combat from this store and eventually inherits the store from Ray.

Zach's bedroom

Zach's bedroom is a shrine to the father he didn't know, displaying all his father's posters, and books, comics, and toys. He has a fleet of spacecraft hanging on fishing



line from his ceiling. He has his gaming device set up so that it mimics the cockpit controls seen in the game.

The book never returns to this room after Zach is recruited for combat because Zach symbolizes his childhood to which he will never be able to return.

The Earth Alliance Shuttle

This is where Zach is given all the information that validates that neither he nor his father is crazy. There is not much description given about the inside of the shuttle, but Zach notes that he doesn't even feel like he is moving. Then he remembers that all Earth Defense Alliance ships were outfitted with reverse-engineered alien technology, including a generator that creates a small inertia-cancellation field around a spacecraft, by "harnessing the aligned spin of gyromagnetic particles to alter the curvature of space-time."

Moon Base Alpha

This is where Zach is deployed for combat. His father has been stationed for the last seventeen years with Shin and Graham. Admiral Vance was also here before he was promoted. He stays here on seven hours, but this is where he meets his father, learns of his father's true beliefs, and loses friends in combat.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Zach is on the cusp of high school graduation, as are his peers. In several weeks, the status quo as he knows it will no longer be. In addition, seeing a space ship destroys any possibility there was left of “business as usual.” This critical event accentuates the need for Zach to step-up, be other than he was, mature, and move on. The first chapter sets up what was the status quo: Cruz and Diehl are his best friends, Ellen is the unrequited love of his life, Doug is his arch-nemesis, and he misses his dead father. The reader knows that all of these things will be affected by the end of the book, and maybe no longer be true. All the changes are caused by - or will cause - Zach's personal growth. This inevitability drives the book.

The status quo is denied with an Earth Defense Alliance shuttle lands on the lawn of Zach's school and his boss Ray walks out looking for Zach. Once on the shuttle, Zach is told that he was, indeed, chosen for his special and unique talent. In fact, he has been the chosen one for six years.

Once Zach arrives at the base in Nevada, his ties to the past are severed quickly. He is forced to part with Ray, who still felt like a father figure to him. He cannot call his mother. His friends are not there because of their lack of skills. He is even forced to take his jacket off and put it in his backpack. Then, as soon as he's in the debriefing room, he is wrenched from any attachment to his child self by falling hard in love with an adult woman with tattoos and booze.

This woman, Lex, is Zach's first incentive to become an adult. He immediately disowns his child-self. He attempts to align himself with adults by drinking from Lex's flask. Their relationship begins with obvious references to his youth and her maturity. However, as the story progresses, even over the span of 24 hours, it becomes apparent that Zach is on equal footing with Lex.

It is his interaction with his father, however, that fully brings him to adulthood. Zach's child-self yearned for a father. However, this yearning was immature and based on idealism. When he meets his father with all his vulnerabilities, flaws, and strengths, Zach is able to integrate his father as part of his identity in a meaningful way. With the death of his father, Zach is forced to become his own self. With the birth of his younger brother, he must consider the future of the world beyond his own lifetime.

Need for Knowledge

Not knowing his father, Zach has always been driven to know him. He seeks knowledge through his mother, grandparents, and the artifacts his father left. None of these fulfill him in the way he seeks. When the spaceship appears, he returns to his father's notes. He hopes that the notes will reveal something about the spaceship. However what he



really hopes is that the appearance of the spaceship will reveal something more about his father—perhaps that his father was the genius he had wanted him to be. The notes reveal more systemic thinking to Zach than it did when Zach was ten. However, they still do not reveal enough.

In Chapter 7, however, there is a grand reveal. Much is revealed to Zach by Ray. He finds out that his father's conspiracy theory was true and that the government had covertly been training their civilians via the use of video games. Zach also finds out that he'd been identified as having special and unique talent through an on-line video game he played six years ago.

Yet, what he wants to know the most is denied him. Who was his father and what really happened to him? Ray says he does not know and hints that once Zach gets clearance, he will be able to find out himself.

Immediately after his first combat, Zach does find out. Zach's father, Xavier, is alive and well. He is a general for the Earth Defense Alliance. He is waiting for Zach on Moon Base Alpha where Zach is being sent for the next combat.

Over the next 24 hours, Zach comes to know his father. He struggles to come to terms with his own emotions while he attempts to be empathetic of his father's situation. He learns about Xavier's sufferings, vulnerabilities, doubts, and theories.

Ultimately, all the questions he had at the beginning of the book are answered. However, it only raises bigger questions. This underscores the fundamental problem of knowledge quests. Ultimately, it is impossible to know enough. The domain of the unknowable only expands.

Friendship

The book starts in a classroom. In this class are both of Zach's best friends, his ex-girlfriend-current-love-interest, his arch-nemesis, the boy his arch-nemesis taunts. From the beginning, friendship and anti-friendship is presented as important. Although Zach doesn't interact with his friends—only his nemesis—he references them often. He continuously checks for their reaction. It appears that the friendships Zach has with Cruz and Diehl have been consistent and based on their mutual love of video games. The reader knows that this cannot continue to be the case. With the appearance of the spaceship, something must change. If the friendship is at the beginning of the book, by the end of the book it will have become something more meaningful or will have deteriorated.

His friendship with Ray is complicated as well. Ray is Zach's boss, surrogate father, companion, and friend. When Zach finds out that Ray is other than what he believed him to be for the last six years, he feels betrayed and angry.

Through his involvement with the mission, Zach leaves all his old friends and makes new ones. When the defining moment comes, he needs the help of all his friends old



and new. They prove their worth as friends by having faith in him, supporting him, and stepping up. There is no conflict between the old and new friends nor does Zach's personal growth create conflict with his friends. Everyone is united in the face of a larger-than-life problem.

It is, however, his arch nemesis, Doug who appears at the end of the book to affirm Zach.

Fatherhood

Zach's father is also presented front and center from the beginning of the book despite the fact that he's been dead for almost a decade; Zach's life still revolves around his father. As a literary tool, the absent father has more intrigue in a story than a present father. The absent father can be anything. Zach mentions that his father is the person with whom he shares half his DNA. This means that Zach strongly associates his own identity with his father. Who he thinks his father was—regardless of who his father actually was—will impact who he views himself is and consequently affect his own behavior.

Ray, Zach's boss, also acts as a surrogate father. He is the one Zach spent time with while his mother was at work, being the other primary adult in his life. He is also the one who first brings up Zach's future with Zach—at least chronologically in the book. Ray himself does not have children or family.

When Ray turns out to be other than what he claimed to be, it complicates the picture of his relationship with Zach. If Ray forged a relationship with Zach out of professional obligation, what becomes of all the years that Ray looked at him as a surrogate father?

As it turns out, Zach's father, Xavier, is alive. His death was faked so that he could serve for the EDA. This whole time, he has had a hand in Zach's training. When Zach is sent to Moon Base Alpha (MBA), he meets his father for the first time. Xavier has been stationed there the last seventeen years. In the 24 hours fraught with tension before the alien invasion, Zach comes to know much about his father as a human being. In that short time, he sees his father's vulnerabilities, doubts, suffering, and love for Zach and his mother.

When he realizes that his father's theory was right, Zach becomes his greatest ally. The tables turn as his father tells him that it meant a lot for him to know Zach believed in him. It turns out Zach's approval of his father was just as important to his father as his father's approval of him. After Zach knows his father is dead (again), his actions are shaped by his desire to want to make his father proud of him.

The book starts with Zach's father dead and ends with Zach's father dead. However, in between, Zach gets to know his father. Even though the ultimate result is that he is left fatherless, the opportunity to know his father helped Zach come of age and find himself.



Self-Identity

From the beginning, Zach views himself in context of his father. When he sees the spaceship, his first thought is that he is crazy like his father. When he returns to his father's notebook after seeing the spaceships, he is seeking to find validation of his father's sanity thereby validating his own sanity.

Zach also has always wanted something amazing to happen. Although he doesn't express why he wanted something amazing to happen, it can be inferred that he envisions himself becoming a more active participant in the face of danger.

This wish comes true. It turns out that it was a premonition. When he gets taken aboard the Earth Defense Alliance shuttle, he's told that he has special talent and has been identified by it. Although Zach does not immediately integrate this into his self-identity, the reader can anticipate that Zach will step-up to this perception of him by others.

When he begins combat, Zach is not scared. He is confident and assured. He knows that this is what he has been preparing for all his life, this is his destiny.

Authority

Authority is presented in two ways from the beginning. The first is the math teacher, Mr. Sayles. Although he is in the authoritative position, he is long past caring enough to enforce his powers for either good or evil. He does not impart knowledge or try to impart knowledge. He does nothing to stop the bullying of a student. Although a minor character, Mr. Sayles presence in the novel so early on establishes the perception of Authority in Zach's everyday world.

Once readers get into Zach's father's notebook, however, readers see a very different version of authority. The authority figure Xavier discusses in his book is that of the government. According to his world view, the government is very hands-on but opaque. It is unclear whether their motives are good or evil. Are they trying to protect the country from evil, or are they trying to propagate evil? In either case, their methodology is cause for suspicion. Men in black, and secret tools of recruitment do not foster trust.

When Zach gets taken aboard the Earth Defense Alliance, he is told the conspiracy the government has been conducting. The video games are military training and recruitment tools, just as Zach's father had suspected. Once he knows this, Zach wonders what actually happened to his father. Ray has no answer. This leads Zach to believe that the government's conspiracy goes deeper.

However, once the secret history is revealed, Zach does not feel anger towards authority. Instead, he feels quite aligned. The deception does not bother him, for he agrees that it was necessary. He's not bothered by the betrayal or condescending attitude of the government towards the population. He does not even feel there is anything wrong with the scientists lying about their knowledge.



Zach's father, Xavier, however, does not agree with the authority. He has found the videos that the government has kept confidential and has doubts about the motives of the aliens. He believes that the people in authority (his friend Admiral Vance, for example) are good people with good intentions. However, he thinks they are people lacking in the imagination to make the right decisions. He thinks that they have not examined the problem with an eye for solving it.

It turns out that the authorities were wrong and Xavier was right. Xavier and Zach committed mutiny and went against authority. They overcame authority and had an opportunity to prove themselves right. Admiral Vance admitted his failings and publicly apologized. Zach finds himself in agreement with his father that Admiral Vance is a good man.

Now, however, there is an authority that has more power than the government. The Solarity, the alien community who had set the test up for humanity and who has accepted humanity into their peaceful community now is in a position of power. Although their presence has only brought positive change thus far, Zach finds himself suspicious of the authority because he doesn't understand their motive. What he has learned from his father is to never stop trying to figure out the motives of the authority. Passively taking for granted what is doled out leaves one vulnerable.

Zach decides to accept the ambassadorial role for Solarity so he can stay involved. He feels that if he disengages, he will leave his loved one and all of humanity at risk.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view is the limited first-person. The story is written from Zach's perspective. Everything the reader comes to know is through Zach. In the beginning, much of the back story is told by Zach. As the story progresses, the reader gains knowledge at the same time Zach does. For example, the secret history of the world is explained to Zach by a video narrated by Carl Sagan shown to the recruits in the auditorium-like briefing room.

The narrator, Zach Lightman, is immature but reflective and compassionate. For this reason, he is able to consider situations from different perspectives. This allows the reader a chance to see things from different points of views. Nevertheless, the point of view is quite limited.

In order to alleviate this, Xavier's diary and letters give us his perspective. In addition, dialog is another way that outside perspective can find a way into the story.

Language and Meaning

Since it is the limited first person from Zach's perspective and the story opens with Zach as a high school student, the language reflects that of a high school students' in the beginning. It is casual, full of slangs, and often hyperbolic. We get insight into the immaturity of Zach's environment through the words of his friends, Cruz and Diehl as well. These two are constantly bickering about who is a better superhero.

Being a coming of age story, as Zach's world view changes and as he crosses the threshold of adulthood, the language begins to reflect this. Once Zach enters the base and is severed from his past, his confidence increases. He is made aware of the fact that he is special. He expresses his feeling with words, instead of hiding them.

Upon meeting his father, Zach regresses slightly. However, quickly, he is forced to step-up again as he is made aware both of the struggles his father survived and the complexity of the catastrophe they are about to face together.

Structure

The first sentence of the book begins with a startling observation, but is followed by much exposition. Since Zach interacts very little with others during this time, the space is used to explain his history to the reader to catch the reader up to the present moment.



There are 26 chapters and an epilogue. The chapters are roughly equal in length at slightly longer than 10 pages each. They are titled simply with numbers. For example the first chapter is "1." The first two chapters explain Zach's family situation and give insight into what his father was obsessed with during his life. The third and fourth chapter introduce the two adults that are in Zach's life and how they perceive his impending graduation. The fifth and sixth chapter introduce the game and the world of the gamers.

The seventh chapter is important because it reveals the world as it is. Zach and the readers come to see that the conspiracies that Zach's father believed in were true. Chapter 8 introduces Alexis. 9 explains the secret history of humanity and alien encounter. 10 & 11 describes the beginning of combat. 12 & 13 reveals Zach's father's role in the military and Zach's acceptance into the military. 13 & 14 introduces him to the others he that are ranked in the top 10 and his father. 15 & 16 gives Zach more insight into his father's life on the moon and to the complexity of the problem at hand. Chapter 16 uses the letter format to allow Xavier to speak in his own words what it felt like to leave his family as a nineteen year old. Chapter 17 uses the letter format to allow Xavier to speak in his own words what it felt like to leave his family as a nineteen year old. In Chapter 18, Zach hears about Xavier's conspiracy theory and is not sure how he feels. In Chapter 19, the world finds out about the alien attack and the people on MBA get to contact their family. Zach calls his mom and Pamela learns that Xavier is still alive. In Chapter 20, Zach and the crew initiate combat. Two of their crew members are killed, raising the stakes. Chapter 21, Xavier makes a risky maneuver and follows through on his philosophy and Zach realizes his father was right. However, he thinks he has lost his father in the process. Chapter 22 find his father to be alive and there is a brief homecoming. Chapter 23-24 now places Zach in a leadership role of saving the world for his father is injured. Zach loses his father in Chapter 25. Chapter 26 shows humanity victorious and Zach a hero.

The traditional story arc of the hero's journey is honored in this story. The unassuming protagonist overcomes obstacles and finds himself.



Quotes

I was staring out the classroom window and daydreaming of adventure when I spotted the flying saucer.

-- Zach (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is the first line of the book and it's from the perspective of Zach. It's an important sentence because it does a few things. First, it alerts the reader immediately that flying saucers will play a huge role in this book, thus establishing the genre. Second, it characterizes the main character. Even though we do not yet know that the main character's name is Zach, we know something important about him. He is the kind of person who daydreams about adventure.

Pamela Lightman (nee Crandall) was the coolest woman I'd ever met as well as the toughest.

-- Zach (chapter 4 paragraph 3)

Importance: Zach is introducing his mother to the reader in this sentence. Zach establishes his attitude towards his mother. He adores and respects her. The reader's expectation of her is also established. She will not be the damsel in distress.

This is more like a museum exhibit—a really sad, fucked-up one, devoted to a man I'd never even known, and never would.

-- Zach (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: This description of Zach's room gives insight into his interior world. Zach is obsessed with his father but knows nothing about him. He only has his father's artifacts to know him by. The label of museum is therefore very accurate. This sentence shows Zach's relationship to his father before he meets him. This is important to contrast with what Zach's relationship to his father will be after spending just one day with him.

We were at the edge of space.

-- Zach (chapter 8 paragraph 2)

Importance: This sentence places the story firmly in the real of science fiction. If there was any doubt of the validity of the first sentence of the story, this confirms it. The flying saucer Zach saw was real. Furthermore, now the story is at liberty to discuss this as a reality.

She was just off to my right, sitting all alone in a deserted row near the back, taking brazen pulls from a chrome hip flask painted to look like R2-D2.

-- Zach (chapter 9 paragraph 9)

Importance: Right after Zach leaves Ray and his connection to his old life is completely severed, he meets Lex. From the first time she is introduced in the story, it is made clear that she is an adult. The flask symbolizes her adulthood. Yet, it is also apparent that she



is a kindred spirit to Zach because of her affinity to Star Wars. Falling in love with an adult woman is the push Zach needs to enter the world of adulthood.

Honestly, though, you have to know you're destined for much bigger things. Right?
-- Zach (chapter 3 paragraph 71)

Importance: This sentence foreshadows Zach's destiny and potential. Up to this point, the reader only sees Zach from his perspective. Zach is plagued with the insecurities and doubts typical of an eighteen-year-old. Ray's words gives a different picture of Zach, one that Zach has clearly not embraced. The reader knows that Ray's words also foreshadows the future Zach.

I still know him," he said. He pointed to his QComm. "I just spoke with General Lightman before you arrived in my office. We talked about you, naturally.
-- Admiral Vance (chapter 13 paragraph 49)

Importance: This is the moment Zach finds out that his father is still alive. All the foreshadowing thus far about his father's dubious death culminates in this one statement. The reader sees that this new fact will impact how the themes of fatherhood, self-identity, and adulthood will be addressed.

He was smiling at me—with my own smile, on an older version of my face.
-- Zach (chapter 13 paragraph 49)

Importance: This is the moment that Zach meets his father. From the first time they are introduced together, they are aligned within the story by their physical resemblance. His father smiling also signifies alignment. They are not set against each other. Zach's self-identity will integrate his father's identity and he will mirror his father in more ways than just looks. His father will be integral to Zach's coming of age.

These aliens have coaxed and manipulated us not this exact position for a reason—maybe to elicit a reaction. Or to put us in specific kinds of circumstances, to see how we'll react to them—collectively, as a species."
-- Xavier (chapter 18 paragraph 51)

Importance: Here readers finally see Xavier's conspiracy theory in its entirety. Readers know that he does not trust the government to make the right decision and he does not trust humans to understand the motives of the aliens. The placement of this scene, coming at about two-thirds through the book leads the reader to believe that Xavier is right, even though Zach is not fully convinced.

If the news is to be believed, it seems like the whole world is ready to fight back.
-- Lex (chapter 19 paragraph 103)

Importance: Humanity is shown positively responding to the horrific news of an alien attack and unites. Faith in humanity is expressed. Also, faith in the fact that the



government's attempt to prepare the citizens through the use of video games is also expressed.

He was right; I was wrong. I understood that now.
-- Zach (chapter 21 paragraph 124)

Importance: This is the moment that Zach aligns himself completely with his father. This integration strengthens his self-identity and sense of purpose in life.

After all of the things that had happened to me, after everything I'd been through, I no longer found myself staring out the window and daydreaming of adventure.
-- Zach (Epilogue paragraph 49)

Importance: This is the last sentence of the book and comes full circle to the first sentence of the book. Zach reflects on where he was at the beginning of the story and acknowledges the growth he's made since. This sentence shows that not only has Zach grown, he is self-aware of his growth.