



Cross Fire

Fonda Lee

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Earth's century of peace as a colony of an alien race has been shattered. As the alien-run government navigates peace talks with the human terrorist group Sapience, Donovan tries to put his life back together and return to his duty as a member of the security forces. But a new order comes from the alien home planet: withdraw. Earth has proven too costly and unstable to maintain as a colony, so the aliens, along with a small selection of humans, begin to make plans to leave. As word of the withdrawal spreads through the galaxy, suddenly Earth becomes vulnerable to a takeover from other aliens races. Aliens who do not seek to live in harmony with humans, but will ravage and destroy the planet.

As a galactic invasion threatens, Donovan realizes that Sapience holds the key that could stop the pending war. Yet in order to save humankind, all species on Earth will have to work together, and Donovan might just have to make the ultimate sacrifice to convince them.

Cross Fire Details

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From Reader Review Cross Fire for online ebook

Britt Buckenroth says

Action packed sequel to *Exo*. The story picks up just about a six months or so after where *Exo* ended. Donovan is getting himself together after being kidnapped by the underground human terrorist group, Sapience, by integrating back in to normal life - drills and missions with his fellow soldiers-in-erze. I enjoyed this book as it took some unexpected turns as Donovan receives a message from father (who died in the last book) and makes some truly history changing decisions for his people and the fate of Earth itself. The action is epic and readers will enjoy the way Lee ties up all the loose ends.

A fun read.

Angela Blount says

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

Smart, well-paced, and intensely thought provoking. This series is on track to redefine sci-fi expectations for the YA genre.

Once again, the story is told in third-person past tense—entirely from the viewpoint of young soldier Donovan Reyes. Donovan is still mentally recovering from his time in captivity, and the loss of both parents to opposing ends of the conflict over the alien colonization of Earth. His instilled-since-childhood loyalty to SecPac and the Zhree is evolving—as is his perspective on Sapience, the recently fragmented extremist group his sort-of-girlfriend belongs to.

The human resistance (Sapience) is seemingly getting what they've always wanted. Thanks in part to the terror attacks and opposition they've been met with in recent years, the Zhree homeworld has decided that Earth isn't worth developing or protecting any longer. They've ordered an evacuation of their entire species. And they've decided a small percentage of their human collaborators will evacuate with them, to preserve the human species in some form once the planet inevitably falls to the scavenging Rii.

But many Zhree were hatched on Earth and know no other home. For those carrying eggs, the trip back to their technical homeworld would endanger or doom their brood. And all would look forward to being dismissed and discriminated against as “offworlders.” As for the humans, the consequences are even more bleak. The evacuation of human Exos demands that most leave some or all of their families behind to face certain death—either at the hands of a vengeful Sapience anarchy, or eventually, to the whims of the genocidal Rii.

Oh, the sociological and political nuances!

There are still no easy answers to any of the moral conundrums we encountered in *Exo*, and I love it for that alone. But in *Crossfire* we do see that the prioritizing of survival demands a mighty shift in the power dynamic. The interpersonal aspects are truly honed in this installment. The closer relationships between the SecPac soldiers and some of their Zhree comrades illustrates the interrelational conundrums in their uneven governing structure. The tensions between homeworld Zhree and Earth colonist Zhree highlights a vast

cultural and political complexity within the alien species itself. And the empathy-building connection between Donovan and Anya is used expertly to show both “sides” (or more accurately, the grey-area gradations) to the underlying issue of colonialism.

The ethical quandaries abound. Is propaganda a means justified by its ends? Is access to tech advancement a privilege or a right? If you could guarantee your children a better life and doubled lifespan with the 1% chance of mortality up-front, is it worth the risk? Can there ever be true equality between fundamentally different species? What, exactly, constitutes “freedom?”

One thing is certain—this series isn’t done asking hard questions that may never have clear-cut answers. Which should leave many a reader pondering the story long after they’ve reached “the end.”

Again, we see the romantic angle is more of a side-note amid the much bigger picture. But in this book, said angle felt more natural and enhancing than it did in *Exo*. There is now the sense that these star-crossed almost-lovers could actually be a catalyst to some desperately needed unity. If they can restrain their biases long enough to find some common ground to stand on...

Final Analysis:

Superb worldbuilding, solid character development, lucid descriptions, and high action balanced by compelling introspection. It’s rare to find a series in which the second book actually surpasses the first... but here, Fonda Lee has done just that.

James says

So if I really enjoyed *Exo* despite having some issues with it, I liked *Crossfire* even better and didn’t have anything like the same critiques of the world and character development that I did with the first installment. The addition of a larger political context to the relevant setting, the greater wealth of information we learn about the zhree, and a particular development about 2/3 of the way into the book that knits together puzzle piece hints dropped earlier in the plot (in a way where the timing and Donovan’s existing characterisation combine very well to have it make sense that it happens when it does, instead of making you go “why didn’t he figure this out 100 pages ago???”), only to swerve again from what I at least assumed would be the straightforward direction of the plot - these were a few features that definitely head my list of things that made *Crossfire* an excellent story.

Justine says

4.5 stars

It's no secret that I'm a big fan of Fonda Lee's books. And apparently I'm not the only one - her adult fantasy book, *Jade City*, was up for a Nebula this year and at the same time, her YA SF book *Exo*, has been nominated for the Andre Norton Award.

Cross Fire is the direct sequel to *Exo*, and picks up the story shortly after its predecessor left off. The alien Mur Zhree who colonized Earth over a century ago with mixed reception, but on balance arguably to the benefit of Earth, may now have to withdraw from the planet by order of their homeworld government. While certain vocal human groups are initially overjoyed at this possibility, others fear the loss of technology and

general social instability that will inevitably follow. Worse than that however, is threat of another group of alien invaders, the Rii, who intend to strip Earth for its resources and then leave it uninhabitable. Without the support of the Mur, it seems Earth will have little chance of defending itself.

In Exo, the main character Donovan Reyes dealt with a lot of internal conflict stemming from revelations about his parents. In Cross Fire he seems to have come to terms with some of the personal angst and found his place. But what I continue to find so likeable about Donovan is that he is quite genuine. For all his internal conflict it still feels real and justified. He feels angry and helpless, but this time it isn't just about him. He doesn't know if what he is doing is entirely right according to what he has been taught, but he also feels that he must do something, even if he ultimately doesn't succeed. It feels like Donovan has grown up, and it suits him.

Cross Fire has all the elements that I have come to expect and love when I pick up one of Fonda Lee's books: excellent worldbuilding, great pacing and well written action scenes, and multi-faceted characters. Finally, I see her craft building with every book she writes, which is a wonderful thing to watch as a reader following along.

Recommended, but be sure to read Exo first in order to get the most from the story.

Robby says

The second is just as good as the first. Same extremely nuanced morality, same incredibly difficult situations, same complex moral choices without resorting to the grimdark or people just being generally awful. I cannot recommend this book series highly enough, especially for intelligent young children. Most books for young children are fairly morally straightforward. There is simply good guys and bad guys and while people make mistakes it's still pretty easy to tell. The next step up adds the sex, drugs and rock and roll that I love, but isn't really something that my 10 year old is ready for. This book series though has all the difficult moral decisions but in ways that even young children can understand, and adults can find compelling. Without any sort of troubling things that may not be age appropriate.

Seriously, great series especially to read with your kids, but even for adults I recommend it. This the second book, first book is called Exo.

American Mensa says

Crossfire, by Fonda Lee, is the science fiction sequel to the popular book Exo. Donovan Reyes, the protagonist, is certainly no ordinary man. He is an exo, or a human possessing an exocell. Implanted using a special procedure, exocells allow for heightened strength and intelligence compared to "squishies", or ordinary humans. Having an exocell has never been more important, for Donovan resides on a vulnerable Earth, where humans are ruled by a superior alien species, known as the Zhree. They protect desperate humans from intergalactic threats like Sapience and are vital for humanity's survival. Working as a member of the security forces and as an adviser to the Zhree "Zun" (leader), Donovan's life is full of chaos and turns. But, everything changes when the Zhree choose to leave Earth, leaving humanity defenseless. Donovan and his friends know the situation is dire and must do whatever it takes to save the only home they have ever known. What will become of Earth, Donovan, and the galaxy? Read Crossfire to find out.

I found out the hard way that this book is near impossible to understand without having read *Exo* first. I dove into *Crossfire* with zero background knowledge and struggled immensely. There is a whole plethora of vocabulary, like Prime Liaison, Hardening, Exocell, Zhree, and Erze that is necessary to process the events of the story. I finally gave up and skimmed *Exo* before coming back to *Crossfire*, and all my problems were solved. So, in closing, I'll put it simply: read *Exo* first.

Crossfire was action-packed once I was able to comprehend it. The entire last half of the book was one humongous climax, and was very entertaining. There was essentially no exposition, because it is assumed that the reader has already seen the characters in *Exo*, and is aware of what is going on. This contributed to the seemingly lightning-quick pace of the story.

Additionally, I enjoyed puzzling through the numerous ethical questions in the story. For example, towards the beginning the "Zhree Zun" wanted all humans to become exos, despite the procedure having a 3 percent mortality rate.

I rate this book 4 stars, since it was gripping and appealing to me as a lover of science fiction. However, I felt *Crossfire* could have done with a slight exposition to refresh the reader's memory on the characters and terms. This is the only factor that lowered my rating from a 5 to a 4. Regarding age recommendation, I believe that children 10 and up would enjoy this book most. Because of the fast pace, even impatient readers can get through it without dealing with boring monologues. This makes *Crossfire* highly attractive to younger readers.

Review by Anya A, 13, Metropolitan Washington Mensa

CW (The Quiet Pond) ? says

I screamed about *Exo* last year, I'm gonna scream about *Cross Fire* today.

Because HOLY HECK THIS BOOK IS AMAZING and has set the bar for YA sci-fi super high for me.

- *Cross Fire* is the sequel to *Exo* and extends the post-apocalyptic story of humanity who are now subservient to an alien colonist species.
- This book takes the story to new heights. Humanity is warring with each other, divided by their allegiance to either the colonists or the human species -- and then something happens that changes everything.
- The discourse is SUBLIME. So sociological and political, and so COMPLEX. I loved it.
- Fantastic exploration of colonialism (again), how identity and perspective are shaped by experience and where we are born, loyalty, discrimination, and trying to do right when all hell has broken loose and you have no idea what right is.
- I loved the characters in this - all were a little morally grey, all excellently and gradually developed, and my goodness, I could empathise with ALL of them (except one, screw that guy).
- The action was STUNNING. I was enthralled and couldn't breathe in some passages. It was so intense and exciting.

Fonda Lee has never disappointed me, and *Cross Fire* is such an excellent addition to her work.

Trigger/content warning: (view spoiler)

Laura says

One of the hardest things to do is to write a sequel set in an already strongly built world and bring in new readers without a ton of "previouslies" or assuming that the reader has already been in this world. This book does it, and does it well. To be honest, I didn't even realize this was a sequel!

The idea that aliens have invaded, that some humans have not only decided to work with them but also undergo a procedure to become more like them, doesn't feel new (one could imagine this as an allegory for any totalitarian regime) nor does the idea that there are resistance groups. What was surprising is that the Earth-born aliens, while adhering to their original societal norms, recognize that there is something special and different about humans. I also loved that the aliens look very different than we do.

R.A. says

The first half is more character driven, while the second half is more action packed and plot-driven. I really liked the complexity throughout.

Lindsay says

A major step-up from the mostly successful first book sees a much more mature Donovan Reyes dealing with an increasingly precarious alien-occupied Earth.

The Rii are coming, and the Mur Erzen Commonwealth are getting ready to abandon Earth, taking with them only a small population of their most fit and trusted humans. The human resistance organization Sapience and its various splinter groups are growing stronger with the zhree pulling back and there's a lot of pressure on SetPac forces to keep order. Donovan and the other Exos want to stay to defend Earth and the Earth-born zhree don't seem any happier about abandoning their home and humans, but the Rii have an advantage that no-one among the humans expect.

This just worked so much better for me than the previous book. Donovan's no longer dealing with his various parental issues and instead faces much clearer questions about where his loyalties should be placed, with his fellow Exos, his zhree masters, to humanity as a whole or to his individual attachments to the people he loves like Jet or Anya.

It's not immediately clear that there will be a third volume, but one would be extremely welcome. The world-building in this is exquisite, like pretty much everything I've read from this author, and the issues around the colonization of Earth and local versus central politics resonate with Earthbound geopolitics in interesting ways. Superb book.

Madeline (The Bookish Mutant) says

Warning: This text contains a minor spoiler

Just as good as book 1.

I enjoyed how high the stakes were in this book, and I loved the fast-paced action and twist filled plot. The development of Donovan was wonderful to watch, and though I'm still a little iffy about his relationship with Anya, it seemed to work for this installment. One thing I wasn't crazy about was Jet. He didn't show up too much in book 1 (looking back, thank god), but he played a much bigger role in the sequel. Though his strong relationship with Donovan was clear, he continually got on my nerves. He just wasn't real. Jet was like this romanticized version of the fiercely loyal, goody-two-shoes best friend that we all wish we had, but we don't, because, well, that's just not that realistic. Regardless, the other characters made up for him.

I also really liked the introduction to the Rii. Not only did they seem super cool looking, they were just the right amount of creepy-not creepy enough to induce nightmares, but still borderline disturbing. (view spoiler)

Nina DuBois says

Cross Fire was a really good sequel to Exo. It kept me highly entertained, there was plenty of action, and the politics was amazing. I loved direction this series is heading and I enjoyed it immensely. Fonda Lee writes such unique stories that are all her own. I love her writing. Even though Donovan was not my favorite person in the first book, he came a long way in this book. Instead of trying to be one thing, and Exo, he was learning to make his own decisions and what it means to do the right thing. I really loved his bravery and his willingness to speak out on things he saw as wrong. Cross Fire was amazing.

The only reason this is not five stars is because there were some sections that I thought was a little slow and sometimes Donovan's inner dialogue was a bit too much. That's probably because I really learning to like him after being annoyed by him in the first book. But other than that this is an amazing book.

Olivia Farr says

"Cross Fire" was a great sequel to Exo that wraps up all the major plotlines and possibilities. The zhree, an alien race, are divided between Mur and Rii. The Mur have colonized Earth over a hundred years ago and work side-by-side with many humans in groups they call erze (kind of like a family group, organized by skill). Some of these humans are hardened (called Exos), which means they were given an exocel when they were young, which gives them protection, strength, and other finer skills. The hardening process isn't perfect and several young children die during it.

Of course, not all humans are happy to have the zhree on their planet, and the main resistance is Sapience, which has now splintered into the Human Action Party, a political group working to promote humans, and True Sapience, a more violent/extreme extension of terrorists. Most of Sapience's former activities were terrorist in nature with bombing buildings, assassinating leaders, and killing Exos they find. Exos are seen as the enemies and "pets" of the zhree (also called shrooms). However, they are independent people who work in harmony for the most part.

Donovan is a soldier-in-erze, who lost both of his parents in the first book. He has been called upon by the zhree to participate in their discussions to decide who will follow his father as the Prime Liaison, and this has given him unwanted political capital. Add to that, the girl he loves is in Sapience, and Donovan is carrying a

lot of weight. Everything is about to change when the Mur decide to evacuate Earth and take some of the healthy, young, hardened Exos with them. Lines are drawn and violence and tension on Earth escalate.

Donovan has some tough decisions to make as the sides are blurred and what is best for humans and Earth becomes even murkier. This sequel is even more action-packed than the first and gives more insight into the aliens and world created here. I really liked the additional background and world building in this book, but it does get pretty slow in the middle. However, I liked how well everything was wrapped up and how things are changing on Earth.

This series has some interesting insights into colonization and immigration that I think are really worth talking about- there's no clear right and wrong here, and how it's handled is really fascinating. This is something you don't often see in a YA series. I really enjoyed this conclusion to the duology and highly recommend it for YA readers of all ages!

Skip says

I think this sequel to Fonda Lee's *Exo* is better than her first book, despite a somewhat slow start. The Zhree decide that Earth is too far away and costly to manage, and decide to abandon the planet, seeking to rescue 90,000 inhabitants to preserve the human species, with a focus on the hardened Exo's. Meanwhile, tensions among the core humans are led by rebel groups called Sapience and True Sapience. We continue to watch events develop through Donovan Reyes, the son of the former Prime Liaison. Donovan wants to stem the violence by capturing the leaders, who are both close to his squishie (human) friend, Anya. Everything changes when (view spoiler), forcing Donovan to seek help from Sapience to disable the failsafe mechanism, making Exo's unable to defend themselves against the Zhree. Action packed story of pack loyalty and honor: 4.5 stars.

Shenwei says

That was an emotional rollercoaster from start to finish. Aside from the incredible action and pacing, I think this book contains excellent character development and is thematically rich and worth talking about. I had a lot of mixed feelings about book 1 and its handling of the topic of colonization; some of those issues were addressed in this book, others not so much. Key turning point: Donovan's character finally realizes that most zhree don't value humans except when assimilated and harmless/loyal to them, which was something noticeably absent in the first book. I might write a full review later about the choice of POV and the resulting engagement with the nature of colonization.

CWs: ableism, violence, death, war, PTSD
