

Metal Swarm

Review of Metal Swarm, Book Six of The Saga of Seven Suns
by Kevin J. Anderson

Cards on the table – Kevin J. Anderson isn't a personal favourite. I have a thing for character-led stories, and this author clearly doesn't go in for complex, three-dimensional portrayals of his protagonists.

However, this book was a very pleasant surprise – so much so, that by the halfway mark I found I didn't care that the characters had the depth of a pavement puddle. Because this book is more about the titanic clash between opposing races – and the different factions within human society.

King Peter has finally managed to break away from his controlling Chairman, Basil Wenscslas and- Nah... Not going to even start down that route. Otherwise we'll be on Page 20 on this review and still not finished. Suffice to say that there is a lot of plot in this book – and in the previous five volumes, which Anderson very ably and succinctly sums up in his excellent eight page 'The Story So Far' section. Something I feel that other authors of multi-book series should consider doing.

Told in third person multiple viewpoint, each section is headed by the character's name, so the reader knows exactly whereabouts they are – an important aid in a plot that whips along at a breathless pace. Anderson's deft scene setting and clear style means that we, the readers, can relax into the book knowing that wherever we're going, we are in the hands of an experienced storyteller who knows his craft. The invention and variety of the different alien species are enjoyable - I particularly like the faeros - and while Anderson doesn't delve overmuch into anyone's psyche, his character sketches have enough plausibility for the conflicts that stack up. And this is where, I think, Anderson excels. His no-nonsense writing means that we are swept through the action scenes with no confusion or re-reading to make sure we've got it – even at 2 am. For me, the outstanding confrontation of the book is the battle between the fiery faeros and the watery wentals – but you can take your pick. There is also a nasty insect race... their robot creations... huge treeships... space gypsies... telepathic Ildirans... This book has got the lot.

The main quibble I have, is that Anderson doesn't shine at dialogue – in places it is wincingly plodding, which is a shame as it impedes some of the scenes, particularly between the humans. However, I am more than willing to overlook what I would normally regard as a major crime, as this master storyteller flexes his muscles. While this world doesn't reach the heights of Kate Elliott's Crown of Stars, as a four star read, it came unexpectedly close and I shall certainly be looking out for Book Seven.

8/10