
SWARM
ENEMY

Also by Tim Peake and Steve Cole

Swarm Rising



TIM PEAKE
and Steve Cole

HODDER

HODDER CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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TP - *For Aiden and Ruth, your stars will always shine brightly*

SC - *For Tobey, as you face the future*

THEY'RE HERE . . .

When the alien Swarm arrived on Earth, they weren't travelling in spacecraft. They came at the speed of light, a signal in code, a hive of intelligence. When they got here, they found an Earth in trouble: its air and water poisoned, its climate warming fast.

Their solution was frighteningly simple – remove humans. Upload the entire human intelligence into digital form and let the planet recover.

But then the Swarm's agents made contact with two teenagers – Danny Munday and Jamila al-Sufi – who helped persuade them that humans should be given one more chance. That people can be a force for good. That we can put things right.

And that's when the Swarm made a terrible mistake.

When they departed, they left behind the faintest traces

of Swarm technology. The tiniest whispers of alien code that, in the wrong hands, could destroy the entire planet.

Advanced technology has brought so much good to our civilisation but there is always the danger that greedy people will abuse it for their own ends – or meddle in things they do not fully understand.

You see, in the eyes of an advanced intelligence, humans are little more than toddlers. And toddlers shouldn't be allowed to play with dangerous technology . . .


FIVE YEARS
FROM NOW . . .

CHAPTER ONE
POWERFUL SECRETS

Did you ever go to cheer on your best mate when she was trying out for athletics club? Did you ever clap and whoop for her as she sprinted over the hurdles, ignoring the looks you got off the cool kids?

And did you ever then see that best mate sprint straight *through* the final hurdle like it wasn't even there?

I'm thinking not.

As for me – Danny Munday, watching on a Wednesday with my eyes out on stalks – yep, you guessed. That's what happened to me. I saw my best mate Jamila's legs do the impossible. Straight. Through. The. Metal. Barrier.

Mr Sunaki, the games teacher, looked mind-blown. 'That was great work, Jamila! I didn't even see you jump that last one . . .'

Jamila looked as confused as I did. 'Well, I couldn't have run straight through it . . . could I?'

'Right.' Mr Sunaki blinked. 'I guess it was a trick of the light.'

Some trick, I thought, with a sick feeling in my stomach. I reckoned I might have another explanation.

Because me and Jamila have form with weird stuff. As you're going to find out.

'It's the high jump for you now, Jamila,' said Mr Sunaki.

'Sir, no!' Flustered, I stood up. 'That's not fair – she didn't do anything! I mean, nothing weird or . . .' I trailed off as I realised Mr Sunaki was looking at me oddly. 'Um. Right?'

'I meant, she'll be trying out for the high jump, Danny,' he said, and tutted. 'Quick breather and I'll see you over there, Jamila, OK?'

I was left standing red-faced, trying not to wilt under the withering stares from the cool kids.

Jamila jogged over to join me, holding up two sarcastic thumbs. 'Way to boost my rep, Danny-boy!'

Her thick black hair was pushed up in a scruffy ponytail, bouncing as she panted for breath. She grinned, genuine this time. 'Anyway, did you see my mega performance? What did you think?'

My smile was less certain. 'Er . . .'

'Let me help you out as usual.' She rubbed her chin, mock thoughtful. 'I think you saw *greatness*.'

'You felt all right running then?' I said. 'Nothing weird? Only, I thought I saw . . .'

'"Greatness",' Jamila insisted. 'That's the word you're groping for.'

She was wrong. I had a word; a word that was ready-made and good to go on the tip of my tongue. A word you wouldn't find in any dictionary. Not on this planet at least.

But I bit my tongue cos I was officially banned from saying that word – and a whole lot like it – out loud. Me and Jamila, we made a pinky swear five months ago: Never Talk About What Happened When *They* Came.

'We can't keep going over stuff in the past,' Jamila had decided. 'It was so intense, so out there. We have to

bury it or we'll never move forward with our normal lives.'

Well, she was moving forward now all right – straight through solid metal hurdles. My stomach felt all tight and tickly with worry at what her 'greatness' might mean.

'You went really fast,' I said. 'Jam, are you . . . feeling OK?'

'I'm feeling awesome,' Jamila said and struck a dramatic pose. 'Now I've got to do the high jump, then show what I can do in one of the throwing events.'

'Throwing up?' I suggested.

'Throwing the hammer,' said Jamila. 'At your head. So watch . . . out.' She swayed suddenly and blinked. 'Ow. Feels like someone's already lobbed a hammer at my skull.'

'Maybe you should sit down,' I said, feeling more and more worried. 'Come on, sit down with me.'

'Don't be so needy,' Jamila teased. 'I want to do well. I can do this. My mum is always moaning I don't do enough sports.'

'You mean gaming and stuffing Doritos with me doesn't count?'

'Strange but true,' said Jamila. 'Mum wants me doing something constructive.'

'Constructive!' I snorted. 'Jam, you basically saved the planet from . . .'

'Zip it, Munday!' Jamila was suddenly fierce and all up in my face. 'We agreed. No more talking about *that*.'

'I'm only saying—'

'Well, don't, OK?' She turned and stalked crossly away to where Mr Sunaki waited in front of the squashy blue crash mats. The horizontal bar had been placed in front of them, maybe a metre-forty high. I knew Jamila was good at PE and had great balance – most nights she secretly crossed from her house next door, out through her bedroom window and in through mine with a swing around the drainpipe in between – but I had no idea how she would get on with the high jump.

Mr Sunaki gestured vaguely to the bar as he checked his clipboard. 'Are you ready, Miss al-Sufi?'

Jamila didn't wait for him to be ready. As she neared the bar she broke into a half-run.

And then she broke the laws of physics.

She jumped and twisted in mid-air as she threw herself backwards over the bar. But her heels were going to strike it. Jamila saw and suddenly she jerked higher into the air, as if pulled on invisible elastic. She cleared the bar by about ten centimetres and kept travelling through the air until she overshot the crash mats and landed face down on the grass with a thud. The sound drew the attention of the cool kids who gave a slow hand clap.

'Jam!' I yelled and sprinted over to where she'd fallen. I might have made the athletics team myself if Mr Sunaki had been watching. But he was crouched beside Jamila by now, helping her sit up. She had a trickle of blood from her left nostril and looked woozy, out of it.

I pulled a tissue from my pocket and handed it to her. 'Gross,' she said, but took it anyway.

'Are you all right, Jamila?' Mr Sunaki looked shell-shocked. 'That jump . . . I never saw . . . are you . . . I mean . . . ?'

'I don't feel so good,' Jamila said, rubbing her head.

'You're lucky you didn't hurt yourself worse. You fell pretty hard.'

'I'll be OK in a minute, sir,' Jamila insisted.

'Nope. Your trial ends here. We should get you home but the bus isn't due to leave for another forty-five minutes.' Mr Sunaki pondered. 'Can your mum collect you?'

'She'll be taking my older brother into work,' Jamila said.

Mr Sunaki looked at me. 'Danny, your parents . . . ?'

'Since you ask, my dad's an astrophysicist who lives in Hawaii since the divorce and my mum's a radio astronomer who spends most of her life working with the Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank, so basically, no, not a chance in hell.' That's what I wanted to say. Instead I just wrinkled up my face and shook my head.

'We could call a taxi,' I suggested. Our playing fields are three miles from the main school campus – we share them with another academy – so we couldn't just walk back home. 'The bus will take ages.'

'Let me see what I can do,' said Mr Sunaki. 'Danny, take Jamila to the main gate – there's a bench there.'

'Hear that, Jam? A bench. We're spoiling you.'

I helped her stand and whispered in her ear. 'Do you feel sick? Stomach cramps? Burning heat in your veins?'

She gave me a sharp look as she realised what I was driving at. 'Danny, please, stop it.'

'Don't pretend stuff isn't happening,' I told her. 'Why won't you just talk about it?'

'Because I can't!' she hissed, pushing me away. 'You have no idea what it was like for me – trapped in the Internet without a body, trying to hold it together while my brain was blown about like smoke through the Wi-Fi. And all because of *them* . . .' Her grin from before was gone. She looked exhausted. Unhappy.

I didn't answer. For all I'd been going on at her to talk about things, I suddenly found I had no idea what to say.

It's tough, you know? When you've literally saved the whole world but you can never tell anyone cos no one would *ever* believe you. Me and Jam, we saved it from a hive mind of alien superbrains who thought the Earth would be a better place without human beings. Obvs we didn't do it alone – one of the Swarm helped us.

Her name was Adi. A-D-I: short for Alien Digital Intelligence.

And in order to help us, first Adi had to *change* us.

Let me put it like this: you know when you do your homework on the computer? It exists as a digital thing. You can copy it, download it, edit it, email it, send it pretty much anywhere. Or you can print it out as a hard copy so it's not digital any more – it's a physical thing you can touch.

Now swap out the homework for the one thing even scarier – *aliens*. Imagine aliens that exist as digital intelligences without form or mass. Aliens that can send themselves through space at the speed of light, like radio waves. When they reach a planet with advanced technology, they can get inside things like the Internet, copy themselves, spread all over the world. And imagine if they could create special machines to print themselves as flesh and blood . . . turn into physical beings with special powers that make them more than human. Powers to warp the world around them.

Powers that could, say, make a hurdle transparent or

bend solid metal just by thinking about it.

I'm sure you get where this is going.

Creepy as, right?

I could tell you so much more about the Swarm but I don't want to overload your puny Earthling brains (joke!) with backstory all at once. All you need to know right now is that when you turn a human body digital and then turn it back to normal, you get . . . complications.

And, trust me, I take complications to the max.

CHAPTER TWO
SOMEPLACE TO CRASH

'It's OK, Jam,' I said, as if saying that would magically make it true. But if nothing else, it did seem to bring a bright white minibus nosing into the car park.

A woman in her mid-twenties with dyed red hair sat at the wheel and she called to me as her window slid open. 'Excuse me.' She smiled, revealing teeth in train-track braces. 'You kids need a ride home? One of you not feeling so good?'

'That's right,' I said, jumping up from the bench. 'Good old Mr Sunaki. Come on, Jam. Not quite a taxi but it'll do.'

'Maybe if I think hard enough I can turn it *into* a taxi,' Jamila muttered as I helped her on board. 'That's the kind of stunt you pulled when *you* had alien juice inside you, right?'

'The more you use that alien juice, the more it hurts,' I told her. 'As I reckon you're finding out.'

Jamila isn't an alien, obvs. She's the most *human* human being I know. But, as I've been hinting so mysteriously, thanks to those aliens, the two of us were turned into digital versions of ourselves and later reprinted. I came out with genes full of alien energy – *energenes*. And those energenes gave me powers you can barely imagine. I could move through solid objects, I could change matter around me. The powers hurt me, made me feel sick, and it didn't take long to burn right through them. I was left normal again.

Jamila stayed digital for way longer than me, though, and was reprinted from a different machine. A more sophisticated machine. *So* sophisticated I thought it had brought Jamila back to real life exactly as she had been.

But what if it hadn't?

What if she'd come out with energenes too, or something even more powerful – and now they were ready to break out?

I helped Jamila into a seat halfway back and settled

in beside her. 'Look, Jam,' I said, 'maybe this is all a fuss about nothing. But if anything *is* up with you, I'm here to help, OK?' I glanced up to find the driver looking back at me.

'There's bad traffic on the A34,' she said. 'I'll take the back way into Didsbury.'

'Thanks,' I said. Jamila didn't say anything. Her eyes were closed and she was sound asleep. I felt a twinge of envy at the thought that Jam might be coming into powers. I'd known that thrill myself, and the fear that had come with it. But those feelings had faded and gone, and now I mostly only remembered the awesomeness of doing the impossible . . .

Except for when I saw Jam suffer.

'How's your friend?' asked the driver, glancing over her shoulder. 'How're you doing, Jam?'

'Jamila,' I said automatically. 'Only I call her Jam.'

'Sorry,' said the driver. '*Jamila* looks really rough.'

'She'll be fine,' I insisted, but I had to agree. Her face was wet with sweat and there were funny flutterings under her skin, like her muscles were having a party

while she slept.

'I really don't want her throwing up in here,' the driver said sternly. 'Keep a close eye. I'll be ready to pull over.'

'Don't hurl, Jam,' I whispered in her ear and she stirred. 'Repeat after me: I will not throw up. I will not throw—'

'The hammer,' Jamila said, her eyes snapping open. 'I was meant to throw the hammer.' She stared round in confusion. 'I'm never gonna get on the team if I don't do well in the hammer.'

'That's not happening today, Jam,' I told her. But Jamila had bunched her fist like she was really holding something. Then, eyes closed, still in her seat, she started swinging it over her head like she was Thor about to throw mighty Mjölnir. 'Jam, I'm pretty sure Mr Sunaki would say that's not the way to . . .'

I trailed off. Wispy trails of sparky blue energy were dancing in the circles Jamila was making with her hand, like she was a witch conjuring a spell. My stomach sank like a counterweight to my heart, which was rising

up into my mouth. I looked at the driver and found her watching the light show instead of the traffic.

She didn't look scared. There was awe in her eyes. She was transfixed.

'*Look out*!' I yelled. The minibus had strayed from the lane into the path of an oncoming truck. The truck's horn blasted as Driver Girl slammed on the brakes and yanked hard on the wheel. We went screeching off to the left.

And Jamila opened her hand holding the imaginary hammer.

A hole smashed open in the side of the minibus and the window above exploded. I thought we were going to overturn with the force of the impact, but Driver Girl brought the minibus back under control. I saw we had left the main road for a tarmacked lane on an industrial estate.

But we were still barrelling along really fast.

'Stop the bus!' I shouted.

'I've lost control,' the driver bawled back, wrestling with the gearbox and pumping the pedals, trying to bring down our speed. 'Nothing's working!'

We were heading straight for the wall of a warehouse.

'Get ready!' the driver shouted.

Ready to do what, I thought. Crash? I checked my seatbelt was buckled and then turned to Jamila. 'Wake up!' I shook her by the shoulders. Her eyes had rolled back in her head and I could see nothing but the whites. 'Stop this!'

She didn't respond. I could hardly hear myself over the giant roar from the engine. A wall of red bricks reared up ahead of us like a tsunami ready to smash into us with fatal force.

'For God's sake, Jam,' I yelled in her face. '*Please*!'

Jamila was shaking in my grip. I screwed up my eyes.

Then the sound of the engine stopped dead. A wave of heat thrummed through me.

'*Incredible!*' our driver breathed and I could hear wonder spark from every syllable.

It was like time had slowed around us. A hole opened up in the brickwork, like a tunnel, allowing us to pass. And the minibus rolled quietly through it, our momentum stolen in a single breath. Thank God there was nothing stored inside! A gap opened in the other side of the

abandoned warehouse and we were drawn towards it.

I clung to Jamila like a drowning man to driftwood as the minibus finally rolled gently to a stop outside the warehouse's far wall. My ears were ringing. I heard the minibus door open. By the time I looked over, Driver Girl had gone, rocketing away from the vehicle at an Olympian pace. I couldn't blame her.

Jamila went limp as lettuce in my arms. 'Hey,' I breathed. 'It's OK. We're safe.'

Her eyes opened, big and dark. 'I tried to picture a hole in the wall . . . and it *happened*.'

'Yes, it did.' Feeling sick with a mixture of fear and relief, I helped her up from her seat and we staggered out of the minibus. 'Have to hand it to you, Jam. You weren't even properly awake and you saved us.'

'After I nearly killed us.' Jamila bit her lip, gazing at the hole in the side of the vehicle. 'In my mind I was throwing a hammer . . .'

'Straight into real life,' I agreed. 'Come on. The driver legged it and we should too.' I looked at the holes smashed in the sides of the abandoned warehouse.

'Someone's bound to turn up soon and ask a whole lot of questions that we don't want to answer . . .'

'You're right,' said Jamila, and pointed past me, up towards the sky.

A drone was hovering there, its camera lens trained on the two of us.

'Where did that thing come from?' I breathed. 'Someone's watching us!'

'Not for long,' said Jamila and with a swipe of her hand, the drone came apart in a shower of metal and plastic parts that peppered the concrete around us.

'Wow.' I looked at her warily. 'That took care of that. You OK?'

'Think there's any more of those drone things?' Jamila was looking about, haunted, sweat trickling down from her hairline. 'Whoever's watching could be just around the corner.'

'Let's go,' I suggested.

'I have to see.' Jamila pushed out her hands towards the warehouse . . . and the entire building toppled over like it was made of Duplo with the most deafening

crash I'd ever heard. Bricks bounced everywhere in thick clouds of cement dust. I coughed, my hands clamped hard over my ears. Jamila puffed out a breath and the dust cleared in a handful of heartbeats. She stood, surveying the damage like a careless toddler who'd thrown her toys out of the pram.

I couldn't see any more drones and just then I didn't care. 'Right, we are leaving *now*.' I grabbed her by the arm and started to lead her away.

But then I found I couldn't move. My body was frozen still.

'Don't tell me what to do, Munday,' said Jamila quietly.

I couldn't move, not even my lips. Couldn't blink or swallow; it was like my whole body was holding its breath. I tried not to panic. The thump of my heart was still coming loud and I could feel the rush of blood in my temples as I fought against the paralysis. But what if all that stopped too?

Then suddenly I was falling forward, released. I fell to the ground and rolled over, staring up at Jamila, ready

to shout my head off at her.

But she was gazing down at me, clearly terrified, tears streaming down her face. 'Oh, God, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to, Danny. It's like I couldn't control myself . . .'

'But you can control everything else,' I said hoarsely. 'And that's a bad mix. Every cop in the city's gonna be out for this. Can we get away right now, please? Seriously. You need to rest.'

'Yeah. OK,' Jamila said. 'I think there's a bus stop at the top of the street . . .' She turned and stalked away from the disaster zone. I got up and followed, afraid she might turn her power on me again.

It was just an accident, I told myself. *I made plenty of mistakes when Adi gave me energenes*.

But that was exactly it – my powers had come from Adi. She was alien but she used her powers to help and protect, and so did I. Jamila's powers had come from Swarm agents – alien soldiers from the Hive Mind who wanted to remove human life.

If Jamila's mind had been affected by the Swarm's

bodyprinter . . . What the hell was I supposed to do?

Oh, Adi, I thought miserably. *I could really do with you here right now*.

But Adi had gone back into space, summoned by the Swarm; she'd developed an independent streak they didn't like and wound up paying the price. But how heavy was it?

I'd wondered what might have happened to her a thousand times, and never harder than right there and then at the bus stop back on the main road. Jamila had fallen asleep with her head on my shoulder, and I covered my face as a trail of speeding police cars howled past and swerved on to the potholed tarmac of the industrial estate. They would find a building that had fallen over by itself beside an abandoned minibus. I knew it wouldn't take long to follow the trail back to Mr Sunaki and my school who would want to know what the hell had gone down.

The bus finally came. I helped sleepy Jamila on board. We got a spot on the back seat. And as the bus pulled away slowly into the traffic, the bus stand's digital billboard caught my eye.

It was an ad for face cream or something. But the supermodel's face was flickering. My heart beat out a rising rhythm as I saw a different face trying to take its place: young, symmetrical. Highly cheekboned. Bright brown eyes, wide and pleading, banded with glitches and static.

I opened my mouth to shout: *Stop the bus! I need to go back . . . need to talk with her. She's the one person who could help . . . !*

But the face had already vanished from the billboard.

'No!' I banged my fist against the seat as I slumped back down beside Jamila.

'What is it?' Jamila murmured sleepily.

I didn't answer. Let it go. Chewed my lip.

But I was certain. Flickering there in the digital ad, I'd seen Adi's face.