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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ SCIENCE FICTION

Eyes of the Sage

Peter J. Ochs II
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Harrowing, tension-filled action scenes initiate empathy for the main character, making for an exciting, page-turning read.

In the tradition of Indiana Jones, an excursion into the Arabian Peninsula turns into a mystical encounter with the unknown in *Eyes of the Sage*. Forces beyond comprehension propel this action-filled story through a series of puzzling scenarios, leading to the discovery of an ancient civilization that disappeared after eight hundred years of activity. The foundation for a potentially award-winning plot is in place.

When the lead archaeologist dies during an important expedition, an astrophysicist steps in to investigate. The story is told from the perspective of Dr. Russell Hatcher, who interprets the strange happenings associated with this foreboding area in the Oman desert. His goal is to unearth, literally and figuratively, the legend behind an extinct society: a fatherly mentor who appeared again and again over the course of nearly a millennium until a dam collapsed, burying his secrets in the annals of time.

A strong concept, but weak in structure and presentation, *Eyes of the Sage* may be better suited to the big screen. In an attempt to turn a literary project into a visual experience, Ochs has included an arrangement of peripheral material typical of nonfiction—maps, photos, diagrams, charts, and artwork. The result is a computer-generated notebook in a cut-and-paste layout that displays an interesting foundation for an excellent science-fiction thriller, but in the end proves distracting and interferes with reading enjoyment.

Action scenes, however, will captivate even a jaded connoisseur of the anticipated “hidden” realm: “Hatcher was falling down a dark shaft. Squarish lights whizzed by his side as if he were falling down an elevator shaft and floor numbers on each landing were going by. He kept falling. There seemed to be no bottom to the shaft.”

Earlier in the book, a watery nightmare advances the plot, escalating tension: “He took a breath, ducked under and stabilized himself against the wall before coming back up again. But now his face smashed against the ceiling. He was still below the surface. He frantically pawed his way across the ceiling to find space.”

It is in these moments that Ochs accomplishes what every storyteller strives for when relating a harrowing event: page-turning concern for a character. The building blocks for creating a standout tale appear to be in place. With proper formatting and clear vision for the final product—novel or screenplay—Ochs’ mesmerizing plot holds a real potential for development.

Those with patience and a genuine fascination with the process of brainstorming may find this work a worthwhile pursuit, but the packaging, suitable for distribution to trusted readers early in the development stage, does not live up to commercial expectations.

Ochs has lived and worked in Oman, enabling him to write with knowledge about his story’s setting. He published the first English-language travel guide to the country. *Eyes of the Sage* is his fiction debut.
JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (October 1, 2013)

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