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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ SCIENCE FICTION

Progenitor: Palak and the Sky Gods

Patrick T. German
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Science fiction fans have to love a bad guy who likes the thought of being worshipped. Such is the character of Lozerick, who, like his father and grandfather before him, is one of a piratical band of mining engineers, poachers, slavers, and genetic manipulators known for “raping planets of metals, metalloids, and sometimes even life forms.”

It is a shame that Patrick T. German does not start this first book in his triology with an introduction to his best character, as many readers might not make it through the ten chapters devoted to the prehistoric hunter Palak and his people, who are the book’s focus before Lozerick’s triumphant descent from his spaceship onto their planet. Though Lozerick is mentioned in the brief prologue, it is only when readers actually meet him that they will find that most delightful of all characters: the villain they love to hate!

Along with most of the other humanoid inhabitants of the mineral-rich planet Medias, Palak and his people are rather dim-witted primitives who hunt and battle with sticks and stones. He is a version of the “noble savage” that has long been a staple of fiction, science or otherwise; both Palak and Watooni, his “red woman,” would be at home in any number of novels from a variety of eras, drawn as they are from that great central casting bin of stock caveman characters and caricatures.

Lozerick, however, is a gem. He is a selfish, pompous, manipulative, and all-around loathsome yet wonderfully playful antagonist. This is a villain who “delights in devastation.” When Lozerick tells his pet mercenary killing machine, known only as the Captain, that on this planet he is God, one cannot help but smile at his hubris. His name may not be in the subtitle, but it should be, for the novel belongs to him. And while German obviously does not want his readers rooting for the villain, it’s hard not to.

Progenitor features other cavemen from other tribes, as well as other “Sky Gods,” as the space-faring races competing to loot the planet are known to the prehistoric primitives. But Lozerick, who at times “is nearly beside himself with joy” with dreams of pillage, is the most memorable character, standing head and shoulders over everyone else in the book (and not only when he is wearing his special suit of armor that is built to make him look taller).

Unfortunately, the first third of the volume is devoted to Palak’s tribe and their daily grind. Only when German finally gets past that portion and finds his stride does the novel become a fun read. For those who persevere through the opening chapters, however, there are rewards aplenty to be found in *Progenitor*.

For those who can’t tell a brogar from a grumble, the author provides a welcome legend of creatures, characters, and planets. He also includes four chapters of the sequel, which looks to be an improvement on the original.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (November 9, 2012)

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