

Retrogenesis 1: The Anomaly

Robert Swann

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Harnessing natural forces to enrich our quality of life may also hold the potential to destroy humanity, an alarming dilemma explored in Robert Swann's *Retrogenesis 1*. Two geniuses discover an earth-moving technology so powerful that every country will clamor to achieve control. In the hands of a dictatorship on Recovery Island, a land created like no other, the leaders are in a position to selectively provide help to those in need, or to withhold the technology to nations that appear to seek financial gain alone.

Formidable and strange, this first installment of a three-part series captures the reader with a provocative idea, yet falters in delivering an action-driven plot with a sense of immediacy. Though coherent and well edited, the book often *tells* rather than *shows* the story of an "anomaly" after a global financial catastrophe.

Peppered with brainy scientists and intimidating heads of state, a heady conglomeration of characters parades across the pages. At times intriguing, this approach does help to push the plotline through awkward conflict and intellectual discussion with a sinister political slant. Sophisticated and subtle, the decidedly reserved style might have benefited from a faster pace and shorter narrative. Explanatory dialogue reveals essential detail and tends to lecture rather than flow in a conversational pattern. On the other hand, introspection hits the right tone.

In the following excerpt, Swann's ability to elicit a sense of wonder is evident. DK, a respected columnist, contemplates his surroundings: "The table at which he sat gave him a view of all the dock activity and the monocot commercial warehouses and offices. He mused as he finished his coffee about the fact that five years ago this island didn't exist; it had been open Atlantic some 500 miles north of the Azores, yet here it was a thriving community with a GNP that would put some large countries to shame. It had no raw materials that he was aware of; it had grown somehow barren from the sea in a geometrically controlled and engineered shape."

The mesmerizing geological concept is ideally suited to series development and with this the author has a gem in the making.

Robert Swann lives on the south coast of Devon in the UK. His first novel, *Retrogenesis 1* is inspired by his extensive travel as a management consultant. His characters are derived from outstanding people he met in exotic locales, and countless hours in airports allowed him to extensively contemplate his project. In upcoming books in the series, the story could take directions that would intrigue not only a diehard science fiction fan, but a mainstream book-lover as well.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (May 27, 2011)

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