

Terranova: The Black Petaltail, Book One

Martin W. Lewis

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“Political reform came first. Remember what a bind we were in during the first decade of the millennium?” the author writes. “The United States was bogged down in two nasty wars, unhinged by terrorism, and hardly able to deal with natural disasters. Policy remained based on mass ownership of gasoline-powered automobiles. The government was oblivious to climate change and unwilling to accept the fact that the oil market was funding global strife.”

By the 2030s Silicon Valley will be redesigned as a pedestrian-oriented city surrounded by restored wilderness and wildlife, as California and the west again lead the nation in cultural innovation. In *Terranova, Book One: The Black Petaltail*, Martin W. Lewis presents a vision of the near future in which energy problems have been solved, reform has brought improvement to social pathology, and a very recent explosion in knowledge and technology has helped improve life. Most amazing of all is the technology of teleportation, which allows exploration of earthlike planets light-years away. Human life is discovered on Terranova, and it is learned that war is spreading across the planet. The research team is faced with the ethical dilemma of how much surveillance to do, and whether they should try to communicate—or interfere.

Multiple plot lines are masterfully woven together here, including the discovery of Terranova, Malcolm's fumbling romantic interest, and Shanna's inner struggles as she accepts employment from Bowman Alexander, whom she considers unethical; on Terranova, readers learn about the alien culture, the conduct of war, and efforts to rescue the society from disintegration.

Discussing the use of cyborg insects as part of the technology transported to Terranova, Alexander says, “For the Terranova operation, our dragonflies were programmed to hover and occasionally dart about in a realistic manner...It's unlikely that any of them will be found, and if a few are it's doubtful that anyone will figure out that they are anything but insects.” But one of the dragonflies is not only noticed, but captured—and dissected. The already interesting plot will take a dramatic turn in book two.

Terranova is an intelligent and well-written novel filled with action, tension, cultural insight, the promise of romance and plenty of details about technology, religion, philosophy, sociology, linguistics, paleontology, and biology, as well as accurate facts about the San Francisco Bay area history and geography. The author has done his homework to make the story accurate and believable. With continually deepening characters and the unfolding of a new culture, it is a fascinating account of social struggles on Earth as well as on Terranova. The map of Terranova could be better, but readers who enjoy science fiction about other worlds will look forward to part two.

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