

The Antorus Saga: Prequel

Mukhtar Farid

CreateSpace (May 20, 2013)

Softcover \$8.49 (26pp)

978-1-4848-8781-3

The Antorus Saga: Prequel, by Mukhtar Farid, is a short sci-fi story with a conventional premise that needs more work before it can stand out in the crowded science-fiction market.

The twenty-six-page, large-print format makes it unclear whom this work is intended for. The trim size, type size, and page count suggest it's for children, but the pictureless pages are clearly for older readers. The multicolored, mysterious cover art, though, does give readers a good idea of the type and tone of fiction the book will contain.

The story takes place over four brief chapters. Set in the 2280s, it follows Doctor Atkins Jacob and Captain Ellison as they try to outsmart the very android creatures they created. The plot falls in familiar territory within the conventions of the science-fiction genre and covers a great deal of time and space for the number of words and pages in the book. Henry the hacker (a fairly realistically premised character) is arrested by the FBI for downloading pirated software.

Dialogue content and formatting are particularly confusing. There are no paragraph breaks, and it often feels like a line of dialogue is missing, leaving readers in a constant state of wondering what just happened. Run-on sentences confuse readers and destroy any mounting tension and suspense. And at times, the author seems to be parroting movies: "Remember this mission is a priority!"

Misused, incorrectly spaced punctuation (paragraph-ending periods at the start of the next paragraph, no spaces around commas, hyphens in place of dashes) and inconsistent capitalization of terms and chapter titles make this book look like an early draft. The text also contains plot-confusing errors, such as "General Stevens ordered Stevens to give the location of the hacker."

Farid seems to have a better sense of gadgetry—he talks about futuristic phones and "jetcopters"—than of the military and medical professions of his characters. Research into these professions could have yielded deeper narrative detail.

The subtitle tells readers that this is a prequel, but it is not clear what it is a prequel to. The volume also does not provide any information about the author, but it is obvious that he is interested in futuristic technology. Unfortunately, Farid's fascination with the subject does not translate into a story that will engage readers.

MELISSA WUSKE (May 31, 2013)

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