ForeWord Reviews
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SCIENCE FICTION

The Archaeologist Reborn
Thomas E. Martin
Strategic Book Publishing
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Three Stars (out of Five)

"Imagining Mars" once meant dreaming of alien civilizations and fantastic creatures. Modern science may have diminished the fantasy, reducing discoveries on Mars to an analysis of ice crystals and dust particles, but some still hold on to the possibility of life on the red planet. Thomas E. Martin brings back the dream in his futuristic and nostalgic debut novel.

Set in the middle of the twenty-first century, The Archaeologist Reborn takes off at top speed, launching the reader into a world of secret caverns, powerful medicines, and hovering spaceships. This is the world of John Cayman, an archaeologist fueled by his belief that he can uncover proof of human life on Mars. He will do anything to make the trip.

While a novel about space travel is necessarily forward-looking, Martin's story is also an homage to an earlier age in science fiction. Recalling the pulp fiction of the early 1900s, Martin celebrates the genre of "space opera" with a story that is heavy on drama and action, and light on character development. Martin revisits the themes popularized by Edgar Rice Burroughs in his Barsoom tales, such as lost civilizations and ancient cultures on a distant planet.

This is classic science fiction, with aliens, utopian societies, and plenty of high-tech gadgets. Martin sometimes glosses over the scientific particulars. For instance, he dismisses a query about magnetism on Mars as simply "technology that Earth's scientists don't understand yet." At other times, though, he gives the science its due, explaining DNA manipulation and the makeup of the Martian atmosphere.

Martin aims to move the action along, to take the reader hurtling through space to land bewildered and awed by miracles on Mars. He gives less attention to character nuance, although he clearly delineates John Cayman's transformation from a cool, distracted scientist to a loving husband. Doing so, he again recalls early Burroughs stories in which the character "John Carter of Mars" also experiences rebirth.

Also well drawn is General Carley, holder of the key to the Mars mission. He makes sophisticated closed-door deals in Washington while puffing a cigar and hoisting up his pants by

the belt loops. His colorful dialogue with DC insiders improves upon the somewhat artificial conversations of other characters.

Surprise discoveries punctuate the adventures of all of Martin's characters, even within the familiar science fiction setting. No outcome is a given in this story, right up to an ending that gives a whole new meaning to the theme of rebirth.

Sheila M. Trask