

The Beginning

Michael R. Nardo

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This sci-fi thriller set in Iraq is well paced and riveting.

Michael R. Nardo's *The Beginning*, an action-packed story of alien contact, seethes with government cover-ups and gun battles in a remote region of Iraq.

When lowing, winged creatures deliver an artifact to the Mount of Tiamat in Iraq, the US government is quick to intervene. Taking possession of the mound, the military flies in experts to interpret the alien gift and struggles to maintain control over the territory where the aliens have made contact. But their attempts to cover up the artifact and the existence of the alien species known as the Annunaki may prove to be futile.

In addition to the interesting opening and exciting conclusion, *The Beginning* features several solid action sequences, often between US forces and al-Qaeda. This gives the book the feel of a war novel as much as a story about aliens. The action is critical in keeping the book interesting, though it sometimes causes the plot to diverge from the central theme of alien contact. Nevertheless, the story is well paced and riveting, seamlessly combining conspiracy theories and dogfights.

The revelation that the Annunaki initially created humans to work in mines for their own purposes introduces an element of moral iffiness unusual in this genre. Despite the book's implication that the Annunaki are ethically superior to humans in that the great sages of history were supposedly Annunaki messengers, the aliens seem most concerned with environmental safety. Humanity might have good reason to distrust neighbors who only appear when their own existence is threatened, and a more interesting alien narrative could result from literary conditions like these. Sadly, *The Beginning* doesn't explore the Annunaki's ethical ambiguity any further.

The Beginning is slightly stilted in tone, often telling instead of showing details that could serve to increase both reader immersion in the story and the solidity of the characters. For example, a character "clearly [feels] isolated and embarrassed," but never turns red, dithers angrily, or storms off. Because of this tendency, characters occasionally come across as flat. However, dialogue often compensates for this weakness, and most characters are interesting and, if not completely three-dimensional, then certainly worth reading about.

Drawing upon modern UFO and extraterrestrial theory, *The Beginning* presents the most interesting parts of both advanced alien technology and lowbrow human violence. There is sure to be something for every reader here, but conspiracy theorists may find it most appealing. Fans of military science fiction may also enjoy the unusual combination of war zone and alien contact.

ANNA CALL (July 21, 2015)

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