



The Drakos Effect

Joe Sharcoff

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The Drakos Effect is an absorbing science fiction parable that unfolds with heart, action, and thoughtfulness.

In Joe Sharcoff's captivating and polished *The Drakos Effect*, an enthusiastic astrobiologist and an unusual alien work to secure humanity's place in the universe.

In the early 2100s, humanity draws the attention of a conglomerate of intelligent species. A race of plantlike aliens known as Cephians serve as emissaries; they intend to judge Earth's readiness to join their peaceful community.

Astrobiologist Shana Savarino forms a unique bond with the Cephians. She never doubts the conglomerate's intentions, even as she struggles with ensuring the positive outcome of the judgement process. But the process stretches out for more than forty years. Human beings splinter into factions that grow restless. Terrorist attacks increase in number.

Then an object is discovered in a dinosaur-era impact crater. It predates the conglomerate and holds troubling information about an ancient race. As humans and Cephians examine it, the object awakens and threatens Earth—and, potentially, all of life. Savarino wants to protect and uplift humanity, and must work in consideration of the object to do so; her struggle is engaging.

The object—a probe/guardian robot programmed with sentience and a directive to protect its charges—bonds with Savarino. With a fractured consciousness, the object wars with itself; it finds itself unable to control its war-oriented side. The device proves to be a flawed and sympathetic character in its own right—one that propels the plot forward compellingly.

While the book's main conflict arises between humans and the unseen conglomerate, the most captivating sections focus on the divisions on Earth, between those who are inclined to trust distant aliens or those prepared to wage war to protect the planet.

Through the perspectives and actions of the Cephians, Savarino, and the object, the narrative contemplates issues of morality and ethics. As humans are examined by outside beings, characters have to consider their actions through the lens of the unknowable conglomerate. When the object forces events to a dramatic conclusion, the outcome hinges on the greater good and the price of doing what's right.

Prose flows wonderfully, marked by sharp and varied sentences of pleasing lengths. Pacing is rhythmic, and scenes are appropriately laid out. Characters are built well; the goals of each are clearly drawn, even when they threaten disaster. Science fiction concepts are either explained in context, not at all, or in breezy explanations, all of which keep the narrative on a even keel throughout. A cliffhanger ending resolves the main conflict while opening the door to tantalizing mysteries about the conglomerate and those who came before it.

The Drakos Effect is an absorbing science fiction parable examining the importance of action versus inaction. It

unfolds with heart, action, and thoughtfulness.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May 23, 2018)

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