



The Prophecy Gene

Stuart D. Schooler

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The Prophecy Gene is an intriguing ecological thriller and adventure.

Stuart D. Schooler's *The Prophecy Gene* is a complex eco-thriller that employs elements of science fiction to draw its points out.

Cousins Sarah and Michael travel to Uzbekistan on Sarah's research grant. Sarah is there to examine the effects of an environmental disaster in the Aral Sea. Michael is a journalist, trying to regain his reputation after a reportorial faux pas by tracking Sarah's finds for his editor.

Camping near a massive animal die-off site, Sarah and Michael have a hallucinatory meeting with an invisible intelligence calling itself M'low Cloom—MC to the cousins. This being tasks them with a specific agenda and proves that it has the power to enforce its commands.

Schooler's characters are fully realized. The familial banter between Michael and Sarah, who grew up together from early childhood, is well rendered. The love between them is obvious, even when they irritate each other. They are built up relatably and as individuals, with their own quirks, strengths, and foibles.

MC's otherworldly presence provides the impetus for the cousins' journeys and is believable despite the potential for oversaturation. Its nonterrestrial intelligence is powerful enough to make things happen around Sarah and Michael that persuade them to comply; the cousins are wary of MC as a result.

A former Soviet Army helicopter pilot, Oishkipeh, proves to be a solid foil to the cousins' achievement of MC's objectives. The pilot is not all that he first seems; he is working for someone else, and his methods of gathering information could have come straight out of a Soviet-era KGB manual.

Professor Peter Barber, under whose aegis Sarah has wrangled the funds and academic credentials to carry out MC's mission, is the most stereotypical character in the book, with his penchant for younger women and desire for positions of power and fame. Sarah is aware of these flaws and exploits them for her own purposes.

The story is excitingly paced, moving forward steadily and never losing its sense of control. An abundance of detail marks the story as it progresses, but instead of taking the form of information dumps, specifics are spread evenly and reasonably through dialogue and narrative turns. Character backgrounds and the necessary amount of context are both delivered smoothly and naturally.

With engaging main characters, an alien force, and a compelling mix of genres, *The Prophecy Gene* is an intriguing ecological thriller and adventure.

J. G. STINSON (December 16, 2017)

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