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Carmen Dula and her husband spent six years travelling to the distant home of the powerful race known as "The Others," in the hopes of forging a truce. But by the time Carmen returns to Earth, fifty years have passed-and the Earthlings have built a flotilla of warships to defend Earth against The Others.

But The Others have more power than anyone could imagine-and they will brook no insolence from the upstart human race.

Starbound Details

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Philip Shade says

I've largely outgrown Haldeman's style. He consistently comes up with ideas and concepts that make readers sit and ponder the larger implications, especially of technologies effects on humankind, but writing-wise I think the series (Marsbound, Starbound, Earthbound) are probably better suited for a YA audience.

Still, I stayed up till 1 AM to finish it, and the ending left me wanting to run out to the library and get the final book.

Travis says

What a bitterly disappointing turd when held up to what "The Forever War" was. It feels like Haldeman set out trying to write a young adult novel with relatively simplistic characters- but somewhere he decided to add copious amounts of sex to keep everyone else from falling asleep. Rather than adding flavor, it only makes things come off more than a little weird. None of these characters have any interesting or driving force of personality. The changes between POV every chapter (at least give me a heading so I know whose head I'm in now?) are disorienting at the least. Unforgivably confusing at worst. Because there are no distinct personalities everyone's perceptions bleed together into an indistinguishable mash of "oh-I-remember-someone-thought-that." The alien personalities seem to exist purely for the sake of comic relief. No realism or fleshing out at all. Everyone on this diplomatic mission is uninspiring. Rather than sending along some of earths best and brightest (whose thoughts might actually be interesting) we instead get a farcical cast of contaminated rejects who don't even have a game plan once they reach the all powerful "others."

Robert Laird says

Starbound is a sequel to the Marsbound novel by Haldeman. I found both to be very enjoyable stories, strictly hard-sf, so no funny business. When beginning Marsbound, my first impression was that the story was written very simplistically and with no guile. However, after reading both and reflecting on the overall story, I decided that it is deceptive: the story (I use the singular since the two novels are really one story) covers a lot of ground, the characterizations develop fully if slowly, and Haldeman is able to get his ideas across in a seemingly simple manner, yet everything is fully fleshed out. Well, the important parts of the story are, anyway. For once, I felt the story could have added much more detail and still been interesting. I don't want to say he rushed through the story, but if he had spent more time with the depth of the side-stories, it could have been excellent. I liked it more, the more I thought about it.

Dan says

I enjoy Haldeman's writing style, and this one doesn't disappoint. His handling of much of the minutia of living and traveling in space is generally well-written, and like his other books there's a little hedonism thrown in here and there to keep you on your toes. There's plenty of hard sci-fi in here (pun intended).

Anyway, Haldeman does a good job telling an interesting story with realistic characters without the book being too wordy. There are many hard-sci-fi elements in the book, but the author doesn't bombard you with it. Starbound is 2nd in a trilogy, but it would function very well on its own, I think, as Marsbound does. I await the real punchline in his next book, Earthbound.

Allen says

The best part of this book was the changing perspective. Told from the first person, the storyteller changed with nearly every chapter after the first few. Sometimes it was hard to pick up who was telling the story, other times it was pretty simple. like most sequels, the story wasn't as good as the first, and I felt like the end was a little rushed. just like the first book, though, as soon as I was done I reached for the next (and in this case, the final) book in the series.

Tim says

I usually think people are too hard on Haldeman these days, but this one just wasn't up to snuff. I liked getting back with the characters from "Marsbound" (which I liked quite a bit) and seeing what happened as a result of the events in that book...

However, the shifting narrators here was annoying. AND it did not have to be. Yes, I could discern who was talking after reading for few sentences (or in some cases paragraphs) but why did I need to? That took my focus from the story & unlike a really good read...I always knew I was just reading words on a page. Just having the character's name near the chapter title would have made this a more enjoyable read.

Still, I liked it.

Falbs says

I really enjoyed reading this one. It's a great follow up to Marsbound. The aliens are fascinating and alien enough to be more believable than most of the crap out there. Also, a truly killer ending. I've read so many books recently that just leave you hanging that it's nice to read something with some resolution, and it sure as hell is not a 'happily ever after' kind of thing.

Erin says

One thing I love about Haldeman is how he throws a ton of ideas at the reader in a relatively short book. He's very much a hard sci-fi writer in that way, although he also delves into the psychology of how humans would react to an alien species. This is also one of the things I don't like about Haldeman, because any one of the ideas he approaches here (monogamy in human relationships, mental illness, mass murder, faith in God, not to mention first contact with an alien species incomprehensible to humans) could be its own book in another writer's hands. That's not to say a better writer; just a different one.

I particularly liked Namir in this book - his experience as a Mossad agent during a biological attack against Israel that killed 4 million people gives him the most depth of all the characters. He carries that experience with him and provides much of the psychological depth in the story. I hope to see more of him in the next one.

Ove says

Starbound left me conflicted, I have had to have a few days to think it over before writing a review. After the human race's near extinction from an exploding martian the earth authorities decide to send an expedition after the mysterious Other's starship that left the solar system heading for what might be the Others home world.

Carmen Dula and her husband have spent six years travelling to a distant solar system that is home to the enigmatic, powerful race known as "The Others," in the hopes of finding enough common purpose between their species to forge a delicate truce.

By the time Carmen and her party return, fifty years have been consumed by relativity-and the Earthlings have not been idle, building a massive flotilla of warships to defend Earth against The Others. But The Others have more power than any could imagine-and they will brook no insolence from the upstart human race. From the Product Description.

This book continues the story from Marsbound and will continue in Earthbound. Carmen, also called the Mars girl is one of the protagonists of this story. She was the first one to meet a Martian, now she is going on a possible suicide mission to the stars together with her husband Paul, another mars bound couple, two martians and a married husband-wife-husband military-spy-specialist triplet from earth.

The story is mainly told as the crew members log entries, blog posts if you like. It works pretty well, in some chapters it takes a while until you have identified the voice. I enjoyed that you get different points of view on events and personalities. Even the martians blog.

The martians are portrayed with an underhanded humor that underline their amusement and bafflement with their human crew mates. The martian is also interesting because they where constructed by the Others thousand of years ago to be their tools of communication with the humans. I enjoyed the martians very much.

When the human crew are not fornicating with each other or contemplating fornication they struggle with high tension. Is it a suicide mission? Are there hidden agendas? Are there spys among us? Will we be able to make peace with the Others? What will happen if we fail? etc. Characterization felt a bit sketchy to be honest, and that I feel is an important weakness with this book as so much rides on the interpersonal interactions of a little group on a starship heading into danger.

The world is also interesting but a bit dark. The terrorist attack on Israel that wiped out almost everyone there in a single day is an important part of the back story. Earth is again, like in so many of today's stories, an ecological disaster as well as ruled by oppressive states. As one of the crew said it is "one big happy police-state family". The Israel twist where inventive.

Relativity and time dilation plays a major part of this story as well as in Forever War. The technology of the

Others live up to “An advanced enough technology would be indistinguishable from magic “. They also have serious trust issues, which is explained in an interesting and convincing way in the book. The prospect of Homo Sapiens is slim if we choose conflict, so what will we do?

Not a bad book, nor an excellent, it is somewhere in between for me. It took a little long time before the action started and when it did it was over in no time. I would recommend it if you like mysterious aliens and Defying Gravity-esque personal interaction.

I haven't read Marsbound, and it is supposed to be a better read than this one, maybe it suffers from middle-book-itis.

A.R. Norris says

This was the perfect example of how not to write in 1st POV...and multiple characters in 1st POV to boot.

I was so excited to follow up with this series after reading Marsbounds, which I thought rocked. However, it was clear within the first couple chapters that I'd struggle to even finish. The characters were only 2 dimensional and focused mostly on themselves and the sex lives of the others.

There was no clear antagonist. I mean, I understand that the Others really are the over arching bad guys, but they don't even get there until the last couple chapters. I needed some more subplot development to sustain the long journey! Plus, once they arrived, the story never even explored that dynamic to its fullest extent.

The Others were a problem for me in general. It's hard to develop an "evil them" and unfortunately Halderman wasn't able to pull this off well in Starsbound. We didn't get a full understanding of why they'd evolved in the direction they did. What it ended up as was a overly sensitive, paranoid Interstellar Mob pushing their power for no other reason than because...well, because.

The SF tech was spot on as usual for Halderman. This is just one of those examples that really enforces the need for an actual story behind the tech.

Ron says

A continuation of the Marsbound story which I found interesting but Halderman seem to over indulge with sexual exploits in both books. This is not needed or wanted in a SF book , just get on with the story. The "others" (could he have tried a better name?) are a powerful race of non DNA beings that live at extreme cold temperatures and are seemingly in control of much of the galaxy. How beings like this could ever have made a fire much less be millions of years ahead in technology is beyond me. With all their tech and power they don't really care if a "normal" room temperature race of beings lives or dies (and they have killed some). I guess this is alien logic. Worth reading but you have to start with Marsbound then decide.

Neal says

Joe Haldeman is one of my favorite authors, but this book is a literal (and literary) train wreck. First, every

chapter is written from the first person POV of one of the characters, and it switches every (short) chapter. Half the time I had no idea which character was actually doing the 1st person narration, because Haldeman doesn't provide an ample clue via dialogue or narration. After half the book is done I started to get a feel for who was narrating, but it wasn't always obvious. Really, REALLY frustrating because I often felt lost.

Secondly, the first half of the book is abysmal, involving the characters on a journey to meet the "Others." They spend the entire trip screwing one another, while secretly lamenting that each other's spouses are also screwing other people. It's takes a very reprehensible (and unlikable) person to do these things, then display feelings that they do...but continue to do it. It made me want to see the ship plow into a random star on the way to Wolf 25 and burned to ash so I'd never have to read about them again. The entire "free love" garbage just fell utterly disjointed, completely unnecessary, and out of place to the storytelling because it had absolutely ZERO bearing on what was happening other than to introduce some drama during the many years long journey. It read like a really shitty soap opera (yes, that statement is redundant).

Thirdly, the story is driven mostly by dialogue. An overly heavy technique I'm not fond of, that makes a story feel like it's just a group of people sitting around a table talking the entire book. Ugh. John Scalzi is becoming guilty of this, and I no longer read his books anymore because of it.

Thankfully the second part of Starbound picks up with some actual story involving meeting Other-prime and Spy. Marsbound was a decent read, and the first part of Starbound is easily 1 star, while the second half is 3 stars (overall 2).

I hope this trilogy is somewhat salvaged with Earthbound...not holding out much hope. Unfortunately, Joe Haldeman glory days of The Forever War are far behind him, and he's seen much better days as a writer and storyteller.

Alex says

Quickly read over the weekend. It feels a lot like a nice space opera: fun and engaging, a page turner which focuses more on the human interaction between people (though at a very shallow level considering a year can pass in the space of a few pages). I enjoyed it as much as a high quality miniseries.

Nola Redd says

A good story, but still annoyingly sexist. The point of view switches each chapter, and it can be hard to tell who the narrator is, since they're all told in first person. I once read three pages thinking it was A before I realized it was B, and that wasn't the only time; I frequently had to re read to figure it out.

Jamie Collins says

This is the middle book in the Marsbound/Starbound/Earthbound trilogy. I've read most of Haldeman's work, and I like his writing. This was a quick, smooth read, despite the admittedly confusing first-person POV changes. (It was obvious when the "Martian" was speaking, but Carmen and Namir sounded too much alike, and often it would take me a few paragraphs to figure out which one was speaking.) I liked the characters,

and the story of their confinement for years in a spacecraft was interesting, even with the focus on bed-hopping that everyone was oh-so-cool about.

However, the plot didn't do much for me. I dislike stories with omnipotent, omniscient, essentially godlike aliens, and unfortunately the author is fond of them. This book also suffers from the unsatisfying ending that is typical of the middle part of a trilogy. I was a little disappointed, but I'm sure I'll read the next book, just because it's Haldeman.
