



Archangel

Marguerite Reed

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Earth is dying, and we have begun the search for a new home. Our hopes are pinned on Ubastis, an untamed paradise at the edge of colonized space. But such an influx of people threatens the planet's unstudied ecosystem — before these settlers arrive, a tenuous research colony must complete its essential and desperate analysis, lest humanity abandon one planet only to die on another.

The Ubasti colonists barely get by on their own. To acquire the tools and supplies they truly need, the colonists are relegated to selling whatever they can to outside investors. For xenobiologist Vashti Loren, this means bringing Offworlders on safari to hunt the specimens she and her fellow biologists so desperately need to study.

Haunted by the violent death of her husband, the heroic and celebrated Lasse Undset, Vashti must protect herself, her daughter, and all of Ubastis in order to draw alliances with old enemies, re-evaluate old friends, and take planet-wide action against those who threaten her world. Vashti stands at the threshold of humanity's greatest hope, and she alone understands the darkness of guarding paradise.

Archangel Details

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From Reader Review Archangel for online ebook

Holly Cochran says

Reed has written the book every writer wants to write. Nearly perfect in plotting, character development and world building, Archangel has something to delight even the most jaded science fiction reader. The story of Vashti and Ubastis is rich in detail, deeply researched and expertly combined into a tale so engaging it is difficult to believe this is the author's first outing.

Wesley Fox says

A complex and at times difficult read, Archangel is an interesting and unique sci-fi novel. With topics ranging from genetic engineering to criminal law, author Marguerite Reed challenged herself with this novel and shares a lot of interesting ideas, but the story left something to be desired.

After Earth becomes a wasteland, humanity desperately searches for a new home world. Vashti Loren is a xenobiologist studying a prospective world named Ubastis. Scientists and explorers like Loren are there to ensure colonization is possible and safe for the people and indigenous life. Four years before the start of the novel, her husband, a famous colonial leader, was brutally murdered by a genetically engineered super soldier. These soldiers are nicknamed Beasts. To further complicate matters, the wife of the Ubasti governor illegally brings a Beast into the community, becoming a stark reminder of her loss.

The novel is about Loren confronting tragedy personified by the newly arrived Beast and finally moving past it for the good of her daughter and her world.

The first thing that struck me about the novel was the instability of the narrator. There are erratic swings in mood and occasional incoherence in her thinking. It makes me wonder if she was really the best first-person narrator for this story. There are abrupt changes in subject, strange word usage, and outbursts that don't seem to come with any consequences for her. At the same time, I found myself admiring her intelligence, strength and unique stereotype-shattering personality. She was very aware her behavior was odd and may threaten her custody of her daughter. Despite her struggles, she was surprisingly insightful, self-aware, and brutally honest.

She wasn't alone in odd behavior. It seemed many of the characters could swing from polite and cordial, to downright nasty in a split-second then back to normal. Dialogue and mannerisms shifted a lot, creating sudden tension then dissipating into nothing. At times, this led to somewhat incoherent exchanges. Some of the characters were absolutely awful, in particular the offworlders. It's clear the author is an advocate of an ecofriendly pastoral existence with population controls to protect the environment. The influence of Malthus is pretty heavy.

Unfortunately, her examination of these topics are painfully one-sided, using stereotypes and strawmen for the antagonists. As someone who prefers villains with depth and complexity, this was disappointing for me.

Ubastis has an interesting mixture of Muslim, Christian, and secular elements to its culture as well as a very progressive communal society. It was refreshing to read about a non-American, non-White future society. For me, this might've been the most interesting part of the novel. The author clearly intended it to be the

ideal, utopian society and she did an excellent job describing it. People refer to each other as "citizen" and child-rearing is a shared responsibility among many people. Killing is forbidden, whether human or animal. Even self-defense is a questionable justification for homicide. Hunting is considered abhorrent. Individuals need permission to procreate, and political leaders conduct psychological examinations of citizens.

The writing style was very strong and at times beautiful, but the author made a habit of unnecessarily using obscure words. Some seem to come straight from graduate school exams, such as the word lugubrious. She also introduces several neologisms that require the reader to use context to figure out what she is talking about. This is not for passive readers. I'm also not clear on where the title Archangel comes from. I don't recall it coming up in the book.

Unfortunately, the ending was anticlimactic and failed to conclude many of the outstanding conflicts in the story. Instead, Archangel is a setup for a sequel and not a strong stand alone novel.

I think many readers will enjoy the unique world-building as well as the complex feelings of the narrator, while some may be annoyed that the novel doesn't have more of a conventional sci-fi style to it. My individual experience with the book was mixed. HOWEVER, I want to emphasize Archangel is deep and rich in detail, avoiding typical sci-fi plot devices. Unlike many sci-fi novels, Archangel is well-written, with some really great narration. The depth and range of the topics covered is impressive. It's been a while since I've read a novel this sophisticated. While this novel didn't move me, I think many will love it.

Gary says

Archangel is an emotionally complex debut science fiction novel written in tough yet lyrical prose. It is the story of Vashti Loren, a leading figure on the recently colonized planet of Ubastis, who must decide between protecting the delicate ecological balance of the planet or bowing to political pressure to open Ubastis to mass settlement. Along the way she uncovers a plan put into motion by her late husband that has staggering consequences no matter which direction she and the citizens of Ubastis choose.

Marguerite Reed is one of those contemporary authors who, like Ann Leckie and Carolyn Ives Gilman, has a genius for writing SF in the Le Guin mold: combining exquisite, imaginative worldbuilding with scientific inquiry. Like those authors' novels, Archangel explores the insurmountable gulf between the needs of the individual and the demands of civilization - the perpetually alienating experience of being human, and the sometimes destructive ways people try to manage that experience.

This novel provoked quite a bit of internal debate for me. I finished reading it more than a week before posting this review; for me, the intervening time was necessary to work out how to respond to this book in a way that could do it justice. Vashti is a brilliantly drawn character, but also one who consistently makes choices that are difficult - even impossible - for the reader to get behind. She has a propensity for violence in a society that abhors and rejects violent behavior, and a suicidal, irrational obsession with avenging her husband's murder. These flaws cause the reader to question her judgement even as she, as narrator, offers justifications for her actions. Reed rightly refuses to supply a clear moral framework for assessing Vashti's flaws, forcing the reader to accept the fact of her myriad contradictions and destructive impulses without the comfort of a safety net.

This may make it a tough book to love for some readers. It certainly was for me. But after a week of deliberation, I remembered that tough love is always the best kind.

Ian Mond says

There's a lot to like about Marguerite Reed's debut novel *Archangel*. The writing is good and at times sublime, especially when describing the colony world of Ubastis. The world-building is rich with detail, in particular the predominant Muslim culture that administer Ubastis. The characters – including our protagonist Doctor Vashti Loren – are complicated and while not necessarily likeable always compelling. The novel's main themes, specifically the effect open immigration can have on a fragile environment, are crunchy and thought-provoking and just a tad controversial. And for the most part the pacing is well judged, with enough plot beats and dramatic moments to keep things moving.

However, the novel has one, near fatal, flaw that for me came close to undermining all of Reed's good work. That would be the relationship between Doctor Loren and the Beast.

To provide some context, as noted above *Archangel* is set on the fledgling colony world of Ubastis. Vashti Loren is part of the second wave of colonists that, at the young age of 15, came to the planet to both tame it but also understand the flora and fauna. More than a decade later the administration of Ubastis is fighting a losing battle against profiteers and the like who want to open Ubastis to hundreds of thousands of colonists. Loren is against this move knowing that the planet's fragile ecology, which they don't entirely understand, is not ready for a significant influx of immigrants.

In addition Vashti's husband, the revered Lasse Undset who led the second wave of colonists, was brutally murdered by a Beast (a genetically enhanced super soldier). Still coming to terms with Lasse's death – which she witnessed and only just survived – Vashti is horrified and furious when the Governor's wife smuggles a Beast onto the planet. Struggling to cope with this constant reminder, Vashti thoughts start to drift toward the topic of revenge.

Loren makes it clear that she has a deep and abiding hatred of Beasts and especially the one that has been smuggled onto the planet. But what's also clear is that she's attracted to this specific enhanced super soldier. Now, Loren shrugs off the attraction, maintaining her hatred, but it's also abundantly clear that this is going to be the case of opposites attract, that at some point Vashti Loren will not only befriend The Beast but they will also become lovers. In other words while Vashti plans to kill The Beast, the reader knows that this isn't going to happen, that Vashti will never pull the trigger, no matter how much she wants too. And while I'm not against a romance that starts from conflict, Loren's stubborn refusal to deal with her emotions makes for a frustrating and predictable read as we wait for the penny to drop. If not for the prose, the setting and the themes I'd have given up.

Still, it's hard to dislike a novel that's brave enough to discuss the issue of immigration and its effect on the environment. While it's clear that an ecology will be threatened by a sudden influx of people (or any new species, I'm looking at you rabbits) when this is then applied to the issue of immigration, or limiting the number of people that can come to a village, city, country or colony planet, the controversy meter goes up exponentially. This is where those frightened by the Other will hide behind the environment to disguise their racism. Reed doesn't necessarily explore that side of the debate head-on, but it lingers in the words of the profiteers who talk about children trapped on spaceships who will never have the privilege or opportunity of breathing in the fresh air of Ubastis. Yes, Reed leans heavily on the side of those opposed to open immigration in support of the planet, and yes there's an element of the strawman in the form of an evil politician looking to undermine the Ubastis administration, but I give Reed props just for raising the issue.

So while *Archangel* does have its weaknesses and one near deal-breaker for a flaw, there's a strength of voice

and character to the book that makes it a worthwhile read.

terpkristin says

Audiobook from Audible Studios

Narrated by Dina Pearlman

Length: 11.5 hours

I spent a lot of my time while listening to this book confused, which made it all the more surprising when I realized at the end that I'd liked the book, and am fairly intrigued about what will come next. A book spanning multiple topics/thoughts, it was interesting to see how the various topics mostly worked together.

I think this book served in some ways as world-building/scene-setting for future books, which may explain why I was confused at times. This may be seen as a negative, but since I liked the world, it was okay, once I realized that I hadn't missed anything with the plot (though at times, I was convinced that I had). I also liked the main character, a researcher on the planet of Ubastis but also one of the one people on the planet with a literal license to kill...anything. So while it seemed that the plot may have moved slowly, or that I was sure I was missing things, in the end it worked out okay for me. But others, especially those who listen, might have similar confusion.

It's hard to describe what the book is "about" since Archangel covers so many topics. The book is set sometime in the future after the Earth has been effectively destroyed/overused by humans. Humans seem to have escaped to space, though it's not clear that they had to go far to find other places to live. The book mentions a station at L5, which I presume is the L5 Lagrange point that people who've studied physics/astrophysics and sci-fi lovers alike will probably recognize. L5 has long been thought of as a place where space colonization might be feasible, so it seems as if it fits and that it's not some L5 in relation to the world in the book, separate from our own system. Many humans seem to live in space, while a small handful live on Ubastis. Ubastis is a planet that has seen small waves of colonists; the first two waves of colonists were trained primarily as a military would be trained, though the job was to scout areas of the planet and start setup for more colonists in the future, to establish it as its own world. The other aspect of the colonists' life is to study the planet and understand the resources it has and the balance between the natural ecosystem and those resources--the colonists do not wish to make Ubastis into another Earth, and so immigration to the planet is heavily controlled, only up for discussion once every 10 years. Archangel takes place just prior to one of these votes, and there is a heavy contingent of "off-worlders" lobbying for the strict limits to be lifted, to open immigration to the planet. In the book, human engineering is also not only possibly but heavily used, and most people have some level of genetic modification; most to dull aggression and many for vanity reasons.

The main character, Dr/Commander Lauren Vashti, is a "natural," a non-genetically modified human. She was one of the people in the second group of colonists to come to the planet. Her husband was one of the leaders of that second group, and the pair are seen in many ways as a literal mother and father (and in the case of her husband, even a saint) of the planet and its resources. Vashti's husband was killed by a highly-engineered "assault human," a BEAST, one who was specifically genetically modified to be a soldier of sorts. This brings me to the first of the interleaved topics that the book touches on--motherhood and, to some extent, single motherhood. Vashti spends much of the book seemingly at odds with her dual role on the world. She has a literal daughter, a toddler, but often sees that being a literal mother is incompatible with being a leader, a voice for the planet as a whole. Because of her natural gifts as well as the reverence given to

her, Vashti is also a literal mother to many Ubastians (and off-worlders?), as her eggs were frozen and used to create other offspring. There were striking scenes in the book where Vashti's grief/memories of her husband are interrupted by her daughter, perfectly capturing the issues with motherhood. Later in the book, as she realizes that she is in some way a mother to the planet, similar memories are jarringly interrupted by the politics of the planet, things she must stand up for.

Obviously, another topic in the book is that of genetic engineering and the...sense...in doing so. I won't go into details, but Vashti being a "natural" woman actually has a fairly important aspect in the plot. In particular, it seems that BEASTs can only really be "controlled" by natural humans, those without genetic modifications. This speaks volumes to the topic of genetic modification in general, but the topic is also touched upon by human nature. Because Vashti is a "natural," she has a "normal" level of aggression/willingness to kill. It seems that many people have that particular knob turned down. Vashti is looked down upon by outsiders because she is in fact willing to kill to study the fauna native to Ubastis and willing to kill in self defense. It seems that most others find killing repugnant in general, something to be psychologically educated-away/re-educated away. The people of Ubastis (and also the off-worlders, I believe) are vegetarian. In fact, many are Muslim, though it was never really clear to me why it was important that so many were Muslim (the rest seemed to be Christian of some sort).

Another topic commonly dealt with in science fiction is that of resource use/protection of a planet/avoiding a runaway situation like we have on Earth/that eventually dooms Earth in many books...this book is no different. In her role as scientist and "mother" on Ubastis, Vashti preaches for conservation and minimization of the human footprint on the planet. The Earth is looked to as a sign of the worst that can happen.

In all, Archangel is a book about revolution. There are many types of revolution in the story, both personal revolution for Vashti, but other aspects of revolution, too. Once I came to terms with being "confused" every now and then, it was actually a fun read. The narrator, Dina Pearlman, is one whose name is familiar but I can't find any other books that I've listened to that she's narrated. Her narration had an odd cadence that was particularly difficult to follow at first. I found speeding up the audio playback helped that significantly, though her pacing may also have contributed to my confusion at times. Once I got "used" to it (at the faster playback speed), I got more into the book, but it did take awhile.

This book might not be for everybody--and certainly might not be for everybody in audio form--but as for me, I'm looking forward to seeing what happens next on Ubastis.

Viv JM says

2.5 stars (ie halfway between "it was ok" and "liked it"). I'm rounding up to 3 because I wonder if my enjoyment suffered slightly from doing this on audio (the narrator had a very odd & distracting way of saying the last word of each sentence in a lower tone than the rest - I would not recommend this format for this book).

This debut novel from Margeurite Reed had some interesting ideas but I think maybe it suffered from the author trying to include All The Ideas - so we had issues of race, sexuality, grief, genetic manipulation, the ethics of meat eating, colonisation, whether violence can ever be justified *and more!*

I did like that the main protagonist was different from the sci-fi norm. She was a kickass scientist/commander whilst also being (single) mother to a boisterous toddler and those two aspects were

explored side by side. I really didn't enjoy the (view spoiler). Call me old fashioned, but I found some of this book a bit crude (view spoiler)

So yeah, slightly mixed feelings about this one. I probably won't continue with the series unless subsequent books get rave reviews!

Robyn says

3.5 that I am rounding up. This was an unusual novel and I'm still not entirely sure what I think about it - Reed grapples with some big ideas and deploys disturbing rhetorical techniques to get you to think about them, which left me unsettled.

J.D. says

The planet Ubastis is a paradise, a veritable Eden, and the teeming hordes of humanity, cooped up in tin cans in space, want in. Badly. It's up to people like biologist/hunter Vashti Loren to stand at the gate, surveying the place to make sure that humans can live there and that they won't ruin this planet like they've wrecked the Earth and others.

But there are snakes in this Eden this time as well. Some of them are in Vashti's head, since the terrible day she witnessed the horrific murder of her husband before her eyes. It doesn't help that someone's broken the rules by bringing one of the breed of enhanced super-soldiers who committed that atrocity onto the planet. Other serpents are hiding in plain sight. Vashti needs to figure out who her real friends and enemies are before it's too late for her and her beloved world.

This fantastic debut novel by Marguerite Reed is both brutal and lyrical--lyrical in the gorgeously written descriptions of Vashti's love for both her planet and her daughter, and brutal in its portrayal of the violence that threatens them all.

I can't wait for the next book in the series. Highly recommended.

Danny Adams says

Vashti Loren was among the second wave of people to explore the planet Ubastis, where she both became a devoted protector of the pristine world, and met her mentor and future husband, Lasse Undset. Now she is a widowed mother on Ubastis after a Beast - a BioEngineered ASSault Tactician, genetically engineered humans bred for war - killed Lasse, and when her friend Moira smuggles another Beast onto Ubastis, Vashti's first and deepest compulsion is to kill him. But powerful people have their eye on resettling part of the population of the ravaged Earth onto Ubastis, which would all but ruin the planet in the process. The Beast may be Vashti's only chance to stop a military invasion of her home.

Vashti's desires and emotions run all over the place - she wants to protect Ubastis, protect her daughter, withdraw from the world forever, and more - which can be frustrating to the reader, especially when she trips over her own feet, but is totally believable, and likely spot on for someone living the life and in the world she

is. The Beast reeks of a dark, blood-filled history. The best (and sometimes most frustrating - see above) parts of Archangel are the interactions between Vashti and the Beast, but everyone, except Vashti's toddler daughter, is on edge as they know their world is likely about to change, or, like Vashti, had their world ripped apart so badly the anger will never completely fade.

Marguerite Reed's writing style comes across like a parallel to Vashti and the others around her: tense, often curt, with a simmering ready to boil just below the surface and sometimes erupting over. Whichever mood came across, it kept propelling me forward. (On a personal note, I was reading this book by the time I took my first and long-dreamed-of trip to Europe, and the only reason it didn't go with me was because I finally decided to only take reading material specific to the trip. But I had it in the back of my mind until I got home.)

Needless to say, I'm much looking forward to the next book in the series.

Mike says

The book started a bit slow but I quickly settled in for a marathon session like I haven't done since I was in my teens. I read large chunks of this at work (don't tell the boss!) because I couldn't wait to find out what happened. Now I can't wait for the next book!

Anya says

Not for me. I was intrigued until the scene where the love interest watches the heroine masturbating without her knowing and then comes in to join. He had no way of knowing it was him she was interested in and even if he did, really freaking creepy and has tainted my feelings of this book now.

Tate says

I think I would describe this book to people as: Jurassic Park meets the American Revolution... with clones.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

This audiobook was provided to me by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. It was also discussed pre-publication on Episode 021 of the Reading Envy podcast, if you want more background. I had not read the book at the time.

This is a debut novel from Marguerite Reed, and I feel I should first say this is not the kind of novel I typically read. It is also not a typical novel. Some of the elements combined together in a way I was not expecting and I had to talk myself through it. I think I'm using the review to think it through even further.

The novel takes place on a planet called Ubastis, a relatively unexplored and uncolonized planet that is being considered as a new home for humanity. Vashti, who the publisher summary refers to as a xenobiologist, is on the planet for further study. She holds multiple roles, from safari guide of sorts to political activist, to mother. Several scenes in the beginning of the novel detail Vashti having important conversations about her husband's death and what she should be doing, interrupted by her toddler being hungry or wanting help with the bathroom. I have to admit that I was a bit startled by this element. I'm not used to women being mothers in military science fiction (a label I am hesitant to use but is the closest I can come). Thinking about it more, I realized that in all those urban fantasy type novels, the main subgenre where you see kickass female heroines, those women are always lone wolves who have hot sex or revenge sex or daddy issues. Their solitude allows them to have the strength and independence. I feel like the author really pushed herself to create a more complex character, one who is grieving the loss of her husband, struggling with self-harm and guilt, and still loving a tiny child that occupies some of her mental and physical space. It isn't something I have seen before. Her humanity is tangible, almost uncomfortable, and it becomes more important as the story moves forward.

There is a lot more going on, from discussions of humanity to independence. This is the first book in a series and Marguerite Reed definitely ends the book with a clear direction in mind. I think readers of urban fantasy with kickass women would really like this, and enjoy the change to space and genetic modification as the setting.

I listened to this in audio and liked the narrator for the most part. She does something strange where she whispers the last word in a sentence, or speaks it in a very low tone. It took me a while to get used to it, and ended up speeding up the recording to 1.5x which helped a great deal. I realized I was waiting for the last word of every sentence and missing what the words in the sentence were, and had to start over. Let me see if I can replicate it in text, with words in asterisks the words spoken low or whispered.

"In Moira's apartment I ate and drank what she set in front of *me.* She remembered something of tact, thank God, and did not interrupt until I had finished scraping my *plate clean.*"

I don't know if this is the narrator's style, if it is the style she chose for the book, but at first it really took me out of the listening experience. I played it for a few others to see if I was crazy and they noticed it as well. By the time I got halfway, I stopped noticing it and the last half of the book flew by.

Tudor Ciocarlie says

This is equal parts a story about ecology, religion and super-humans. Yes, exactly like Dune! This excellent novel has a very Dune like feeling. But, is a better written book and has much more interesting and lifelike characters. And the central character is a kick ass female, that is both a loving mother and the most dangerous human being on the planet. From Mad Max and Star Wars to Aurora and Archangel, it looks like this year, for the first time in its history, the science-fiction genre really placed the woman in the center of the stage.

Christopher Eshelman says

Reminds me of my first experiences reading Anne McCafferty's Pern or Ballybran (Crystal Singer) series -

or Margaret Atwood's Handmaid's tale. Powerful, challenging, richly developed, complex characters that I feel as if I've known for years and desperately want to know what happens next. A magnificent first novel that I will reread multiple times as I eagerly await Legion and further stories. I heartily recommend this novel.

There are two very, very short list of books I've read that I either intentionally slowed down to savor my enjoyment of OR immediately began to reread on completion. Archangel is on both list.
