



Footsteps in the Sky

Greg Keyes

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The pueblo people who landed on the Fifth World found it Earthlike, empty, and ready for colonization . . . but a century later, they are about to meet the planet's owners

One hundred years ago, Sand's ancestors made the long, one-way trip to the Fifth World, ready to work ceaselessly to terraform the planet. Descendants of native peoples like the Hopi and Zuni, they wanted to return to the way of life of their forebears, who honored the Kachina spirits.

Now, though, many of the planet's inhabitants have begun to resent their grandparents' decision to strand them in this harsh and forbidding place, and some have turned away from the customs of the Well-Behaved People. Sand has her doubts, but she longs to believe that the Kachina live on beyond the stars and have been readying a new domain for her people.

She may be right. Humans have discovered nine habitable worlds, all with life that shares a genetic code entirely alien to any on Earth. Someone has been seeding planets, bringing life to them. But no other sign of the ancient farmers has ever been discovered—until one day they return to the Fifth World. They do not like what they find.

Footsteps in the Sky Details

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From Reader Review Footsteps in the Sky for online ebook

Megan says

[Disclaimer: I received a free e-copy of this book from NetGalley.]

There was a lot lacking with this book, for me. For one, the narrative style was too disjointed for me to really get into it, and it made for a difficult time understanding what was happening. I was a good 20% of the way in before I started to sort of comprehend what was going on, and even then I couldn't really follow the actual events very well. And it wasn't until around the 55%-57% mark that we even get a real explanation of the various "factions" of people on the Fifth World, and who the Reed are. I didn't really care for any of the characters, and found them all to be pretty bland and boring. Hoku's motivations seemed to be simply greed and power, but I feel like that can't be all there is to a person. Alvar was a weakling, Teng was unmovable, Sand was simply scared, Jimmie was selfish... What was there to like about any of them?

There was also a very strange sex scene towards the end that I didn't feel enhanced the story *at all.* It seemed like it was there simply because the author felt like two people should screw. And the weird relationship between Sand and Tuchvala that turned semi-sexual was disturbing for reasons that should be obvious to anyone who reads the book.

I didn't really enjoy the read, I found it lacking in the narrative style and character building, and difficult to follow. Although apparently I am in the minority, so while I don't recommend it, you may find you enjoy it.

Jessica Strider says

Pros: plot centres on native american beliefs, realistic characters, interesting alien life forms, hard SF elements

Cons:

Descendants of the Hopitu-Shinumu Native Americans colonized Fifth World agreeing to terraform the planet for the Vilmir Foundation - what they call the Reed - in return for ownership of the world when it was fully habitable. But a rift has formed between those who live on the coast, trading with the Reed for technology and renouncing the backward ways of their forefathers, and those who live on the pueblos, the Traditionalists, keepers of the old ways and old religion. When three alien spaceships appear in orbit the coastal Tech Society believe this new technology could help them throw off the yoke of the Reed, assuming they can control it. Meanwhile, a traitor alerts the Reed to the presence of the ships, prompting them to send a group of colonial peacekeepers to secure the ships for themselves - or destroy them should they prove hostile.

Unknown to the colonist these are the alien ships that performed the original terraforming on the planet that made it possible for humans to eventually inhabit it, but the ships' very long lives have made their AIs unstable and they're unsure if allowing the invaders to inhabit this world is something their Makers would have approved. In an attempt to answer this question, one of the ships creates a clone to meet the inhabitants and see if they deserve life, or if the ships should wipe the planet clean.

The background for the plot is fairly complicated - and takes a few chapters to set up - after which the story itself is quite straightforward. I loved the world-building. The author's father worked on a Navajo reservation when Keyes was young, so he learned a lot of the stories and beliefs that are recounted in this novel. I found the stories of the Kuchina, the origin of the Hopi and the prophecy that sent their ancestors to this planet in search of a new home really interesting. I also loved how SandGreyGirl could both question and in some ways blindly believe the teachings of her youth. The complexity of the emotions examined by her and Tuchvala, concerning beliefs and how the world changes you, were believable. I also liked how inheritance passed through the female line, and how that changed gender dynamics. It was interesting to read how SandGreyGirl sometimes took female lovers because it reduced the chance that her partner was after her land and the pressures of marriage that relationships with men brought up.

I appreciated the variety of characters, some likeable and other less so. Everyone felt real, with understandable rationalizations for what they were doing, even the various antagonists. The only hesitation I had here was with how Sand and Tuchvala relate to each other at the end of the book.

You don't learn much about the Makers, the ones who built the ships, but what you do learn is quite interesting.

There are hard SF elements, though I don't know if all the physics were accurate. I appreciated that space travel took years and that time passed differently for those planet side.

I'd have loved a few historical notes in an afterward explaining what, if any, of the things Keyes attributes to the Hopi people were made up for the book (beyond the prophecy).

It was an interesting book that brought out some questions about the nature of belief and had a fair bit of action.

Janice says

The most interesting thing about this book is that the author based his society of interstellar colonists and terraformers on the Hopi nation. I thought the depiction of the society was well done, though I can't vouch for its accuracy viz. the Hopis.

The alien ship that embodies itself into a human clone is pretty interesting too. You can see that there's a lot of back-story that the author worked out. He only hinted at it in this book, just enough to show why the conflict was happening.

Good solid work., not flashy.

Kathie (katmom) says

While I wasn't very fond of this one, maybe it will be your cup of tea. It comes out today.

I really wish I had liked this more. The blurb was interesting as I'm fond of that "first contact" trope. Unfortunately, this book could have been placed anywhere here on Earth where a down-trodden people are

used by a large corporation after being offered pie in the sky promises. The writing was choppy and the editing was spotty. Change of POV was offered with no break in the formatting which made it hard to understand who was actually speaking. This cover was odd, too. The people are PEOPLE, not giant mouse people, which is what this cover conveys. AND the aliens don't look anything like this cover, either.

For those who appreciate trigger warnings, at one point there is a sex scene that, while both parties want it at the moment, they only want it because of the drugs they inhaled. Drugs that were forced on them. Some readers were offended by that. There is also a f/f love scenario. It wasn't graphic, but that might bug some people. Didn't bother me.

I've read lots of reviews for this book (and the author's other books) and people love his writing. Apparently this book wasn't written for this reader. It was all I could do to make myself finish it. This one gets a 1.5 bookmark rating from me. Read some of the other five star reviews to balance it out, you might like this one.

*Thank you, Open Road Media and NetGalley, for the opportunity to read this book.

Chris says

2.5

Disclaimer: ARC via Netgalley.

I should point before starting this review that Keyes and I don't really get along. It's strange because we have never met, and I am pretty sure he doesn't even know I exist. I think his plot ideas are interesting, and there is nothing wrong with his writing. Yet, for some reason, I am always underwhelmed by his work, and then I feel guilty because it really is a simple case of some taste that I can't vocalize.

That said, why I felt a similar reaction to his Keyes novel, there is something I truly love about it, and that is the use Native American culture/belief tied into a twist on the racist "ancient cultures were by space aliens" crap. Please note, I am not saying that Keyes uses that crap, but he twists it, upends it, and gives it to the bastards who say such crap.

I really, really liked that.

It was also great that the chosen ones were a mother and daughter.

So unless you are like me, and have one of those strange relationships with Keyes, you should enjoy this blend of science fiction, belief, and nature.

They really should sell this at the Smithsonian.

Althea Ann says

Greg Keyes' first novel is now back 'in print' thanks to Open Road Media. Since being won over by his 'Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone' I was eager to read this.

It's a 'colony-world' sci-fi story. The colonists are a group of people from Earth who have the intention of re-creating the traditional culture of the Hopi. In service to this goal, their children have been brought up with the myths of the Kachina and other spirits instilled in them. However, in many ways they are still modern people, and the reality of interplanetary technology coexists awkwardly with their mythology.

And of, course, there are disagreements and factions. On-planet, the two great divides are between those who are more 'traditionalist' and those who are more eager to embrace any available technology. However, both of those groups may be threatened if a feared rumor is true: is the corporation who enabled the trip to this world just waiting for the colonists to do all the hard work before swooping in and taking over to reap the economic benefits?

On planet, one man believes so, and he's willing to be ruthless in order to combat what seems to him to be an 'end-justifies-the-means' level threat.

In his way seems to be a young woman, Sand, who, following in her deceased mother's footsteps, discovers what her mother described as a Kachina spirit - but what could be described by those of a more scientific bent as an alien. This could be a game-changer, and the fate of the entire colony hangs on the decisions that will be made.

It's a good book. The whole 'resurrection of traditional cultures in space' reminded me a bit of other books I've read, including some by Tobias Buckell - but I felt that the rationale given and the description of what a re-created culture might be like are depicted here in a much more realistic and believable manner than in many other equivalent stories. I do think that Keyes' writing has improved over time - you can tell this is an early work. But it's still definitely worth a look!

Many thanks to NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

The Shayne-Train says

Wow, this book simply blew me away.

I received an advanced copy of this book through NetGalley.

I started this book thinking it was just OK. I was having kind of a hard time following the characters, and the jumps between them. The world-building was good, but the action and the characters and the plot and the "voice" of the story just weren't meshing with me.

Then it came crashing down on my head that I was halfway done, I loved these characters, and I couldn't wait to find out what happened next. It snuck up on me. All of a sudden, like something suddenly.

Indian traditions and terraforming and doomsday weapons and alien life, all mixed up together in a heady brew that left me fully satisfied. Highly recommended.

Fantasy Literature says

Footsteps in the Sky, by Greg Keyes, is on one level a wholly enjoyable science fiction action story that offers up a whole bunch of fun surface action involving laser rifles, fusion-powered seedships, augmented humans, AIs, rebellious space colonies, and the like. You can read it for those elements alone and have yourself a good time. But the novel offers much more, as Keyes builds onto the surface elements an evocative, deeply felt exploration of identity, compassion, faith, community, and of just what it means to be human, much of it through the prism of the Hopi culture/belief system, presented here in detailed, respectful, and often touching manner and presented as well in a fashion that could clearly stand as an analogue to modern-day conflicts within such native cultures: How does one mainta... Read More: <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/reviews/footsteps-in-the-sky-greg-keyes>

Blue says

Footsteps in the Sky is a fast-paced, remorseful, melancholic affair. Unlike other readers, I had no trouble getting into the book (I suppose I have a longer attention span than a few minutes and can read books with different point of view without difficulty, though one would imagine sci-fi fans would be fairly comfortable with such styles of writing...) and I found the pace to be just right. I am not a hardcore sci-fi reader, nor have I read many first contact type of books before, but I found the plot and story to be a good mix of original twists of old legends.

I'll make a feeble attempt to describe the plot without giving away too much: A traditionalist (Hopi) woman, Pela, lives as a part of the terraforming colony on the "fifth world." They have been contracted by an Earth (fourth world) company (which the Hopi call "the Reed" based on one of their creation myths) to terraform this world. This world is one of several worlds that have been discovered by humans to have been terraformed or altered by another alien (and yet) unknown species with great technology. The terraforming humans on the fifth world have had disputes, and factions have formed. Most factions, regardless of their religious and political differences, question the future of their planet and whether the Reed will let them have the planet once it is successfully terraformed or claim it for themselves.) The book starts when Pela has first contact with one of the ancient alien farmers of the fifth planet, but most of the book takes place starting 20 years after first contact and centers around Pela's daughter, Sand.)

The main characters that lend their voice to the narration are well developed. Their motives are only as confusing as their human (and not so human) hearts are troubled. The political structure, the nature of the alien interventions ("alien" will depend on the point of view here), the allegorical legends all work well to set very personal issues (of love, betrayal, belonging, revenge, remorse) against the backdrop of the bigger picture (community, responsibility, leadership, tradition, religion).

Keyes is a good writer. He creates distinct voices for the narrators. The consciousness of the three sister farmers has an eerie outlandishness to it that conveys a bigger understanding of time and space than humans are capable of. Yet the petty human troubles are what lies in the heart of the story, and the human is just a spec in the vast universe and the center of it at the same time.

Some of the gender and sexuality elements are intriguing. Especially the implication that two female characters may be together at the end, considering their previous relationship, is, from a human point of view, interesting and troubling at the same time (the writing is vague enough that one can interpret it as the two characters are just living together, or that they are lovers). The sexual assault scene is also troubling, and the confusion is aptly left unexplored beyond a few brief, aborted attempts.

Overall, *Footsteps in the Sky* builds an interesting, emotionally engaging world. As alien as it is, this world is very much human, very much tainted by the same problems that humans have always managed to create whenever they attempt to live in larger communities.

Recommended for those who like political intrigue, spy stories, bioengineering, and corn.

Thanks to the publisher and NetGalley for a free ARC of the novel in exchange of my honest review.

Henry Lazarus says

Open Road Integrated Media has found Greg Keyes first novel. *Footsteps in the Sky* (paper) is a solid tale of Hopi settlers on a world first modified by aliens to almost human standards. Earth is on edge because revolts have broken out on other colonies, so that when three huge, alien starships arrive, they send a small expedition to investigate. Twenty years later, when the earth ship arrives, one of the aliens drops off a cloned human with the downloaded brain of one of the ships. On the planet, the two factions – one traditional, and one embracing technology are at odds. There are also the more, technologically- advanced Earth expedition with its own agenda and the three ships above that have the ability to destroy the colony. Two of them have gone mad from the millions of years they have been at their task. Caught in the middle is Sand, whose dead mother was cloned, and who will do anything to save the clone who looks like a younger version of her mother and to save her culture. Fascinating. I don't know why this never got the acclaim it deserved when first appeared. Review printed by Philadelphia Weekly Press

Ian Wood says

This is the complete review as it appears at my blog dedicated to reading, writing (no 'rithmatic!), movies, & TV. Blog reviews often contain links which are not reproduced here, nor will updates or modifications to the blog review be replicated here. Graphic and children's reviews on the blog typically feature two or three images from the book's interior, which are not reproduced here.

Note that I don't really do stars. To me a book is either worth reading or it isn't. I can't rate it three-fifths worth reading! The only reason I've relented and started putting stars up there is to credit the good ones, which were being unfairly uncredited. So, all you'll ever see from me is a five-star or a one-star (since no stars isn't a rating, unfortunately).

I rated this book WARTY!

WARNING! MAY CONTAIN UNHIDDEN SPOILERS! PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK!

I typically don't do covers because my blog is about writing and writers rarely have any say in what their covers look like unless they self-publish (which is why those absurdly dramatic gushing "cover reveals" are so pathetic), but I have to remark upon this one to the effect that if you think, from the cover, that the story is about a race of mice, you're completely wrong!

There was a ten-page prologue and then a five page 'Interim'! I have no idea what that was all about. I don't do prologues, prefaces, introductions, forewords, or even interims! If the writer doesn't consider it of

sufficient merit to be incorporated into the body of the book, then I'm really not interested in it either.

This is sci-fi set in 2442 (AD!). We meet SandGreyGirl who is, along with assorted cousins, preparing her mother's body for burial in some sort of ceremony rooted in Native American Hopi tradition. This "Earth" is evidently one of several which Humanity has colonized before moving on to the next, yet despite this technological prowess, there is still death and so there is still superstition in the form of religion, and the Hopi have curiously not changed in several hundred years!

I found that hard to believe. Yes, you can argue that they like to hang on to their traditions, but it's really sad to portray a people as apparently incapable of, or unwilling to change. Given that their total population has barely changed over the last half millennium, who knows - maybe anything is possible? Frankly, I don't get the point of setting a sci-fi story half a millennium or so into the future and simultaneously hobbling it with beliefs and traditions from the same distance into the past, although Star Trek makes a good living from doing exactly that, so who knows?!

So "Sand" takes her personal speeder out to her mother's secret place to bury her 'magic things' and finds an ebook, evidently left by her mother for Sand to read after she died. The ebook turns out to be useless because by the time Sand reads it she already knows what it reveals, more or less. Meanwhile, out in space, Alvar Washington and some genetically engineered cyborg-style chick named Teng (modeled heavily on Molly Millions from Neuromancer, but Molly could take Teng!) are barreling in from deep space because aliens have been discovered orbiting the very planet upon which the Hopi people are now living. How the spaceships were seen from so far away is a mystery.

This story is blessedly written in third person, for which I sincerely thank the author, but even so, there was a point (page 96) where it degenerated into first person PoV as we shared the thoughts of one of the aliens. This wasn't in a separate chapter, but in-line with the third person text, same font, style, and text size, the only demarcation being a wider gap between lines. I don't know why this was done.

It felt really odd to me, springing out like that when we were already over a third of the way through the novel. It went on for about one page length and then we were back in third person. I decided to skip this and any future such instances (of which there were several). I also skipped a lot of the portions which were devoted to the psychotic high-tech leader, because they were boring. Guess what? I didn't miss a thing!

There is, seemingly, a rule required by the sci-fi genre that everyone always refers to Earth as 'Terra', and its population as 'Terrans'. Frankly I find this laughable because no one uses that term. There is no provenance for it, and no history of it except in sci-fi. How is it possible it would come into use? It's not! Yet here we find it again in this novel.

From a writing perspective, which is what my blog is all about, it bothers me because it trumpets that a given writer (of whatever sci-fi novel it is which we're reading) has given no thought to this, but has just blindly followed trope. To me, that doesn't speak strongly for the rest of the story (even though many such stories are, in the end, good). So while this doesn't kill a novel for me, it certainly doesn't endear me, either. To me, sci-fi is all about the future - about fresh, new, and original, and it saddens me to see so much of it larded with trope and cliché.

I think writers use it to make it sound cool and different (even though everyone uses it, so it isn't different at all), but I also think they use it for a practical purpose: there is no term for the people of Earth as there is for, say the people of Canada: Canadians. What are we to call ourselves? Earthans? Earthites? Earthlings?! No, Terrans sounds better than those even though, realistically, it makes no sense. It sounds far too much like

terrapins or terrorists! Don't forget that the Greek word 'teras' (τέρας) means monster, too! The term 'Humans' makes far more sense, and has long been in use. It sounds perfectly fine, and I can't believe that more sci-fi writers don't simply employ that ready-made term.

As I mentioned, one of the issues that bugged me about this particular story was the paradoxical anachronisms. It was like the Hopi moved some four or five hundred years into the future, but simultaneously moved the same distance into the past. Half a millennium ago, the Hopi had certain behaviors and customs and a certain life-style. Today, those things have changed in very many ways. Given that, why would it revert, four hundred years from now, to what it was back in, say, 1515?

What bothers me is not so much that it couldn't possibly happen at all, but that we're offered no explanation for why it evidently did happen in this case, and to me this feels rather insulting towards the people - that they're somehow atavistic and incapable of progress. It's like the entire Hopi culture of the sixteenth century was transplanted to a new planet, the people choosing to live as they had a thousand years before - except, of course, for all the modern conveniences. Except of course, that those modern conveniences are confined solely to technology. The mindset hasn't changed at all. They're not allowed, for example, same-gender marriage. What?

This set-up made no sense to me. It made less sense that there would be only these two cultures - the 'techs' on the coast and the Hopi people inland, in a desert culture reminiscent of that of the sixteenth century (except for the tech) - and there's no-one else on the planet at all? And these two cultures hate and despise one another? Why? We're not given any explanation or rationale.

To be fair, at one point, Sand Girl does say that the reason the Hopi came to this planet was to recreate the life they believed they were meant to live, but this makes even less sense. The Hopi now - today in this world - aren't living the life the Hopi were 500 years ago. Neither is Sand Girl, who is flying around on mini-jet planes, or her people who are using them to spray crops, using some electronic lie-detecting device, and using modern toilets and showers!

So what criteria, exactly, are she and her people employing to define "the way we were meant to live"?! They're certainly following nothing traditional save for superstitious nonsense. It makes no more sense than the Amish communities freezing their lifestyles in the eighteenth century. On top of that I don't see how any rational thinking person would actually want to regress into a such a lifestyle if it also entailed deluding yourself into thinking there are animistic gods, and that there are evil witches abroad.

I'm not saying it's completely impossible. I mean, even today there are various individuals, some communities, and some artisans who follow anachronistic habits in their lives or at least in their art, but it isn't widespread, and it wouldn't be rational (to say nothing of being economically viable) to give over a whole planet to such a group. I mean, why do the Hopi get this rather than the Bedouin, for example? Why the Hopi rather than the Tuareg? Maybe some attempt was made in the prologue and/or interim to explain all this away, but I find it hard to believe that anything could explain a whole planet being given to such a (relatively) small group of people to the exclusion of all others!

The worst part about this is that we're told, in so many words, that even this back-to-the-land-of-our-ancestors kind of culture has its ghetto: the impoverished, the low-lifes, the criminals, and so on. I don't get that at all. For as 'hi-tech' as society in general is in this novel, these people have the bare minimum. They're living off the land, and no one of them has any more than any other, so where does the criminal element come from? What's there to steal? How is there a ghetto? None of this made any sense at all to me.

In the end, which I almost skipped, but skimmed instead, I can't bring myself to recommend this. It rather fizzles out into a largely unresolved mess, and too much of it was predictable. The aliens were unconvincing - supposedly so different from humans, but supposedly so alike. The one representative they sent seemed completely un-alien. The secret spy among the Hopi was telegraphed from way back near the start of the novel. I like my stories to make sense and this one just didn't. I cannot recommend it.

Frank Errington says

Review copy

A combination of Hopi legend, fantasy, and space opera, *Footsteps In the Sky* is a complex tale of the Fifth World, the result of terraforming over millennia.

The story is set more than 400 years in the future, with the Hopi people inhabiting the Fifth World. They appear to be descendants from Earth's 20th Century Hopi. The tale is not so much about how they got there or even why, it's more about division, discovery, and the strong possibility that those who prepared this planet for them are thinking about starting over.

Although filled with intrigue, back-stabbing, and many original ideas, I just found this work to be a bit overbearing. It may be a matter of sensory overload since there was so much happening all the time.

A demanding read told in a convoluted way, *Footsteps In the Sky* was a nice diversion from my usual horror fare, but ultimately not something I would like to make a steady diet of. As challenging a read as this was, this is another time I was glad I saw this one through to the end as it is the kind of story that stays with you well beyond the time spent between the pages.

Footsteps In the Sky was originally written in 1994 and has been re-released as an e-book from Open Road Media and is currently available from a variety of online retailers.

Although I was glad I read it, I can't really recommend this to others. Of course, your mileage may vary, so don't let me stop you from giving it a shot.

Ross Armstrong says

I received a free copy from Netgalley for an honest review.

This was an interesting book. I really liked the Hopi mythology at the core of the tale. It was not an easy read initially as it shifts perspectives frequently between its main characters and the reader has to figure out who is telling the story but you do get used to it after awhile. The Fifth World has been terraformed and colonized by people wanting to return to Hopi ways. The Vilmir Foundation, nicknamed The Reed, have funded the process and the inhabitants fear their return to take the planet away from them. But then three spaceships appear in orbit around the Fifth World. They are aliens who had seeded the Fifth World for the Makers and are surprised to find their work undone by humans. One of the aliens clones a Hopi to determine if the humans are advanced enough to inhabit the world or if they need to sterilize it and start over. The drama builds around the factions on the planet, the arrival of a Reed spaceship to investigate the aliens and the tale

of SandGrayGirl and the alien clone Tuchvala who was cloned from Sand's mother. There is a lot going on in the book. It is very ambitious. It is a good book, not necessarily a great book.

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at [Risingshadow](#).

Footsteps in the Sky is Greg Keyes' first novel. It has never been published before, so this is the first time that it will be available for speculative fiction readers and fans of Greg Keyes. This is nice, because Footsteps in the Sky is a good and well written hard science fiction novel. The publisher of this novel, Open Road Media, will also release Greg Keyes' Chosen of the Changeling fanatsy duology: The Waterborn and The Blackgod in e-book format in April 2015.

I think it's good to mention that Footsteps in the Sky requires a bit of intelligence and concentration from the readers, because the author doesn't explain every little thing to his readers. It's nice that he assumes that his readers can figure out a few things for themselves (it's possible that readers may be slightly confused about the first chapters of this novel, because it takes a bit of time to figure out where the happenings take place).

It's possible that certain readers and critics may criticize Footsteps in the Sky for not having anything new in it. I understand why readers and critics may feel this way, because this novel doesn't exactly contain anything new, but in my opinion they should pay attention to the entertainment values it has to offer, because the story is good and worth reading. The story contains popular elements that can be found in many sci-fi novels and stories, but in Keyes' capable hands these elements feel refreshingly invigorating and entertaining. Footsteps in the Sky is almost like a blast from the past because of its wonderfully old-fashioned approach to science fiction and scientific issues. It's an intriguing combination of space opera, science, culture, nature, Hopi traditions and aliens.

Here's a bit of information about the story:

- This novel begins with a quotation from the Hopi Origin Legend. Then the story shifts to Pela and Sand and how people live on the Fifth World. The people arrived there to terraform the planet and have gradually shaped the land. They wanted to return to the way of life of their ancestors who honored the Kachina spirits.
- The ancient farmers have been seeding the planets, but no sign of their existence has ever been seen by anybody. They have seeded the planets and brought them to life. One day they return to the Fifth World and they don't like what they see there. They're thinking about sterilizing and re-seeding the planet...

I enjoyed reading about the protagonist, Sand. It was interesting to read about her thoughts about what was going on, because she was a well-created and fascinating character. She was a woman whose mother, Pela, had died - her mother's death affected her life and actions quite a lot.

In my opinion Greg Keyes wrote perfectly about Sand's feelings and actions, because he seemed to understand her confusion and her life, and managed to make her a realistic character. This is nice, because many hard science fiction authors normally tend to write more about science and technology and write only little about the characters and their feelings (this is something that has often annoyed me in hard science fiction, because lack of good characterization easily makes the story flat).

The interaction between Sand and one of the seeders, Tuchvala, was handled exceptionally well and it was interesting for me to read about them. Because Tuchvala had taken the form of Sand's dead mother, her presence reminded Sand of her mother. This added a nice touch of tension and emotionality to the story.

Tuchvala was an interesting character, because she lived in a human body and had to learn new things. Although Tuchvala could pass for a human being, she was different from the other characters. Sand was almost like an instructor and protector to Tuchvala, because she told her how to do certain things (Tuchvala had a bit of problems figuring out how and when to act etc). Sand and Tuchvala were kind of dependent on each other and as the story unfolded they became incorporated into each other's lives in a fascinating way.

One of the best things about this novel is that the author examines the happenings from different viewpoints. This adds quite a lot of depth and tension to the story, because the characters differ from each other and have different motives for their actions (the terraforming humans have had disputes and disagreements and the world is not as serene and peaceful as it could be).

Reading about what the seeders thought about the Fifth World was fascinating. They had different opinions about how to proceed with their job, because they had two choices - they could either leave the planet alone because of the lifeforms that lived there or sterilize and re-seed the planet, because it was their job to grow planets and the colonists were not part of their original plans. The author wrote fascinatingly about the different opinions and science involved in re-seeding the planet and paid enough attention to details and science. He also wrote convincingly about colonisation and what was involved in it, but didn't go overboard with scientific information.

What happened between Alvar and Teng was handled well. In my opinion the author wrote surprisingly well about how they had sex and how they had different views about affection and sexual feelings, because Teng only wanted sex and nothing more. Sex seemed to be the only kind intimacy for Teng.

It was interesting that the author also wrote about references to bisexuality and left a few things a bit vague on purpose so that readers could decide for themselves what was going on. He approached gender and sexuality-based elements in a surprisingly fluent way and avoided excessive and tedious moralizing about sexuality and its different forms.

The author used Native American culture in an excellent way in the story, because he easily blended Native American beliefs and way of life with science fiction. I'm aware that this has all been done before in speculative fiction, but in my opinion the author wrote excellently about these issues and managed to avoid preaching.

Because Greg Keys wrote fluently and well about Native Americans, there was an intriguing anthropological dimension in this novel that is seldom found in modern science fiction novels. There are - of course - similar kind of stories out there on the market, but only a few of them have this kind of depth and understanding of culture in them.

One of the main reasons why the story intrigued me is that it had an emotionally engaging dimension that is often lacking from hard science fiction novels. As Tuchvala learned new things and came to understand life and how life adapted to changes, the exploration of her feelings was speckled with human emotions. For example, when Tuchvala thought about her Makers and if they were still alive or not, the whole scene was full of interesting human emotions.

Greg Keyes is a talented author who can write intelligent and genuinely interesting novels. He has built a

believable and surprisingly human world that is tainted by problems that have been a part of human existence for a long time. He has also created a good and versatile cast of characters, and he easily shifts the narrative from Sand to the three sister farmers and other characters.

It's possible that this novel may not be to everyone's liking due to its contents and combination of different elements. I personally enjoyed this novel, because it felt fresh compared to many new sci-fi novels that repeat the same plot elements over and over again with huge amounts of insignificant sex and brutal violence. Don't get me wrong, I do like reading those kind of novels too when they're stylistic and well written, but I'm a bit fed up with sci-fi authors repeating themselves and using sex and violence to attract new readers and not paying enough attention to the story. Fortunately this novel differed from most new sci-fi novels, because GreG Keyes had ambition and was able to deliver an intelligent story to his readers.

In my opinion Footsteps in the Sky has tiny bits and traces of Robert A. Heinlein, Frank Herbert and Robert Charles Wilson in it, but it's an original and fascinating novel that stands proudly on its own feet. It a classic hard science fiction novel that will appeal to readers who want to read old-fashioned and well written science fiction stories that lack the frustratingly annoying elements of many modern sci-fi novels. It's a perfect marriage of classic hard science fiction, human emotions and Native American culture. I give this novel 4.5 stars on the scale from 1 to 5 stars.

By the way, if you enjoy reading this novel, I strongly urge you to take a look at the author's fantasy novels (Chosen of the Changeling duology: The Waterborn and The Blackgod, and The Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone series: The Briar King, The Charnel Prince, The Blood Knight and The Born Queen) and The Age of Unreason series. They're excellent reading material for adult readers who want to read good speculative fiction.

My final words are:

Footsteps in the Sky is intriguing and well written science fiction for adults!

Jacqie says

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Greg Keyes likes to play with different mythologies, and in this book he works with Hopi legends. The book takes place mostly on a planet colonized by people who identified as Hopi who wanted to go back to traditional ways of living and also get a planet of their own by prepping it for humanity and agriculture.

There's a lot of interesting ideas here. There's the Hopi part, which seeps into sections written about AIs and affects the way the colonists interact and interpret the technology around them. There's a man sent from Earth, along with an enhanced ship's captain/warrior who may have an agenda of her own.

I've had a bit of trouble lately with feeling like I'm missing part of what's going on in some books. Something will happen (a random sex scene out of the blue, an interlude with AI narration) and I'll feel like I just don't quite get it. A bit more showing and telling is needed for me to have a frame of reference. Sometimes I can hunker down and wait until the book tells me enough to figure things out, but in this case I felt at sea and became frustrated.

So, while there were lots of interesting characters (somewhat different from most I've read) and some good concepts, I ended up skimming more than I read.
