

Exiles of ColSec Short Guide

Exiles of ColSec by Douglas Hill

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Overview

Exiles of ColSec is a rugged sciencefiction adventure that addresses the issues of leadership, cooperation, and survival. The teen-age heroes, juvenile delinquents exiled to a distant planet, must learn to set aside their differences and work together to learn about and survive in their new home. Obstacles to their success include the menacing alien lifeforms they encounter, as well as a member of their own group, a dangerously unstable ex-government thug known as the Lamprey. While the book's futuristic plot, high-tech gadgetry, and weird aliens make for fun and imaginative reading, the author also takes on some more down-to-earth topics. His portrait of the future Earth is one of a corrupt society governed by the powerful few who exploit both their fellow human beings and the natural resources of many planets. Wealth, education, and freedom are unknown to the great masses of Earth's people, except those who manage to build lives for themselves in the more remote and desolate areas of the world, or those who find some measure of freedom by joining the youth gangs that roam the decaying cities. The five young heroes of the story are drawn from these latter groups. Hill emphasizes the characteristics of a just society through the friendship and cooperation shared by the young people, in contrast to the greedy, selfish behavior of the rulers of Earth—an Earth which, at times, bears more than a passing resemblance to our present society.

About the Author

Douglas Arthur Hill was born on April 6, 1935 in Brandon, Manitoba and was raised in rural Canada in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The jacket of one of his books quotes the writer as stating, "The backwoods of Canada were a great place to grow up in but a lousy place to be an adolescent." A self-described "dreamer," Hill began reading science fiction at an early age.

Staples of his reading diet included the Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers comic strips, whose influence can still be seen in his fast-paced futuristic adventure stories for young people.

Hill left home at the age of seventeen to attend the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon; he graduated and continued his studies at the University of Toronto. At age twenty-three he moved to London, England, where he still makes his home.

Hill's interest in science fiction has continued through his adult life. In 1963, he became a science fiction critic for the London Weekly Tribune, where he also spent several years as Literary and Arts editor. He has edited poetry and folklore anthologies, and he has written nonfiction books on mythology, the supernatural, and the history of Canada and England. He now spends most of his time writing young adult science fiction and fantasy. His books include the Last Legionary quintet, five books about a futuristic warrior named Keill Randor, and two Dungeons and Dragons-style fantasies: Blade of the Poisoner and Master of Fiends. Most of his books are installments in various science fiction and fantasy series. Exiles of ColSec is the first of a trilogy that continues in The Caves of Klydor and concludes with ColSec Rebellion.



Setting

The story is set on a planet called Klydor in the distant future. Earth is ruled by a ruthless buracracy known as the Organization. One arm of the Organization, Colonization Section, or ColSec, establishes colonies on other planets for the wealth and benefit of the Organization. Because colonizing wild planets is a dangerous task, ColSec frequently sends unwanted, "expendable" juvenile delinquents on their colonizing missions. If they perish, the Organization can always find more "discards" to send on these missions.

As the story opens, the shuttle carrying one such group of young people to the planet Klydor crash-lands on the planet surface. Most of the teen-agers, held in suspended animation, die in the crash, but five of them survive, as well as the maniacal Lamprey, an ex-government "Crusher" with a lust for power. The five heroes must survive the terrors of both the unknown planet and the threat posed by the Lamprey if they are to build a life for themselves on Klydor.

Social Sensitivity

In *Exiles of ColSec*, Hill encourages racial harmony through the diversity of the heroes and their attempts to understand the culture of the Klydor aliens.

Equality of the sexes is stressed by the active roles played by the girls, Heleth and Samella. Nor are the male characters stereotyped. Cord is a thoughtful hero who would rather resolve conflicts through reason than through fighting. The book does contain violence that younger readers may find disturbing. But Hill does not dwell on violence, and many readers will find his descriptions of fights between characters and the deaths of monsters merely realistic rather than excessive.

Literary Qualities

Exiles of ColSec is a fast-paced work that is exciting and fun to read. The characters, while not drawn in great depth, are engaging and believable.

With its emphasis on survival in the wilderness, Exiles of ColSec clearly follows the tradition of the "Robinsonades," stories inspired by the adventures of Daniel DeFoe's shipwrecked hero, Robinson Crusoe. But unlike Robinson Crusoe, Exiles of ColSec is not about one person triumphing over the forces of nature. It is about several people learning to cooperate with each other and with their environment. In this way Exiles of ColSec takes a more modern attitude toward nature and survival than does Robinson Crusoe. The struggle against evil and tyranny, personified by the ColSec organization and the destructive Lamprey, is also an important theme here, as it is in many works of Western literature. Hill writes in a style that reads quickly, with many colorful action verbs and skillful descriptions of settings and strange monsters. He displays humor through the characters and their relationships.

Jeko and Heleth, for example, trade a number of friendly insults throughout the story, and Jeko occasionally makes ironic remarks on the heroes' situation.



Themes and Characters

The story's most important characters are the five teen-age heroes. Each of the youths has a different background and different talents. Cord Ma Kiy, who becomes the leader of the group, is the most well-developed character, and most of the story is told from his point of view. Raised in the wilds of the Scottish highlands, Cord has little knowledge of technology, but his independent spirit and wilderness tracking skills prove useful on the wild planet of Klydor. Cord is also a muscular, able fighter. These qualities make the other youths view him as their natural leader, but Cord dislikes the idea of giving orders to other people. He accepts a position of authority reluctantly, trying to encourage the others to adopt "the Highland way" —and make their own decisions. Of Cord's companions, only Samella, a girl with telepathic receptivity and computer expertise, shares this independent bent.

The other three teens are former members of street gangs, accustomed to obeying the orders of leaders without question. The boys Jeko and Rontal are "Free Streeters," from the sprawl of Detroit and Chicago, while the girl Heleth comes from the "Bunkers," remnants of London's decayed subways.

These three are natural warriors with their street-fighting skills, and Heleth proves to have excellent night vision as well, from spending a lifetime underground in the old subways. The teenagers' ability to pool their varied skills enables them to survive in an unfamiliar environment. Hill's stories often feature ill-assorted groups of heroes.

The diversity among these characters helps to emphasize the theme of overcoming individual differences and utilizing them for the benefit of the group.

The cooperation among the teenagers contrasts sharply with the behavior of the Lamprey, the sixth survivor of the shuttle crash. A former government thug and a trained killer, the Lamprey uses a laser-rifle to seize control of the little group. Frightened by the Lamprey's dangerous mental instability, Cord and his friends initially submit to his authority. The Lamprey leads them on an excursion through the Klydor forest, where the group encounters a tribe of aliens. The Lamprey, who reacts with brutality to anything he does not understand, fires the laser-rifle into the alien group, killing several of them. It is at this moment that Cord and Samella, horrified at the carnage, manage to wrest the rifle away from the Lamprey and drive him into the forest. But now the teen-agers are faced with two problems: the Lamprey has vowed revenge on Cord and Samella; and meanwhile, the alien inhabitants of Klydor, as a result of the Lamprey's behavior, have become hostile to the humans.

The young heroes also discover, through Samella's psychic abilities, that the trees of Klydor are sentient beings which communicate telepathically with the alien tribe. The aliens, they realize, are hostile to humans not only because Exiles of ColSec of the Lamprey's savage actions, but because the humans' transport shuttle killed a large number of trees in its crash landing. When Cord and his friends discover a well-kept "tree graveyard," they realize that the aliens consider the trees sacred. Hill's young



heroes, unlike the Lamprey, treat nature with a healthy respect and try to understand the alien lifeforms of Klydor. In this way, they represent the author's idea of a moral society. Cord and his friends try to learn from nature, while the Lamprey destroys it and the ColSec officials exploit it to increase their own wealth. Justly enough, it is the alien people who eventually kill the Lamprey, while Cord and his friends later help the forest people defend one of the sentient trees from attack by a giant worm-monster, and are subsequently left alone by the alien tribe. The teen-agers then set off to explore Klydor further, with plans to make it their true home, a place where they can live freely. The idea of freedom is important in the work, for the writer clearly believes that a life of freedom in the harsh wilderness is preferable to life under a "civilized" tyranny.



Topics for Discussion

1. In the first chapter, how does the writer use the dreams of the characters to introduce them? Is this method effective? Why or why not?

2. What qualities does Cord possess that make him especially fit to make decisions, such as the one the GUIDE computer asks him to make early in the book? What other decisions does Cord make during the course of the story?

3. Can the Lamprey be interpreted as a symbol of the Earth's harsh and corrupt government? What traits does he share with the rulers of Earth? In what ways does he try to control the behavior of Cord and the other teen-agers?

4. In Chapter Eight, Cord and Samella have a misunderstanding because Cord believes the girl is angry at him for letting the Lamprey go unchallenged. Samella retorts that "The last thing I wanted was for you to fight that killer." What kinds of assumptions has Cord made about leadership?

About Samella? What do you think the author is trying to say about the roles and attitudes of men and women?

5. Even after the teen-agers take the laser-rifle away from the Lamprey, they continue to share their shelter with him until he picks a fight with Cord. What characteristic(s) of a just society are symbolized by the teen-agers' willingness to give the Lamprey a second chance?

6. Eventually Samella uses the laserrifle to drive the Lamprey off into the forest. Heleth urges the other girl to "Kill him now, while you can!" Samella admits that maybe she should, but maintains that she does not want to start their new life on Klydor by committing a murder. What are the merits of each of these arguments? Do you agree with Heleth or Samella?

7. How does the rope around the giant tree foreshadow the climax of the book?

8. Would the book's ending have been more or less satisfying if the teenagers, rather than the aliens, had killed the Lamprey? Why do you think the author gives this role to the aliens?

9. The heroes discover many alien monsters on the surface of Klydor. The Lamprey is also described as a monster. Which monster is the most dangerous and why?

10. How important to the story are the sentient trees of Klydor? In what ways do the trees' mental powers help or hurt the teen-agers? What other elements of nature do the heroes encounter in the story? How do Cord and his friends react to the various lifeforms of Klydor?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. How does the Lamprey's attitude toward the lifeforms of Klydor differ from that of the teen-agers? Give examples of the characters' behavior to back up your responses.
2. The computer GUIDE is a useful tool for the teen-agers, but also useful to the reader. How do GUIDE'S remarks help the reader to understand the story? Give examples to support your responses.
3. Compare this book to one of its sequels, *The Caves of Klydor* or *ColSec Rebellion*. Which is the better book and why? Do the characters change from one adventure to the next? If so, how?

Give examples to support your responses.

4. How do Cord, Samella, Rontal, Jeko, and Heleth each contribute to the survival of their group? Give one example of behavior for each character.



For Further Reference

Review. Booklist (November 1, 1984): 360. Calls Hill's novel an "action and violence-packed adventure," and "a sure winner for fans of Hill's earlier books."

Review. Growing Point (January, 1984): 4193-4194. The critic praises the "statement of faith in human nature which has always been the hallmark of Douglas Hill's robust and inventive novels."

Review. Junior Book Shelf (June, 1984): 139. Questions Hill's use of "weird and horrific happenings" as a device to draw the interest of young readers.

Review. School Librarian (June, 1984): 153-154. Praises Hill's novel as "serious and important," and compares its themes to those of Robert Westall's *Futuretrack 5* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

Review. School Library Journal (November, 1984): 132. Notes that Hill's heroes are "believable products of slum culture evolved from present day conditions," and calls the book "an exciting adventure with a minimum of science fiction."

Review. Science Fiction Chronical (January 1987): 40. Recommends Hill's novel as exciting reading for young readers and for adults. Notes its similarities to earlier works of science fiction.

Review. VOYA (April, 1985): 55. Praises *Exiles of ColSec* as "a well-paced, gripping adventure."

Related Titles

Exiles of ColSec is the first book in the ColSec trilogy. The adventures of Cord and his friends are continued in *The Caves of Klydor* and *ColSec Rebellion*. In addition, Douglas Hill has written a number of other books about the adventures of young people in futuristic worlds, including the *Last Legionary* series and the *Huntsman* trilogy.



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