

Dream inspires Nipomo man to pen science-fiction series

THE ESSENCE OF HOWARD LEWIS

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Howard Lewis sits behind the wheel of his 1963 MG Roadster, which he restored while writing his first novel. “When you restore a car, there is a lot of kind of mindless work — scraping rust and so forth,” he said. “So I’d have my notepads nearby, and I’d think of an idea and write it down as I worked.”//Ian Gonzaga/Staff

It seems Howard Lewis can do anything he sets his mind to.

A 23-year resident of Nipomo, he’s served aboard submarines and trained their nuclear reactor operators. He’s supervised mechanical systems training at Diablo Canyon Power Plant.

He’s restored two classic MGs, doing the body work, fabricating the door panels, sewing the upholstery and hand-shaping new solid-wood dashboards.

He built a stone and wood-beam cover over his patio, where he also constructed a large stone-lined koi pond with a fountain, and he paints professional-quality Western scenes in oils.

“I like to think of myself as a Renaissance man,” Lewis, 54, said with a grin.

But one of the things he never even considered was writing a science-fiction novel — that is, until inspiration came from an unlikely source and he found himself driven to tell a story.

His initial goal of writing a single book grew into plans for a trilogy, but now it has expanded into a series of at least four books and probably more.

“It was supposed to be one book, but it got too big and I had to make it two,” Lewis explained recently as he sat at his dining room table, surrounded by his paintings of cattle, cowboys and locomotives. “The outline for the third is even bigger than the first one that turned out to be two, so I’m kind of backpedaling on the trilogy idea.

“I think there’s a lot of scenarios that can spin off it — Earthside, in space, in the universe around it,” he added.

Under the pen name H.W. Lewis, he self-published the first volume, “The Essence of Daedalus Rimes: The Journey Begins,” in 2009. He just released the second, “Daedalus Rimes: Afterdeath,” and is now working on the third.

The books are a chilling twist on the urban legend of alien abduction — one that conjures up faint echoes of the classic “Twilight Zone” episode “To Serve Man.”

But in Lewis’ tale, Earth is “kind of a Third World world caught in a battle between two superpowers,” he said, which poses a philosophical question.

“If our planet were threatened, would we have a World War-Cold War kind of race, developing space mining and so forth, if it meant the survival of our species?” he asked.

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As a youth, Lewis read stories by H.G. Wells, Jules Verne and Edgar Rice Burroughs, later moving on to writers like Robert Heinlein and Frank Herbert. But he never imagined he’d one day write his own sci-fi novels.

The inspiration to do that came some five years ago — in a dream.

“It was a dream bordering on a nightmare, if you will,” he said. “This was a very extraordinary dream, very vivid and detailed. I knew I had to write it down or I’d be awake all night.”

Lewis said it’s not unusual for him to get ideas at night, and he used to keep a notepad beside his bed so he could write them down — until he finally moved the pad to his study to keep from further annoying his wife, Jann.

But the dream didn’t stop at one night. It kept recurring and progressing for several weeks. Soon Lewis had an outline for a story. Then he started filling in the details.

“Writing it was a catharsis,” he said. “I let my mind run crazy. I put it on paper and let it run. It was like sketching a picture, then adding color.

“When I wrote it, I visualized it in my own mind, like a movie or comic book,” he added. “A lot of people who’ve read it describe it that way, so apparently that carried over.”

Lewis said his sister, editor of “Zahir, A Journal of Speculative Fiction,” heard he was writing a book and asked to read it. Once she had, she urged him to publish it.

He looked into having it printed through a traditional publishing house but found that process daunting.

Then he looked at self-publishing and found it was “relatively inexpensive and easy,” with much of it done online. The result is his first two books released in hardback and softcover through AuthorHouse.

Lewis credits wife Jann, his “No. 1 fan,” and daughter Alexis with encouraging him to write and eventually publish his books.

Alexis, who works in marketing, has become his publicist and marketing director, helping him set up a Web site and a Facebook page.

“I thought that was important because I’m from that Gen-Y generation,” said Alexis, 28.

Lewis admitted sales have been slow to take off. Most copies have been purchased by friends and family, even though they’re available locally through the Halcyon Store in Halcyon and the Novel Experience in San Luis Obispo, as well as on Amazon.com and AuthorHouse.com.

But he said he was warned not to expect his name and word of his books to spread for three to five years.

One encouraging sign, he said, is that people who read the first book are anxious to read the second one to find out what happens next.

The only downside for his slowly growing fan base is that it could be another two years before book three rolls off the presses.

Lewis said he’s taken on a new job and is now working 60 hours a week, which has cut into his writing time.

To buy the book

- “The Essence of Daedalus Rimes: The Journey Begins” and “Daedalus Rimes: Afterdeath” by H.W. Lewis can be purchased through www.amazon.com at \$30 for hardback and \$21 for softcover editions.
- Copies may be purchased through www.authorhouse.com and directly from Howard Lewis at www.authorhwlewis.com for \$21 hardback and \$14 softcover.

- Copies also are available at the Novel Experience in San Luis Obispo and the Halcyon Store.