



## The Companions: A Novel

By Sheri S. Tepper

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### The Companions: A Novel By Sheri S. Tepper

Three planets have been recently discovered in deep space, and prosaically named to reflect their respective environments. Jungle, lush and foreboding, swallowed up an eleven-member exploratory team more than a decade earlier, while hot, harsh, and dusty Stone turned out to be phenomenally rich in rare ore, the most profitable new world to be found in a century. But it is the third, Moss, that could well prove to be the most enigmatic . . . and dangerous.

Enlisted by the Planetary Protection Institute -- an organization founded to assess new worlds for potential development and profit -- famed linguist Paul Delis has come to Moss to determine whether the strange multicolored shapes of dancing light observed on the planet's surface are evidence of intelligent life. With Delis is his half sister, Jewel, the wife of one of the explorers lost on Jungle. Working together, they are to determine the true nature of the "Mossen" and decipher the strange "language" that accompanies the phenomenon.

Yet the great mysteries of this bucolic world -- three-quarters covered in wind-sculpted, ever-shifting moss -- don't end with the inexplicable illuminations; there is the puzzle of the rusting remains of a lost fleet of Earth ships, moldering on a distant plateau. Perhaps the biggest question mark is Jewel Delis herself and her mission here at the far reaches of the galaxy. Leaving an overpopulated homeworld that is rapidly becoming depleted of the raw materials needed for human survival, Jewel is a member of a radical underground group opposing a recent government edict that will eliminate all of the planet's "nonessential" living inhabitants. And it is here, at the universe's unexplored edge, where the fate of endangered creatures may ultimately be decided -- though it will mean defying ruthless and unforgiving ruling powers to repair humankind's disintegrating relationship with the beasts of the Earth.

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## The Companions: A Novel By Sheri S. Tepper Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #710095 in eBooks
- Published on: 2009-09-25
- Released on: 2009-10-13
- Format: Kindle eBook

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Fans will hail Hugo nominee Pepper's latest (after 2002's *The Visitor*), with its compelling story of an ordinary woman flung into extraordinary circumstances, but interesting ideas left undeveloped, awkward transitions from first to third person and unfair withholding of information may annoy others. Earth, incredibly overcrowded, has passed a new law prohibiting nonhuman life on the planet. Jewel Delis, dog keeper and member of an underground animal-rights group, wrangles her way to the planet Moss with several dogs, ostensibly to help her unpleasant half brother Paul, a linguist, figure out the peculiar language of the planet's varied inhabitants. Jewel finds Moss every bit as odd as advertised, with strange and dangerous plants, fantastic dances performed by creatures that may or may not be intelligent, and a group of humans descended from the crew of a spaceship that crash-landed years earlier. But figuring out how the Mossen communicate is only the beginning, as Jewel and her dogs get sucked into a portal, where Moss, Mars, the dogs, a missing alien race and Jewel's ex-husband collide. As usual in this author's novels, overt themes of ecology and feminism combine with thrilling mystery, and just as typically, a *deus ex machina*—here aliens stepping in to save the day—makes for a less than emotionally satisfying ending. Still, Pepper talks about important issues, besides excelling at world-building and at creating strong and independent characters.

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From [Booklist](#)

Pepper's new grand-space opera contains a mysterious planet that may or may not bear intelligent life but does host the remains of a fleet of Earth ships; several predatory cultures, human and alien; an implausible law that will eliminate all nonhuman animal life on Earth; and a heroine who is a true speaker to animals and is trying to find a refuge for them. The good guys are larger than life, the bad guys smaller (whining rather than bold villains), and everything in the book comes together in a magnificent climax. The profeminist, antimale, antireligious didacticism that marks so much of Pepper's work is present in full measure, but so is her extremely fine writing. Pepper's command of language and characterization should have readers busily turning pages right up to the climax, even if, now and then, they will want to install earplugs to soften the shrieking of axes being ground. Oh, well, Pepper's hefty following will happily receive this book, which, neophytes should be advised, isn't the ideal introduction to her. *Frieda Murray*

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About the Author

Sheri S. Pepper is the author of several resoundingly acclaimed novels, including the Arthur C. Clarke nominated *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, *Six Moon Dance*, *The Family Tree*, *A Plague of Angels*, *Sideshow*, *Beauty* (voted Best Fantasy Novel of the Year by readers of *Locus*, now a Fantasy Masterwork) and *Grass*, a Science Fiction Masterwork.

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#### **Alison Caulfield:**

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