

A smashing (and fiery) finish to the Halo trilogy

By Renee Struthers

For Go! Magazine

Crucial Larsen just can't catch a break.

In "Mars Adrift," the final book of the Halo trilogy by Kathleen McFall and Clark Hays, Crucial is set to leave Mars for the last time after saving the head of one of the Five Families from a wasting brain disease, richer than his wildest dreams. All he wants is to return to Earth and forget Mars once and for all.

Then the meteor storm hits. And Halo is crippled.

His ride destroyed, and with Mars in ruins, Crucial is thrown back into the resistance's struggle to introduce an empathy hack into the AI that runs everything but tips the scales in favor of the Five Families. To make things worse, a sixth Family arrives from exile in the far reaches of space claiming Mars for themselves. The situation stinks, quite literally. Digestive bacteria-powered ships, anyone?

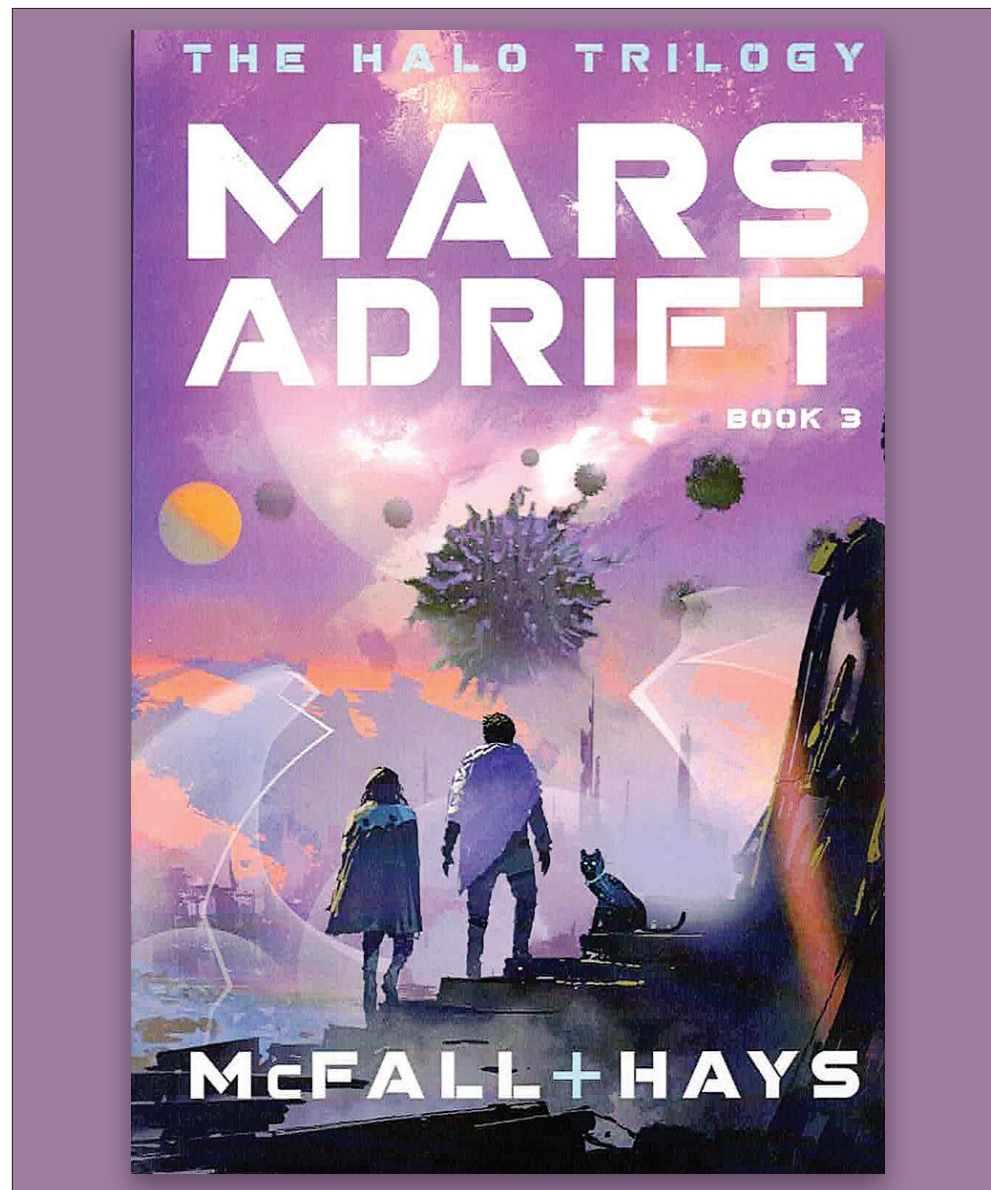
With his usual brand of apathetic derring-do, Crucial must rescue his sister Essential, reboot cybernism Sanders (whose usefulness without Halo is limited to his ability to withstand almost anything thrown at him) and find ex-lover Mel and the Halo backup servers before the new

overlords do. All while dodging the usual crowd of people wanting him dead. Will Crucial's cynicism mean the end for both Mars and Earth, or will love for his "family" save them all?

Told from the point of view of historian Lauren Valentine and Sanders in flashback form 50 years after the events unfold on Mars, "Mars Adrift" discusses whether a historical narrative can ever be considered "true," or whether history depends on one's point of view. When or how is it appropriate to change history? To suit new facts? To suit the will of the masses? Or to suit the will of the ruling class?

McFall and Hays are masterful in the use of sarcasm and dry humor to bring their characters to life, warts and all (I mean, how can "prokking underbunch" not be your favorite curse after reading this book?). Sanders continues as the straight man to Crucial but learns critical lessons in humanity in the interplay between the Larsens and the people they care about. In the end, it is Sanders who carries the lesson of love, empathy and compassion through to a new generation.

"Mars Adrift" was released Feb. 14 from Pumpjack Press. It's available at various retail outlets and via www.pumpjackpress.com.



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