ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SCIENCE FICTION

A Breath Before Sunrise
Jamie Horwath
AuthorHouse
978-1-4685-3178-7
Five Stars (out of Five)

Talented author Jamie Horwath crafts an intriguing, action-packed tale with his short novella, *A Breath Before Sunrise*.

At an unspecified time in the future, the human race has been nearly annihilated by a strange enemy that takes various deadly forms based on a deceptively simple cell structure. Human survivors of this apocalyptic invasion have escaped underground where they have created a new world. The desire to defeat the invaders remains, and recon expert Bear, a Collector, is sent to the surface to recover data from Observers in an effort to discover any weakness in the creatures.

Bear becomes fascinated by the evidence he finds of human life prior to the annihilation, a life which was clearly more meaningful and fulfilling than humanity's current existence in the dark underground, where The Elders rule and nonconformity can be dangerous. Howarth writes: "Life under the surface was black and heartless. Either you were in the military or you worked as a slave. The Elders didn't call it slavery, but everyone knew what was going on."

Bear's discovery of what life could be creates in him a restless dissatisfaction, and he ultimately chooses to remain on the surface despite the dangers and the fact that such a choice is forbidden. Soon, a friend, Bird, is sent to bring him back, and when another acquaintance, Fox, follows shortly after, all three experience strange and deadly events even as they realize that hope may not be lost.

Howarth's writing contains powerful descriptions of people and places. The world-building is inventive and compelling, skillfully conveying the bleak atmosphere both above and below the surface. The author displays an impressive talent for capturing the subtleties of human behavior—whether horrific or selfless—in such a way as to make even the most impossible scenarios seem realistic.

Scenes are set clearly and effectively, and readers will be intrigued and engaged from the first page. Even description of the stark, eerily lifeless surface of the Earth is rendered vividly:

“Neatly cut, green grass played canvas to a blood painting created from the recent attack, which projected a somber mood into the surrounding air. Bear walked slowly through the human wreckage, searching for his quarry.”

In spite of the brevity of the book, plot development and characterization is thorough. The story progresses at an efficient pace, and the main characters are drawn meticulously. Howarth demonstrates their individual struggles, making it easy for readers to engage in the story and become invested in each of their fates.

The author deftly crafts a unique and detailed story that manages to convey both horror and hope. Although *A Breath Before Sunrise* encompasses events prior to those explored in “The Observer,” a short story in Howarth’s book *Extinction Chronicles*, the novella stands alone effectively. This well-written, absorbing tale is certain to inspire readers to seek out the author’s other works as well. Highly recommended.

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