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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ SCIENCE FICTION

A Harvest of Thorns

Mario Carini
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A Harvest of Thorns *is an intense science fiction thriller with a complex plot and compelling characters.*

Exploring government corruption in global (and interstellar) crises, Mario Carini's *A Harvest of Thorns* is an exciting science fiction adventure with dark themes.

At an undetermined time in the future, humans have discovered another habitable planet, Aquario Prime, and have created a society there. Earth is still livable, though due to environmental and economic issues in the past few centuries, political tensions run high. When a flu epidemic threatens to kill off the inhabitants of Earth and a corrupt pharmaceutical company hides its involvement in the outbreak, a few key players emerge. Pharmaceutical professionals, government officials, and members of a terrorist organization called the IAM compete to take advantage of the situation for economic, political, and sometimes personal gain.

While the majority are well developed, there are too many characters to keep track of, and it's difficult to pin down who the major players are until several chapters in. A handful of characters are introduced and killed off in the first ten chapters alone. As the book goes on, there are shown to be benefits to the high death count, which builds suspense, suggesting that any of the main characters could lose their lives at any point, and increases dramatic tension.

Descriptions of characters are sympathetic and establish context for the scenes; the writing is eloquent, capturing vibrant snippets of lives before their often violent ends. The main characters' conflicting motivations drive the story. The leader of the IAM, the mole in the operation, and the vice president of the United States are among the more intriguing characters.

Though the book is long and its story lines complex, the pacing is on point. Chapters section out the story into swiftly moving scenes. Minute, physical details describe the settings excellently. The writing is at its strongest with the dialogue, which stays true to the personalities and backgrounds of the characters speaking. Action is also artfully rendered.

However, some pivotal details are muddled. Though the book takes place at some point in the future, it is never clear how far from the present it is. Travel through a space gate between Earth and Aquario Prime, and to space stations, is common, but otherwise there's not evidence of more advanced technology than a cell phone. While the IAM is an adequately malicious and tension-building antagonist, neither its reason for forming nor its ultimate end goal is clear.

A Harvest of Thorns is an intense science fiction thriller with a complex plot and compelling characters.

AIMEE JODOIN (November 26, 2018)

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