

Ashes in Autumn

Jen

CreateSpace (May 29, 2014)

Softcover \$29.99 (796pp)

978-1-4929-6954-9

Every character in this apocalyptic epic is completely drawn and thoroughly examined.

A hauntingly realistic narrative that follows a deadly virus from its creation in a top-secret military laboratory to the height of its pandemic reach, *Ashes in Autumn* showcases humanity and the human will to survive at both its best and worst. The author, known simply as Jen, builds each character, scene, and interaction with incredible attention to history and detail.

Dr. William Coger has had a rough year. After his wife died in childbirth, he dedicated his life to raising his son, Todd, and concentrating on his experimental scientific work in the field of “offensive biological weaponry.” When a traffic accident puts Todd in a coma and Coger subsequently loses his job, he is filled with anger and rage at the world. With the help of an ambitious cult leader and a crooked politician, the virus Coger created is unleashed on the general population, causing a breakdown of unfathomable proportions. Meanwhile, Andy Leong, David Warner, and Irene Jacobs, three college professors and longtime friends, find themselves in the precarious position of attempting to survive an apocalypse.

In turns action-packed and slowly methodical, *Ashes in Autumn* covers a lot of ground surrounding the events leading up to the disease outbreak and its consequences, making it quite a lengthy tale. Jen has broken down the timeline into book 1, which covers May 17, 2019, to August 30, 2019, and book 2, which picks up the action one year later on September 20, 2020, and continues through May 15, 2021. Books 1 and 2 are essentially complete unto themselves and could stand alone as two separate novels.

Chapters and subchapters are labeled with dates and times that add to the sense of urgency; much like in the television program 24, the clock is always ticking. At times, it is unclear why the author chose to include certain factoids and off-topic musings, but the result is that every character, regardless of his or her role in shaping the plot, is completely drawn and examined. Dozens of mini character studies are presented throughout the course of events.

The title, *Ashes in Autumn*, is evoked by the text that both precedes and closes book 1: “Upon the darkened horizon, the autumn of existence approaches sending ominous foreshadowing of what will become. As the chilling winds begin to squall, the ashes of what remains quickly scatter and dissipate into the ambiance.” Jen uses evocative vocabulary and imagery; unfortunately, it is too often combined with grammatical errors. In particular, verb tenses are often mixed midsentence and semicolons are consistently used incorrectly. The result is distracting but could be easily rectified by a thorough proofread. Trickier to address are instances of not-quite-right word use, such as, “the stymie atmosphere that seemed to be produced by the depressing mood,” or “sadamastic exercise.”

Ashes in Autumn would be at home in the collections of fans of other gritty, realistic, borderline horror movies and books such as *Contagion*, *28 Days Later*, *Outbreak*, and even *I Am Legend* and *The Last Man on Earth*.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (July 28, 2014)

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