



Bat Blood: The Devil's Claw

Richard Myerscough

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Homage to B movies contains vital message about man's interference with nature.

Elite guards from a super-secret research facility battle for their lives against a mutated teenage girl and her compatriots, the genetically enhanced and dangerous offspring of escaped lab animals. Richard Myerscough's *Bat Blood* contains common themes found in techno-thrillers like Michael Crichton's *Prey*, medical thrillers such as Robin Cook's *Coma*, and horror/sci-fi in the same vein as John Saul's *The God Project*.

Intentional or not, *Bat Blood* is a delectable homage to science-fiction B movies, like *Day of the Triffids*, *Them*, and *The Blob*, which were filmed during the early stages of the Cold War and inspired by the fear and paranoia of atomic warfare and fallout. Here, Myerscough exploits the fear of genetic experiments gone horribly wrong.

What makes the novel even more frightening, beyond just the fear of the unknown, is that it feels as though the content could be ripped out of the latest newspaper headlines. The threat of chemical weapons, genetic enhancements of animals and humans, and the creation of killer viruses and bacteria in laboratories is very real.

A bat-like animal bites teenage Sarah Douglas in an abandoned mine rumored to be inhabited by gremlins: "The huge, winged creature ... collided into Sarah ... its teeth bit into her shoulder while its four sets of claws slashed into her back, face, neck and shoulder." Sarah has terminal leukemia, and after she is savaged by the bat-like monster, her father signs a waiver to allow a nearby super-secret research center to treat both her cancer and her new injuries.

Unbeknownst to Sarah and her father, the research center maintains a sinister agenda. Sarah escapes from the research center, but she undergoes a strange and terrifying physical metamorphosis. She becomes instrumental in a war between the progeny of highly intelligent, genetically enhanced lab animals and the employees of the lab; the conflict also involves the well-armed guards and the surrounding townsfolk.

Bat Blood is a fun novel that contains cinematic battle scenes that might have come out of a Michael Bay action movie. Myerscough writes, "He stabbed and managed to pull one of the creatures off. As it hit the ground, two guards blasted the creature into chunks of meat."

That said, there are numerous grammar, punctuation, and syntax errors in the text, and a lack of continuity within the story. As a result, part of the novel's vital message about man's tampering with nature loses its effectiveness. The author's wording is often awkward, also. For example, in one instance, the text reads, "The beast flipped around and bit his powerful jaws into Thompson's neck." (Jaws don't bite; teeth bite.)

With proper editing, *Bat Blood* has the potential to be an exciting and enjoyable read.

LEE GOODEN (November 6, 2013)

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