



Blowback '94: When the Only Way Forward Is Back

Brian Meehl

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Blowback '94 is a satisfying time travel adventure made more tantalizing because of the friendships, love, and loss that it features.

In Brian Meehl's dynamic time travel novel *Blowback '94*, a family legend is wrapped up.

Twins Iris and Arky have been reunited with their mother, Octavia, in 1894 Paris. Octavia is an astrophysicist whose experiments with time travel stranded her in the past. While they're in Paris, Iris and Arky meet their long-lost cousin, James, who helps them to get jobs and earn their keep. Arky experiences first love and loss, and Octavia takes on a new profession as a performer at the Moulin Rouge.

The siblings' father, Howard Jinks, is left back home with the twins' two good friends, Matt and Danny. Matt is concerned because Iris has disappeared before prom, while Danny tries to make his own sense of where his friends have gone. Howard, desperate to be reunited with his family, confides in the boys and begins planning.

The family legend at the center of the novel dates back to 1720, when one of Octavia's forefathers, a musical instrument artisan, prayed for help after the tragic loss of his twin daughter, Iris. Since then, Jonglers have been omniscient seers whose distinct destiny is to guide and heal others who are stuck by their circumstances. The magical instrument, with its mystical music, results in the incredible chance for the family members to meet kin from previous generations.

The book's fantasy and science fiction elements are coupled with a metaphysical twist as the twins work to get back to the present. The banter of their family and friends helps to round out all of the story lines: the siblings have their own slang, people in the past speak with the appropriate dialects, and modern colloquialisms help to maintain senses of time and place.

These unique elements make the story more engaging as it charts ancestry in its one-of-a-kind manner. Its developments are exciting, and the storytelling is versatile enough to support them all. The story includes a cosmic voyage through time, a family of eccentrics, and historical details from nineteenth-century Paris, incorporated in a way that makes the settings easy to imagine. Real-life references and French language words make this unusual tale all the more believable. Still, the story's turns are many, and not all characters are developed on an equal level. Howard, in particular, is less fleshed out.

Introducing new characters and experiences, *Blowback '94* is a satisfying conclusion to the young adult trilogy. It is tantalizing because of the friendships, love, and loss that it features.

HOPE HILLS (March 3, 2020)

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