Clarion Review

General

Broken Spark
Thomas D. Potter
Lulu
978-0-557-07485-3
Three Stars (out of Five)

War is more than tanks and men in camouflage waving flags and shooting the enemy. There is much behind-the-scenes work that is done by everyone from politicians to private contractors and scientists. *Broken Spark* focuses on the implications of electromagnetic pulse technology that could rip apart electronics-based operations and wreak terror on the world's economy, governments, and militaries. At the heart of the novel is a protagonist charged with weaving his way through the political web of his own country, other countries, and terrorist cells.

The best pieces of this novel are those linked to politics, war, and action. This is where Thomas Potter uses his sharpest description and best dialogue. For example, when Anderson arrives in Washington, DC, he is met with a chase and fight scene in an episode that is suspenseful, nuanced, and effective. In fact, it is here where the novel really picks up speed. Knowing that betrayal could be around every corner keeps readers on their toes.

The novel stutters when Potter steps away from the action and focuses on romance. Here, things move far too fast. Even while Anderson is coping with the death of a loved one to the violence of terrorism, he begins to court an old flame. Potter uses over-the-top language to describe emotions like grief and love. These descriptions are not as nuanced as those he uses for action, politics, and war. While these moments are probably included to humanize the protagonist, in reality, his relationships with his mentor, Frank Pierce, and other colleagues show more of his personality and character.

The end of the novel seems thesis-like, as if Potter felt the need to tie up the loose ends of the plot. Without the summary-like last paragraph of *Broken Spark*, more could be left to the imagination. The novel's characters, political climate, and plot are rich and complex and could span many volumes with enough time and care. Potter does not shy away from the realities of war: people die, countries implode, and characters disappoint.

One of the best things about this novel is that Potter is able to subtly explain or allude to the reasons that people join terrorist cells and organizations. Here, people like Taufig recruit young men who are disillusioned, poor, and angry about their place in the world. Just as smartly, Potter is able to show how quickly loyalty can shift: betrayal is quick when people feel unappreciated or when focus on the cause is lost. Potter deftly shows that all it takes is a brief spark for a person to wake to the hypocrisies and horror of the world. Such a spark or moment of clarity can mean the world, literally.