



Clouds and Earth: The Peace Outside: I/III

Sayde Scarlett

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(252pp)

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Clouds and Earth is a twisting and turning science fiction thriller.

Corporate espionage meets the moral quagmire of war in Sayde Scarlett's science fiction novel *Clouds and Earth*.

Lieutenant Alisande "Sandy" Attiyeh is a veteran of the Long War. To some, she is a war hero. To others, she is a war criminal and mass murderer. Sandy no longer knows who or what she represents. Disillusioned and without a purpose in life, Sandy accepts a job offer on the fringes of the law. Soon, Sandy is faced with a situation that could turn her into a traitor to the country she once fought for. Her entire future, and the survival of the man she loves, hangs in the balance as she decides her next move.

The book is the first part of *The Peace Outside* trilogy and takes place on Earth one hundred and fifty years in the future. The world building is plausible, with geopolitical regions having replaced nation states and a joint council governing what remains of the United States after the office of president was abolished.

Several subplots arise in addition to Sandy's story, but they rarely interlock. When they do, it is for short instances with little long-term significance. Sandy's story is sometimes lost among the twists of the independently told subplots.

The first half of the book handles backstory by deftly weaving important pieces of information into dialogues and internal monologues, avoiding overt exposition. In the book's second half, though, backstory takes up entire chapters. The change in narrative structure comes as a surprise, with neither an explanation nor a lead in, and it impacts how characters are portrayed: in the first half, internal monologues and flashbacks reveal the depths of Sandy's psyche and emotional turmoil, but the second half of the book skims her surface instead, making her seem less complex.

The book's language is flowing, and the story's pace keeps up the momentum. Scenes are short, but narrative points of view change several times in the same scene, which leads to a choppy reading experience and makes it difficult to become invested. Military terminology and regulations are handled awkwardly.

Even the various stories themselves wrap up differently: one subplot contains a complete story arc for its character, while Sandy's story ends ambiguously, turned on its head in the very last paragraph, which occurs after Sandy has exited the book.

Clouds and Earth is a twisting and turning science fiction thriller that promises intrigue based on difficult choices.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (March 5, 2019)

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