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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ THRILLER

Code of Darkness

Chris Lindberg
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Encouragement of creative experimentation and erasure of promotional definition—these are techniques often seen in the writing and marketing of books that have attempted to harness the qualities of several categories. A tense interplay of science fiction, action thriller, and urban fantasy, *Code of Darkness* surpasses the boundaries of a one-genre novel.

The psychological impact of experiencing such a work is an anticipated combination of fascination and confusion. A crime-oriented blurb, along with the striking red, white, and black cover, leads readers into believing this will be an investigation from the viewpoint of veteran Chicago police officer Larry Parker. Despite Parker's critical role in nabbing a dangerous superhero who has distorted intentions, the primary focus is on Rage, the dark angel himself. The Black Ops division of the Pentagon wants them both, adding a military spin to this unbelievable tale.

Rage is a frightening mixture of hero and villain, evident from the perspective of a woman he has saved: "She remained on top of him for a moment, just holding on to him, not saying a word. In the brief time this stranger had been in her life, everything had turned upside down. He was at best a tormented soul with a twisted sense of right and wrong—but, despite all of this, she felt a closeness to him; a bond."

Meticulous attention to detail as well as satisfactory editing propels the well-conceived story. The plot veers into a convoluted escapade and brings the reader into a bizarre world of vigilante heroism turned bad. A premonition of cataclysm sets a sinister mood that plays in the background like a gloomy musical score.

Lindberg's keen descriptions emphasize this mood: "The apartment was small and mostly barren; the room's light came from a single bulb with a pull chain hanging from the center of the ceiling, leaving the place relatively dim. The hardwood floor was filthy, and creaked loudly in protest when walked upon … A beaten couch and dark wooden coffee table rested in the middle. Peeling, dark green-patterned wallpaper adorned the four walls, giving the place an even darker feel. On the far wall, a faded painting hung crookedly just to the right of the apartment's lone window."

Divided into eighty chapters composed of brief, strategic scenes, the book has the choppy feel of a fast-paced movie. Though carefully orchestrated, an overload of minor characters tends to snuff out the major players, bringing what could have been a five-star delivery down a notch. That said, *Code of Darkness* is an engaging debut from a promising new author.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (March 5, 2012)

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