

Dark Dawning: The Oil Is Running Out

Auguste Dinoto

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It is 2034, and fighting factions struggle to gain control of dwindling fuel supplies in *Dark Dawning: The Oil is Running Out*, Auguste Dinoto's debut novel. Catastrophic earthquakes in the Mediterranean Sea take out much of the world's oil infrastructure and drastically alter the lives of people around the globe, including investigative reporter Brick Sanders, who is living in California without air conditioning, fuel, or hot showers. Constant news feeds assure citizens that the United States government will take care of everything, but Brick sees something else happening on the streets.

And it is on the streets that Brick and his photographer, Tyra, come to life. Their banter, which is sometimes playful and sometimes angry, expresses the sexual tension that runs between them. Their dynamic relationship keeps the story moving, as they try to make sense of both the official explanation of the ongoing war with Mexico and the rumors among their contacts that things aren't quite what they seem. With swagger and bravado, Brick narrates their narrow escapes from life-threatening dangers, including their search for gas. Dinoto shows Brick to be an authentic character, driven by morality and at the same time susceptible to the sex and drugs available everywhere.

A thriller with multiple conspiracies to unravel, *Dark Dawning* also travels into science-fiction territory. Genetically engineered creatures called hubroos lurk around every corner, ready to do the bidding of the government agency that created them to keep citizens in line. Dinoto offers quasi-scientific explanations for his story's worldwide disaster, citing an unimaginable earthquake with a Richter-scale reading of 15.5 that has caused the oceans to begin to "drain to the earth's core." It is hard to reconcile the level of destruction such an event would likely cause with the continuation of the mundane, such as television news broadcasts. If mass media still exists, then why does the news outlet use film cameras, rather than digital cameras? Perhaps this technological regression, along with elements like the return of the human-powered rickshaw, is meant to demonstrate the degree of change in the world.

At its heart, however, *Dark Dawning* is a suspense-filled adventure, not a science-fiction novel. While Brick's frequent psychedelic interludes and typo-ridden speeches slow the pace at times, the cinematic action near the end of the book rekindles the suspense: Dinoto's ricocheting bullets, exploding gas tanks, and horizon ablaze with bright orange fire will appeal to any reader intrigued by Hollywood-style adventures. The heroes are on the move just in time, with a variety of evils at their heels. Dinoto seems willing to sacrifice any character at any time, which keeps the reader guessing to the last page.

SHEILA M. TRASK (May 29, 2012)

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