Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

DiSemblance
Shanae Branham
CreateSpace
978-1-4775-2776-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

DiSemblance, by debut author Shanae Branham, chronicles the adventures of a socially inept seventeen-year-old. Jason Tanner—along with his brother, Isaac, and father, Lloyd—has spent most of his life inside his home in the tiny town of Wolf Point, Montana. Jason's father has spent years inventing and perfecting a virtual-reality machine similar to the one that produces the holodecks on *Star Trek*. During the time Lloyd was developing the machine, he chose to homeschool Jason and Isaac, not only to protect them from the outside world but also to protect his invention.

When Lloyd unexpectedly disappears, Jason must venture out into the world to recover his father and protect his brother. The neighbor girl that Jason has a crush on, Boston Komen, gets mixed up in the Tanners' adventures as well, as do the police, who are on the hunt for a serial killer murdering terminally ill patients. Will Jason be able to figure out what is going on and protect those he loves, or will it cost him his life?

The characters of Jason and Isaac are nerdy enough to elicit empathy but cool enough to rise to the occasion, making readers feel like they are rooting for real young men. At an age where many teens attempt to estrange themselves from their guardians, Jason's love for his father and his motivation to find out what happened to him are particularly refreshing. It is also admirable that Jason wishes to protect his little brother even though Isaac can be bratty and manipulative. The author expertly captures the reality that teenage boys can be mature one moment yet terrified the next.

Branham does a brilliant job creating suspense that is carried throughout the novel. She ramps up the tension by keeping readers guessing over the identities of Jason's foes and about how Jason's situation ties in with the hunt for the killer. It is also uncertain whether officers of the law will ultimately be Jason's allies or enemies. The villains and police officers are

multifaceted characters, and readers will keep turning the pages to find out what happens to Jason, his crew, and even these secondary characters. It is a shame, then, that the character of Boston is a one-dimensional, weepy damsel in distress. This might prove to be an annoyance to female readers.

The science of the holodeck is explained in such a believable way that even non-science buffs will be able to easily wrap their heads around it. Several major conveniences do occur during the story. Additionally, characters' phobias appear and disappear as needed to serve functions of the plot.

Overall, Branham has penned a marvelous, fast-paced thriller, sure to appeal to teen science-fiction aficionados and the uninitiated alike.

Jill Allen