

Hunters of Hahl

Jack Henry Psaila

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Hunters of Hahl is a character-driven fantasy that brims with heartfelt ideas about family and culture.

In Jack Henry Psaila's compelling fantasy *Hunters of Hahl*, a society unites in the hopes of defeating a towering monster.

A century ago, an enormous creature attacked and destroyed the thriving Great Dahrk Village, scattering the survivors to the wind. Now, the survivors have splintered and formed warring factions: The Hunters of Hahl, the Dahrk Clan, and the Fury Pride. These tribes wander the lands eking out a living by hunting the dwindling wildlife and avoiding war with each other. Despite the tribal elders' best efforts, the tribes grow smaller, and the threat of the creature still casts a shadow over the land. If the factions don't unite and face the creature, they risk losing their land to darkness.

The narrative starts with the destruction of the village before flashing forward. The creature, known as Preature, still haunts the lands as the factions struggle to survive. The factions are drawn in distinct terms, one example of the book's effective world building; each has evolved and adapted in particular ways. For example, the Hahls—at the center of much of the story, and home to its most engaging characters—excel at nomadic hunting; among them, social prestige is reserved for legendary hunters.

Aldra leads the Hahls. His son, Jackal, is the tribal prince. Aldra grapples with caring for his son, providing for his tribe, and forging alliances with the other tribes. His every action and thought highlights his drive to provide, even when it means risking diplomats to reach out the other tribes. Even as Preature stalks the lands, Aldra keeps his people on a path leading toward prosperity and peace.

Seeming to build toward a climatic showdown with Preature, the book takes an unexpected twist along the way, shifting its focus to emphasizing the importance of community and social ties. Even as the Hahls fight for resources, they attempt to connect and rebuild with the other tribes. The final showdown becomes less about defeating a great evil and more about overcoming misconceptions.

The writing is imbued with fairy tale sensibilities, but this extends to characterizations, and many of the characters end up being shallow. Scenes are difficult to contextualize, and it is not always clear which events are occurring at which time, though many extended scenes help to outline what tribal life is like. The tale is unevenly paced to underline its focus on characters, rather than on an ultimate good-versus-evil confrontation.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (May 16, 2019)

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