Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Red Nova
Paul L. Centeno
CreateSpace
978-1-4664-8180-0
Four Stars (out of Five)

"Bisel was arrogant, obnoxious, and indifferent. And he was perfectly happy that he possessed all three of those attributes because he smiled when thinking of each and every one of them." Such is the character of the admiral whose quest to defeat a genetically altered super-villain drives the plot of *Red Nova*, a thoroughly well-crafted and ingenious space opera by sophomore author Paul L. Centeno.

The admiral and, later, his gifted eighteen-year-old daughter, Nesha, are the main protagonists in this adventure set six centuries in the future. The pair is aided by a small but equally engaging supporting cast that includes a pair of rough soldiers, a perky blonde starship commander, and an artificially intelligent android with a messianic complex. The villain of the novel, Liagon (first introduced as and sometimes referred to by the tongue-defying name of Vreffith Larser) is something of a devil incarnate.

The first quarter of the book is a rip-roaring blast of exciting space chases, one-sided yet rousing starship battles, and exhilarating combat. Yet Centeno seems unable to sustain the momentum. Some readers who thrill to *Red Nova*'s action-packed opening may become disenchanted with what then seems like a young adult novel when Centeno focuses on Nesha and her friends going shopping in twenty-seventh-century Manhattan or "rifting" on what are essentially flying surfboards. Fortunately, the author eventually regains his early pace and brings Nesha into the main plot. From there onward, readers are once again drawn into an engaging action-adventure story.

Centeno writes in a clear and clever manner, using vulgarity very sparingly, keeping the sex scenes tasteful and to a minimum, and restraining himself from becoming too explicit when describing violent acts. Though there are not many memorable phrases in the text, Centeno knows when to allow his characters to deliver the expected stock quip, such as, "Those bastards

just don’t know when to become extinct!” and “Come on, Kong! Let’s finish this!”

Centeno’s universe is Earth-centric enough to be familiar, yet also goes beyond the “veil,” as his characters call it, to allow readers to expand their minds into other worlds and galaxies populated by non-human races. Science fiction fans will find much of the content conventional, but there are just enough surprises and twists to keep them engaged and entertained.

Once past the midpoint of the novel, readers will find it impossible not to finish. Those who want and expect a good yarn of adventure in space will enjoy *Red Nova*.

Mark G. McLaughlin