Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Remnant: An Anthology
Roland Allnach
All Things That Matter Press
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Four Stars (out of Five)

With *Remnant*, Roland Allnach presents three novellas that promise to haunt the reader long after the cover has been closed. Though the title refers specifically to the last story in this collection, *Remnant* also indicates the dystopian future in which all three stories take place, a future in which exploration and technology have advanced far enough to spread the human condition into the far reaches of space.

The first story, "All the Fallen Angels," begins with a dream, setting the tone for a tale of redemption sought in the shadow of a planet that seems to influence the emotional state of its inhabitants. The story is enjoyably surreal, bringing to mind Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*, while remaining firmly grounded in the gritty details of the main character, a guilt-plagued military officer named Stohko.

The second installment, "Enemy, I Know You Not," is a suspenseful action thriller featuring a squad of soldiers on a training mission gone awry, a situation in which the trust they've developed as comrades-in-arms is quickly destroyed, leaving them suspecting the worst of each other and questioning the morality of their cause. It's a more cerebral version of James Cameron's *Alien* in which, instead of being hunted by an insect-like alien, the marines target themselves.

"Remnant," the finale, is reminiscent of elements of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* or Stephen King's *The Stand*. After most of civilized society has been swept away by a plague, Peter Lowry has holed up by himself, suspicious of everyone and everything. Faced with a choice between rebuilding the world with other survivors or remaining alone with his memories, Peter is conflicted, as he tells a fellow survivor: "I *despised* the world-that-was. Even as I feared for my family when the plague came, part of me welcomed the anarchy with open arms, part of me relished the idea of having it all come crashing down, part of me had always longed for the

time after it all fell apart and the twisted adventure of survival without any external check." But Peter Lowry has to decide if he really wants what he *thinks* he wants.

Overall, the three pieces fit together nicely, without seeming forced. The characters feel authentic, not simply serving as dialogue devices, as in lesser-crafted science fiction tales. The questions raised are significant ones, posed thoughtfully without becoming preachy or overly didactic. While the text is marred occasionally by a misused or misspelled word, the writing is engrossing enough that these few mistakes are easily overlooked, specks of dirt on a nearly perfect gem of sci-fi.

Remnant has been named a finalist in the science fiction category of the 2011 National Indie Excellence Awards, and Roland Allnach has previously been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His star is on the rise, and *Remnant* will surely not be the last of his writings left behind, but rather a bright precursor to a brilliant, not-so-dystopian future.

Peter Dabbene