ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SCIENCE FICTION

Shades of Treason
Chris Raay
Xlibris
978-1-4535-2722-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Captain Grieg Bryians runs his trading business in the Dragoes system with few problems, earning a reputation as a reliable merchant on the capital planet of Zelphr. His world is interrupted by the invasion of the Kyrans, humanoid, bipedal aliens who are very good at conquering whole planets on the way to swift takeovers of entire star systems. All humans are enslaved, and Bryians ends up at a slave camp on Zelphr. He conspires with others to escape the camp, steal a Kyran shuttle, and swipe a Kyran battlecruiser, which Bryians plans to sell to the human rebel faction. A Kyran assigned to keep watch on the cruiser becomes his prisoner. The Kyran space fleet is large, and the escapees are revealed soon after they board the cruiser. At the same time, Bryians has to keep his crew under control and obtain information from his prisoner, who is stubborn and well-indoctrinated into his culture's beliefs.

Shades of Treason is space opera weighed down by misplaced, word-heavy descriptive passages. There are information excesses, unnecessary fashion details, grammar problems, and overlong conversations. The novel begins as science fiction and ends up as more of a Western European fantasy set on an Earthlike planet.

The "action" scenes, and individual fights in particular, are well-written and clear. But the book suffers from other problems. Some characters are not woven into the narrative; they're dropped into scenes without any set up. Calling the Kyrans "humanoid" and having their eyes as the only differing feature from humans is lazy writing because the nonhuman characters are too familiar. Aliens can be very humanlike, but they have to have something within their culture or philosophy (beyond simply adding antennae or extra arms) that makes them seem "alien" to readers.

There's some very good writing in *Shades of Treason*, particularly in the exchanges between Bryians and his captive. The theme of breaking out of one's mental shackles to find a more holistic view of the universe underpins their relationship, but the book suffers from a wandering story line. While Chris Raay needs to work on developing a more coherent authorial

voice, three-dimensional characters, and solid storytelling, there is no doubt he should persevere.

J. G. Stinson