ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

ROMANCE

Soulless
Toni Hofman
CreateSpace
978-1-4921-1184-9
Four Stars (out of Five)

Sensual, sexual, and spellbinding, this original take on the urban fantasy strips layers off its characters, revealing the depths of ardor and insanity.

Soulless, an urban fantasy filled with predators in all walks of life, melds the mythical vampire with the alien conqueror. An evolved species of humans feeds on the bioenergy of others, turning a social acquaintance into a potential victim. Toni Hofman's intriguing concept exhibits a "differently the same" approach toward genre fiction, fulfilling expectations while providing a twist on anticipated events.

A police detective falls in love with the assassin assigned to kill her, a man who chooses to protect her with his life, defying the demands of his own people. This secret society, known as "Family," has always been David Jason Sawyer's top priority as well as his sustenance. His passion for Alexis Martinez changes the course of his existence, bringing to light a hidden truth of his past. Steeped in metropolitan madness and gritty violence, *Soulless* strips, literally and figuratively, the layers off its characters, revealing the depths of ardor and insanity.

This gifted, though self-interested, race of stalkers can join souls and see to the core of one's being, causing a person's inner psyche to plummet as the experience takes and, sometimes, gives: "This familiar consciousness, this entity, was David Sawyer and it held her completely, radiating a keen wanting that discomfited her enough to make her want to turn away. Feelings coursed through Alex's body like shots of adrenaline, waves made of a heady ecstasy. She was *enveloped* within him, completely, intimately."

A phenomenal ability to share information via telepathic connection in a dreamlike state, along with the compulsion to consume its targets in a sophisticated manner, makes this clandestine civilization an original take on dominating the food chain. It is the energy itself that is the lure, followed by the thrill of torture and mutilation.

David and Alexis are a romantic exception to the threatening rule. Their encounters are

sensual, sexual, and spellbinding. In this interlude, Alexis enters her lover's mind: "When consciousness succumbed and sleep came, her dreams were of his life as if it were her own. It was as if she was no longer herself, not completely, like she'd stepped into him, saw through his eyes, felt through him. She was Sawyer, locked in his memories."

The book's sole flaw is a tendency to rely too heavily on dialogue to convey essential details in some scenes.

Soulless is Hofman's debut novel and the first book of a series. Without question a page-turner, Hofman's work will captivate fans of action-oriented romance and mesmerizing urban fantasy, even though her questionable hero may not appeal to the sensitive at heart.

Julia Ann Charpentier