

Sunset: Pact Arcanum: Book One**Arshad Ahsanuddin****Arshad Ahsanuddin, Illustrator****Craig Payst, Illustrator**

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978-1-4563-5485-5

"My eyes are open, and I am not afraid," state the supernatural beings when they swear allegiance to one another in Arshad Ahsanuddin's steamy, suspenseful debut novel *Sunset: Pact Arcanum: Book One*. In the year 2041, one of these magical beings, Daywalker Nick Jameson, breaks a policy of noninterference with the human realm when he thwarts a terrorist attack in the United States, exposing his fellow Sentinels, Daywalkers, and Nightwalkers to the human race. Sentinels (vampire slayers), Daywalkers (vampires with souls), and Nightwalkers (vampires without souls) have had twenty years of peace by coexisting in the Armistice Zone under the rule of the Triumvirate. Outside the Armistice Zone, however, the Court of Shadows—the home base of warlike factions outside the truce area—seeks to reignite the conflict. Meanwhile, Nick and his friends must negotiate an amicable rapport with the media and the American government as a result of his actions. Political alliances prove as volatile as personal ones, as readers witness Nick's complicated relationships with his romantic partners.

Ahsanuddin creates an intricate, fascinating vampiric society. His fragile ceasefire between the supernatural races is well-grounded. In a refreshing change from many alien invasion tales, in which humans and newcomers attempt to destroy one another, the author offers the possibility of human acceptance of the supernatural beings. Payst's illustrations of the various supernatural insignia draw readers further into Ahsanuddin's fantastical world.

The author's true masterstroke, though, is the way he expands the sexual appeal of vampires. With the exception of Anne Rice's Lestat from *The Vampire Chronicles* series, modern vampires are heterosexual. Nick Jameson, however, is gay. His sexual orientation is dealt with in a matter-of-fact manner and accepted by all. The love and sex scenes are tasteful and tender. Readers agonize with Nick and his partners as they grapple with their unrequited love. In the face of such positive representations of gay men, lesbians and bisexual readers may find themselves wishing that they too were represented in *Sunset*.

For all its goodness, the finer points of Ahsanuddin's supernatural world can be hard to follow. For example, it is hard to keep a handle on all of the ranks in the hierarchy. The author gives his supernatural characters many titles, and often uses titles instead of names when referring to his characters. Ahsanuddin never adequately explains his characters' powers or origins, leaving readers to glean their nature from his sometimes vague and bewildering descriptions. Nonetheless, Ahsanuddin's romantic, futuristic, suspenseful page-turner will entice readers into the ingenious world of *Sunset*.

JILL ALLEN (May 10, 2011)

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