

The Awakenings: Battle of the Mind

James Sonny

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The Awakenings: Battle of the Mind is a faith-driven fantasy that revels in its gruesome violence.

In James Sonny's harrowing novel *The Awakenings: Battle of the Mind*, faith and determination help a young man to face a growing threat and keep his family safe.

Upon returning home from what he thought was an uneventful day, Harry is shot, point blank, by his father's shotgun. He survives, but learns that, as far as his family knows, he'd disappeared a long time ago. His worn-out clothing, haggard face, and scarring are odd; odder still is Harry's dream that he was fighting a war in a hellish landscape. But the dream was real, and the war is far from over.

A powerful, hellish entity has targeted Harry and those whom he treasures, driving Harry to cultivate the skills necessary to challenge its horde of demonic beings. The fate of the world hangs in the balance; more vital to Harry are the fates of his loved ones.

Faith plays a major role in Harry's world—not spiritual or religious faith, but personal conviction. Harry believes in himself and in what is moral, and that drives all of his actions. The threat of death doesn't challenge that faith, but strengthens it, anchoring the plot. Conviction is Harry's defining trait; he's only sketched in beyond it. Secondary characters are also defined in terms of single traits, including sexuality, to the exclusion of all else; characters appear and disappear without reason.

The hellish reality that Harry splits his time in is built up with an intricate mythology that draws from Christian and Greek lore, though there's little context for many of its features. The demons have a fascinating hierarchy; it's teased, but details are limited to those that are necessary to advance the plot, as with the primary villain being a blend of Satan, a medieval king, and an adept tactician. Much occurs behind the scenes; Harry understands and acts upon events beyond the audience's awareness, and tension is limited as a result.

Characters' conversations are variously sparse and verbose; the best among them focus on characters' actions, as with a single sentence of dialogue that's followed up by a snarky decision that hammers home the expressed unease and disgust. The surrealistic hell scenes have a dreamlike quality; they're short on details that might invite the audience in.

Harry's story is cyclical: he's trapped in a loop, facing the Satan-like ruler in an alternate reality, while the showdown has simultaneously also not yet occurred. Hazy pacing and erratic perspective shifts make the narrative difficult to follow, an issue that worsens as characters disappear and the mythology shifts.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (June 18, 2020)

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