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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆

The Boundary

Yma Sharp
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Yma Sharp stretches the boundaries of imagination with this work of young adult fiction that combines disparate elements that include NASA, werewolves, aliens, the US government, and the military.

When Dr. Smart is offered a dream job with the government, he uproots his family, moving his wife and three children to a place called Fallen Camp, known for “fine schools and excellent homes.” The Smarts quickly discover that the residents within the oddly drawn boundaries of the ghetto-like Fallen Camp are unfriendly; the adults appear tired, and they are all afraid of outsiders. Although she is inexplicably rejected by her neighbors, Mrs. Smart decides to “force the Fallen Camp community to accept her family.”

The children begin to notice changes in their mother after their father mysteriously disappears. She becomes distant and mean, so the kids—two girls and a boy— decide to look for their dad.

During their search, they discover that the residents of Fallen Camp are werewolves (good ones, though), and that the US military is cruelly rounding up and killing the werewolf children. The Smart children wonder, “What kind of crazy world was this where the military moved around within cities with cages and guns?” Not only is the army killing babies, but it has also arranged noisy festivals with Moon Bounces to distract people so they don’t hear the werewolves’ yells of terror.

The werewolves, it turns out, are aliens who need to return to their planet. “Most of them are scientists and physicians,” the children are told by a delightfully magical creature called Gram, who knows where their father is. As the werewolves board a spaceship to carry them away, the children see in their eyes “wisdom, knowledge, love and sadness,” but no loathing for the oppressive military. It is the first time the werewolves show their humanity.

The horror of the military’s crackdown on werewolves and the children’s plight with their parents would have more punch if the characters were more fully fleshed out. The children have no names, ages, or physical description; nor is their birth order revealed. It is difficult to care about such one-dimensional characters. Reasons for their mother’s transformation are unclear, as is why the werewolves were so unfriendly to the Smarts when they are described as kind and intelligent beings. Readers will find it hard to sympathize with them as well.

Sharp’s narrative has the feel of a transcribed spoken tale. Her story has the potential to provide social messages of acceptance and tolerance through, perhaps, a deeper meaning of the boundary itself. The author’s vivid imagination and storytelling ability are evident, but The Boundary requires more intricate knotting of its story threads to fully engage readers.

LINDA SALISBURY (May 18, 2010)

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