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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ SCIENCE FICTION

The Collection

Chris Monaghan
Xlibris (Sep 26, 2012)
Softcover $32.09 (214pp)
978-1-4797-0727-0

On the bookstore shelves today, there are many historical thrillers and science-fiction thrillers, with too many subcategories to mention. Chris Monaghan's *The Collection* marries the historical and scientific into one eventful, action-packed story.

A history head teacher from the Central Coast (north of Sydney) of Australia, *The Collection* is Monaghan's first novel (though he's written several school histories and other works of nonfiction), and it's easy to see that he has a love for history as well as an interest in science. The novel's main character, Bryce Brannigan, is something of a polymath, specializing in archaeology.

The plot of *The Collection* is sprawling, beginning with an accident that strands a group of scientists somewhere in space and time. They embark on a quest to collect several items that will help them to return home. Along the way, they visit ancient civilizations and parallel worlds, attempting to survive by their collective wits and skills.

It's an exciting premise, and Monaghan has clearly done his research, with realistic details regarding everything from the Large Hadron Collider to the types of medicine administered in hospitals. However, the danger of grounding the story too much in reality is that the transitions to fantasy become that much more apparent. A realistic account of particle physics can only go so far toward explaining mind-controlled time shifts.

A greater flaw is the overall quality of the writing. There are several errors throughout the book. "Allusion" is used instead of "illusion" and "naval" instead of "navel." Sentences are overstuffed with unnecessary words, sometimes making the meaning hard to discern: "It was the look he had previously never seen on his face that was in some way different to that which Bryce had had been used to." The double "had" might be a typo, but even so, the sentence begs for clarity. Other sentences can be similarly confusing, as when, describing a character's battle with a formidable Maori warrior, Monaghan writes, "The power of this Maori warrior was no match for John, no matter how many special skills John seemed to come up with."

Its flaws are somewhat counterbalanced by the book's strengths, however. The visits to ancient cultures are especially well done, and the characters, particularly Brannigan, share many interesting facts about the technologies and techniques of the times. Readers who enjoy this sort of thriller might overlook the shortcomings of *The Collection*.

PETER DABBENE (February 21, 2013)

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