Clarion Review

General

The Division
Jerry W. Amos
CreateSpace
978-1-4495-9358-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

Attorney Jerry W. Amos has combined his law background with extensive research into the conflicts between Christians, Muslims, and Jews to create his debut novel, The Division. Lawyer Jonathan Keller and Catherine Paulson, the daughter of a Middle East expert, team up to stop a terrorist plot to destroy a mosque in Israel. They are aided in their venture by a rabbi and a Muslim scholar who have different views on the Arab–Israeli conflict, but who each possess empathy for opposing views and seek a peaceful solution. The quartet embarks on a potentially fatal mission to discover the connection between a book bequeathed to Catherine by her late father and the possible attack before everything explodes.

The division of the title is the gulf that exists between the three religions and their differing ideas about the importance of Israeli holy sites. The terrorists believe that a successful explosion will trigger Armageddon, and that as a result of this destruction, these divisions will disappear.

This ambitious novel is told from many points of view, including Jonathan's, Catherine's, the rabbi's, the Muslim scholar's, and most fascinatingly, each of the three terrorists—a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew. Amos's depiction of Israel's geography and religious strife is impeccably researched and admirably nuanced. Additionally, the author delves into the historical nature of these inter-religious conflicts, drawing some surprising yet logical conclusions guaranteed to deepen the average reader's understanding of the Middle East.

The amicable Muslim scholar and rabbi who agree to disagree represent a welcome counterpoint to the terrorists and the conventional wisdom that Arabs and Jews don't get along. Throughout most of the book, the history and information about the region and its attendant religious troubles are well-integrated into the thriller aspects of the story.

Although the novel is 500 pages long, it generally maintains its momentum. The major

characters possess complex motivations and backstories—even the terrorists. In a genre where terrorists are often reduced to one-dimensional, addle-brained people, it is a credit to Amos that he makes his terrorists seem human by explaining how they arrived at their fundamentalist beliefs.

At times, though, The Division contains too much of a good thing: although the religious and historical information is interesting and relevant, it sometimes distracts from the plot. At intervals, characters stop to have information-heavy conversations, and the action is shoved to the back burner. Toward the end of the novel, the author attempts to squeeze in everyone's point of view. Some of the minor characters seem to exist only to provide "man-on-the street" interviews.

Amos could write a separate historical religious textbook using all the nuggets he inserts in this book, but overall The Division is a promising debut.

Jill Allen