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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Tribe of Tsulib

Helen Quinn
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The fiction shelves burgeon with end-of-the-world scenarios, with stories of what happens when humanity must begin anew. *The Tribe of Tsulib: A Story of Survival*, by Helen Quinn, is one such story. “We are all destined for self-destruction,” writes author Helen Quinn believing that selfishness and greed lead to the willingness of powerful countries to destroy the planet rather than be overpowered by another group of people.

Seeking to survive a nuclear war, Quinn’s enlightened group of survivors gather a few tools, seeds, and books, and set sail hoping to escape the effects of bombs, fire, smoke, poisonous air, and water. A few boats are sucked into the bowels of the earth, into huge caverns of waterways and dim light.

The book begins with a chapter called “The End,” and it describes how this group builds a new society in the caverns. Members of the next generation decide to leave the caverns to explore the outside world. Eventually, they become the tribe of Tsulib.

Helen Quinn is an expert in health science, and has an advanced diploma in western herbal medicine from Athene College in Western Australia. She annually studies plant medicine of the Amazon Basin with the local Cachuela and Shintuya cultures. Her knowledge of healing applications, herbal curatives, and ceremony, dress, and ritual of native people gives authority to her writing. *The Tribe of Tsulib* offers little dialogue, and the author’s ideas of what constitutes civilization overshadow character development. However, Quinn is able to electrify her story with details that ring true. When she tells of the next generation that wants to leave the caverns, her arguments on each side of the question are relevant and thought provoking. The community has learned how to get along without a leader or political controls, yet it’s members aren’t happy. They have ceased to listen to their homemade music, lost a zest for talking, and don’t even *think* of leaving their protected location. Their minds need stimulation through unknown adventure—the possibilities and unpredictability beyond their cavern walls.

Characters in stories like Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* accept defeat; Quinn’s characters strive to change ruinous behavior of the past. The author raises questions that will intrigue and motivate readers of every genre: Is mankind doomed to predatory behavior? Is it destined to self-destruct and deplete natural resources? Can people learn to live in harmony and to show gratitude to each other and to the earth? Especially in these times of fear in our lives and for our planet, this book will light the fires of imagination in those who have considered our demise in a nuclear war.

MARY POPHAM (October 11, 2011)

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