

Torn Apart: The Silent Screams of Destiny

Christopher Kostecka

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Tightly written coming-of-age science-fiction thriller is an intriguing page-turner.

A video-game character comes to life, invading the soul of a reserved young boy in this science-fiction thriller. Reminiscent of the *Twilight Zone* television series, which typically featured surreal situations that defied explanation, Christopher Kostecka's *Torn Apart* draws the reader into the story and does not let go.

Neal Ori saves his sister's friend Teri from drowning in a broken dam, and thereafter, he accomplishes other heroic feats. As this introverted child transforms into an extroverted man, it is only through Ndori, his strong alter ego (a lifelike warrior created on a computer), that he experiences the extent of his hidden potential. He must defeat sinister forces that threaten to keep him from Teri. One of those evil forces lurks in a netherworld difficult to fathom, yet it can penetrate reality.

The story follows Neal from childhood to maturity, and Ndori remains a part of his psyche. Alternating between scenes of swordplay in a medieval fantasy realm (called Firstborn) and the daily routine in Neal's ordinary, grounded existence, the novel is a peculiar mix of coming-of-age and sci-fi.

Kostecka tempers drama with understated simplicity. His sophisticated prose is tight and is edited well, free of unnecessary dialogue or excess description, with only occasional repetition. He has a knack for intriguing readers with few words, making the book a page-turner. Here, he describes a river rescue after a car accident: "Neal swam them back to the opening and pushed her onto the surface. The cold and lack of air finally got the better of Neal, and he slipped back under the water. The current took him under the ice and down the river."

Scary aspects of this phenomenal tale accelerate the pace and enhance the quality of the riveting plot: "Time had reclaimed the city; it was now overtaken by trees, weeds, and vines. It was difficult to make out the shape of buildings, and some had crumbled from lack of care."

The oblique ending—an undefined continuation of strange events—concludes the book without fully illuminating what has occurred. This hanging technique is often seen in science-fiction books and films, and the endings can be interpreted in a number of ways.

Christopher Kostecka is an information technology specialist and business software designer; his knowledge lends an authentic feel to *Torn Apart*, his debut novel. Fans of the psychological thriller will find in his work an entertaining twist that successfully integrates multiple genres.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (July 10, 2013)

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