Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Total Secession
Adam Connell
Adam Connell
978-0-9854855-2-8
Five Stars (out of Five)

Total Secession is a tour de force of speculative fiction. Adam Connell creates an intriguing dystopia in which two ex-cons, Grant and Litz, travel around the United States in the days leading up to the dismantling of the federal government, as states secede to become independent nations. While the political anarchy of the disintegrating country is a chillingly effective backdrop, the main story focuses on Grant and Litz's road trip and the oddball assortment of characters they meet along the way. Connell deftly juxtaposes the horror of anarchy—for example, dropping illegal immigrants out of airplanes—against the mundane reality of the characters' travels. The pair navigates through the chaos, trying to survive societal breakdown with their sanity intact.

The author does an admirable job of getting inside his characters' heads. Grant and Litz are well-rounded characters, each full of seemingly contradictory impulses. As hardened former prisoners, they beat up their foes with regularity, yet they are also capable of waxing philosophical or ruminating over private losses. They form a tight bond over the course of their road trip. Odd character names such as Pavlova and Wishful augment the quirkiness of this story's players. Additionally, the author adroitly captures the clipped, expletive-laden lingo of former inmates. With its frequent brawls and extreme profanity, this book is not for readers with weak stomachs, but the inclusion of these elements lends authenticity to the story.

The plot takes many detours, but they are enjoyable ones for readers, especially those who enjoy lyrical use of language. In some cases, Connell uses a phrase repeatedly, imbuing passages with a poetic quality.

While political commentary generally remains in the background of this novel, the author nonetheless makes several trenchant points relevant to today's democratic ideals. As each state becomes an independent country, the eternal and pervasive political mentality of us versus

them rears its ugly head. Yet, in an ironic twist, Grant and Litz raise the possibility that they too may be dumped out of airplanes along with the immigrants. If they are not dumped, Grant, Litz, and their friends wonder if they will be used to repopulate the continent, as the British did when they established a penal colony in Australia long ago. The descriptions of bleak scenery contrast well with the lively dialogue, accentuating the country's dire straits. With flair and finesse, Connell has created a raw, thrilling novel that speculates on the consequences of letting our current political system go unchecked.

Jill Allen