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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ ROMANCE

Underground

Sandy Holden
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A young woman in jeopardy, surrounded by vampires in an urban setting—this could be the description for a bestseller or a flop. *Underground* is neither. With an attention-grabbing style and a riveting situation, this tried-and-true, though often trite, formula succeeds in providing a few hours of decent entertainment.

Sara is on the streets, alone and lost, when she is abducted. Taken into an underground world and forced into submission, she falls in love with her captor. John is a leader who treats her with respect and kindness, allowing her some normalcy as he changes her into a vampire. Even the reader averse to the subject will find the words of this skilled author captivating in her telling of the couple's bonding ritual.

Love scenes are emotional and filled with a lighthearted sense of humor. What makes John palatable is Sara's perception of his sensitivity and desire to comfort: "The feelings carried her along until he moved away from her. She surprised herself by moaning at his absence. Her body missed him … She breathed more heavily now, and being cold was the furthest thing from her mind. In fact, she wanted this now, to her surprise and shame."

Meticulous editing and careful phrasing set Holden's work apart, but a few separations between the hero and heroine cause the plot to lag. The author has divided her novel into two sections. While the shift appropriately signifies a transition into another phase of the story, the technique fails to maintain the sense of urgency required for the reader to feel involved. Sara trains for her new role in the first section and moves to another sector in the second, almost nonchalantly: "In spite of her sadness from leaving John, Sara had started to feel a little excited about what lay ahead."

The cover art is somewhat washed out: a black-and-white shot of a person standing in what appears to be a gloomy, deserted alley. This lackluster design may fail to intrigue potential readers. In addition, the overuse of rhetorical questions in the back blurb—four in succession—give the packaging a dashed-off feel. The book's chapter titles, such as "I Will Not Hurt You," "Not Just Infected, but also Loyal," "Her Knee Smashed into Sara's Mouth," and "Benevolent Dictatorship" are unnecessary.

This Lothario plotline with its romanticized kidnapping can be endured only within the confines of fantasy. *Underground* would not be a good choice for those who cannot tolerate books about the undead, but it will certainly appeal to connoisseurs of the genre.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (March 15, 2012)

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