



Usher's Harbour

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Usher's Harbour introduces a post-apocalyptic, twenty-third century world in which human beings reside safely inside meticulously controlled domed cities, protected from the disease and climate disasters that have ravaged the earth and decimated its population. The virtually crime-free, disease-free Utopia is realized through the efforts of a group of idealists called the Founders, who pulled together the master plan which would ultimately rescue humanity from the environmental and societal tragedies of its past.

In addition to the physical safety afforded by life in the domes, science and technology have also advanced to the point that society is largely genetically engineered, with antisocial or extremely violent tendencies essentially purged from human DNA. The titular harbour serves as a storage facility for the culled memories and genetic material of those carefully chosen members of the twenty-first century deemed too valuable not to resurrect in the future. The storage of memories and DNA, as well as the process of cloning and reviving the esteemed "Futures," figures prominently in the plot of *Usher's Harbour*.

In 2204, one of the more illustrious members of RichmondDome's society is Professor Quinn Braxton, who teaches college classes and happens to nurture an avid interest in twentieth-century criminal behavior and forensics. This hobby proves vital when the citizens of the dome are suddenly victimized by an apparent serial killer. In a socially engineered society with virtually no criminal behavior, authorities are stymied, having never had reason to learn how to track and capture a criminal. Braxton's expertise quickly becomes an essential resource as he joins in the efforts to stop the anomalous, vicious murderer.

Husband and wife writing team Barry and Darls Epstein have achieved a stunningly impressive debut with *Usher's Harbour*. Compelling and thought provoking from start to finish, the fast-paced novel manages to offer readers a well-developed view of a possible future world while simultaneously drawing attention to the inevitable flaws of such a seemingly perfect society. The novel capably combines the science fiction genre with the excitement of a gripping thriller, and the world building is comprehensive. The utter helplessness the dome inhabitants feel as a society when faced with true, senseless evil is conveyed with realism, and readers are sure to be drawn in and fully engaged with the characters and the outcome.

Characterization is thorough and convincing, and Braxton makes for a worthy hero with realistic flaws. The villain of the story is chillingly evil, and his story unfolds with mounting suspense and sometimes graphic scenes which, while disturbing, are central to conveying his increasing malevolent nature. Although the book switches back and forth during various time periods, from 2057 to 2204, readers will be so immersed in the story line that the time jumps become easy to follow and ultimately necessary to maintain the effective pace of the story.

Usher's Harbour is the type of novel easily imagined on the big screen, or perhaps as a television miniseries. The story is gripping, the characters compelling, and the pace exhilarating. The book is an extraordinary debut and deserving of a wide readership.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (November 1, 2012)

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