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Foreword Review MYSTERY

Valley of the Shadow

Tom Pawlik
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Attorney Conner Hayden suffers a heart attack. His latest client approaches a highway ramp and encounters a car riddled with bullets. On the same night, Mitch Kent rides his motorcycle to see his girlfriend and is struck by a truck. Suspense author Pawlik weaves these isolated events into a single fabric when the characters meet in the space between life and death. Alas, Interworld is no purification for entrance to Heaven; it is barren, gruesome, and ruled by Reapers, corpse-like wraiths with mouths filled with “rows of black teeth.” Reapers periodically grab inhabitants and drag them into the abyss of the damned.

The three men are rescued by a resident of Interworld, who hides them in the cabin on his farm. The saviors motives, however, become suspect when two of them are returned to their Earthly lives. Conner, for one, finds himself driven to locate those he met in Interworld. When he discovers Mitch in a coma, he believes that God let him live so he could save his friend.

Mysteriously, his path to save Mitch is blocked. Instead, he is guided to locate Howard, the man who hid them away in Interworld, and who is, in reality, in a nursing facility. Conner is astonished to find that the farm hed visited in Interworld is Howards real home. Drawn to locate the cabin where he and the others stayed, Conner discovers a terror even more horrendous than the Reapers.

Pawlik holds readers on the razors edge with swift pacing, solid alternate world-building, and several surprises, earning comparison with the work of Dean Koontz. His second novel, *Vanish*, won the Jenkins Christian Writers Guilds 2006 award.

CAROL LYNN STEWART (July / August 2009)

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