

***After Midnight: Volume One***

Patrick Cunningham

AuthorHouse (2008)

ISBN 9781434379252

Reviewed by Ron Standerfer for Reader Views (12/08)

Recently I had the opportunity to review a draft copy of "After Midnight," and it was a scary experience, to say the least - not because of the author's writing, which is more a stream of consciousness narrative than anything else, but because of the nightmarish visions of blood, gore and death that the reader must endure while following him on a guided tour of hell. Welcome to the bowels of evil. Welcome to the world of Irish writer, Patrick Cunningham.

"When the forces of darkness awaken - when the fate of the world is at stake - who will be brave enough to stand and fight for the powers of good and the whole of humanity?" This is Cunningham's challenge to the reader and the premise of the story. Fight for the powers of good and protect humanity from the forces of evil? That's a pretty tall order, and the answer to that question will surprise you. As it turns out, action figures like Superman and Wonder Woman need not apply. The fate of our world rests in the hands of four, twenty-something's named Ben, Rodger, Jackie and Sarah. Two hip couples named Ben, Rodger, Jackie and Sarah step in to save our world from destruction? Whoa! Who are these people and what do they have going for them? As it turns out, they have quite a lot going for them. For one thing, they are clever, quick-witted, strong and incredibly courageous. And for another, as Cunningham puts it, "The girls kick ass just as good as the guys." Well, no big surprise there. This is the twenty-first century, isn't it?

So much for the cast of good guys; who are the bad guys? It depends on where in the book you are reading of course, but in no particular order you will run into hostile extra-terrestrials, ghosts in a haunted house, a chain-saw wielding madman, a legion of murderous scare-crows on a deserted island, a super secret Army test gone amok, and a gaggle of female vampires. One of the latter, a toothsome young woman named Stephanie falls in love with Ben and takes the extraordinary step of invading his girlfriend's body from time to time to have her way with him.

So what is "After Midnight" really all about? Is it just about blood and gore, or does it serve some higher purpose? In a recent interview, Cunningham said, "The book is a series of short stories centered on the four main characters. I don't give any real descriptions of the characters so the reader can use their own imagination and make believe that they are that character. I just set up the stories to trigger your imagination and take you on a roller-coaster ride into madness and mayhem." So there you have it. "Imagination" is the key to this book. Those who have it and like to use it will find it a good read. Those who don't probably won't. Meanwhile, Patrick Cunningham who lives in Ireland, a country surrounded by myth and legend, is hard at work on Volume Two of "After Midnight." I wish him luck on that project, as well as success with Volume One.