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No Such Thing as Evil (Circle of Six Trilogy, Book 1)

Andrew Hunkins

Beaver's Pond Press (2016)

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Reviewed by Kristina Turner for Reader Views (01/2022)

4*dark energy, Zoroastrianism, and evolution?

“He felt a thrill unlike the countless other times he’d crossed from the world above to his destination. Finally... after millennia of toil. He brought his hand to the knot of his red silk tie, pressing his fingers into the tight folds of the perfectly shaped knot and elegant dimple. The movement exposed the French cuffs of the white dress shirt under his British-tailored business suit. The gold cufflinks were in the shape of a circle with six diamonds evenly spaced along their circumference and one larger diamond in the center. His hand glided down the front of the tie, ensuring its perfect alignment... He closed his eyes, tipped his head back, and embraced the feeling. In his mind’s voice he recited the ancient hymn.”

What do dark energy, Zoroastrianism, and evolution have in common? The answer: Andrew Hunkin’s science-fiction techno-thriller, “No Such Thing as Evil.”

Except there is most definitely evil in Hunkin’s world. Laura & Ben Richards, college professors, and members of the lucky, employed class find themselves the parents of a friend’s orphan baby boy, Chris Lumière. A very unusual boy who defies modern medicine’s attempts to scan him, and who somehow exudes an aura of comfort and leadership. The boy’s life runs parallel to, yet inevitably entangled with, the efforts of a dark cult plotting mankind’s next evolutionary leap. Their efforts seem directed by supernatural forces that speak to their leaders during sadistic rituals involving torture and pain.

The plot is dualistic, creating a balance of forces that intensify their differences.

Offering on one hand a wholesome family and strong, positive friendships. The Richards are loving and accepting. They care for their neighbors, their world. They are optimistic and curious. Chris’s friendships are supportive and creative. They are the family we all wish we could be. Supportive, loving, able to compromise and work through disagreement and strife. Their small group, which eventually includes Chris’s three closest friends and a perfect Labrador puppy, are cooperative, inventive, and skilled.

On the other hand, the novel follows Skotino and Tyvold, leaders of the Circle of Six, a dark, sadistic cult shielded by corporate holdings and government infiltration. The Circle’s chapters are difficult to read. They are evil, without a doubt. Hunkin pulls no punches in their torture chambers as he shows how vile, grotesque they are, drilling down on deep psychological terrors. He digs at fears rooted in the collective unconscious: disgust, humiliation, mortification, pain, helplessness. The dark terrors worse than death.

The novel put me off at first, as the opening chapters put you immediately in the oubliette of The Circle of Six's vile torture chambers, which made my skin crawl in every way. But the chapters are broken into short sections; thus, very quickly I was meeting Laura Richards, a clearly optimistic and good person concerned unselfishly for the plight of her students and neighbors. A relief and palette cleanser.

My other concern was that Hunkins quickly introduces a lot of characters and the novel spans a large chunk of time, but he makes keeping them all straight easy, as each character has a definite personality of their own, and eventually they all start to converge, making their purpose in the mystery clear. Furthermore, those short sections I mentioned made for a quick read as I could read for a bit here and there while busy with daily chores without losing the sense of the narrative. And besides, I was quickly invested in seeing how Skotino would come to a bad end. Surely good will win... right?

Still wondering about dark energy, Zoroastrianism, and evolution? You'll have to read the book!