

Ruins of America

J. Schimschal

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In post-apocalyptic America, the situation grows ever worse. Led by the unspeakably evil Father Vertigo and Sister Nightshade, the Reaper Kai have used their psychic abilities, plagues, betrayal, and brute force to bring the kingdom of Rasheed under their control. As they solidify their hold on the region, they plot to spread their reign of terror to neighboring areas.

While unlikely alliances between former enemies hold out some hope of turning back the Reaper Kai, it is the strike team Nova 7 that stands out in the common people's mind as a symbol of hope. But Nova 7 lost young warrior Jared in a shipwreck, and scholar Tani is devastated by the loss of his friend. The insane rancher Banion harbors mistrust of Mineera, a psychic who has renounced her heritage as a Reaper Kai. The remaining members of Nova 7 must navigate the hostile wastelands and their own fears as they seek a nuclear weapon that will destroy the Reaper Kai.

In this sequel to *The Devil's Utopia*, author J. Schimschal continues his foray into a nightmarish fantasy world. Schimschal's descriptions of this post-apocalyptic realm reveal a gift for world building. From honorable warrior Globulus, a mutated hippo, to the Reaper Kai's Goat Minions and Biotech warriors, the effects of nuclear fallout on this future society are everywhere. Vertigo and Nightshade, whose race is dedicated to all that is evil, exhibit a particularly disturbing combination of magic, science, and horror.

Schimschal does an admirable job of weaving together several stories, but the heart of the book is Jared's transformation into a warrior of the light. Schimschal deftly evokes the Native American vision quest in his treatment of Jared, who saves a small band of natives from a hydra and is poisoned in the process. When he awakens from his recovery, he learns of his new role as a prophesied hero and receives his totem, a raven. Jared emerges as a formidable warrior, protected from the psychic assaults of the Reaper Kai.

The adventure is crackling and the pace relentless. However, while Schimschal is an excellent storyteller, his prose does not always serve his plot well. At times his language is a bit Baroque, and he reuses certain phrases to the point of distraction (such descriptions as "psychic maiden" and "deranged gunfighter," for example). A more streamlined style would help keep his gripping yarn at center stage.

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