

Planetfall by Emma Newman: Review by Allen Stroud

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Review: Planetfall by Emma Newman

A masterpiece flawed narrator story, *Planetfall* by Emma Newman immediately draws the reader into a claustrophobic plot seemingly without any effort whatsoever.

Renata Ghali, our storyteller works as a printing technician in a far flung space colony. Right from the outset we know something is wrong with the fragile peace she has established in her life. The layers of guilt she feels over the choices she has made begin as they do for many of us with guilt over her interactions with her parents, but these hide much more sinister secrets.

A stranger comes to the colony, a man who by rights should not be alive, but is - Sung-Soo - grandson of the colony's Pathfinder Sung-Suh. Gradually, his story and that of the colony is told to us, with occasional recollections from Ren as she dwells on relevant information.

This is where *Planetfall* attempts something difficult. It is very clear that the narrator knows more about our situation and circumstance than she is letting on. Newman uses this information privilege carefully by placing it at the heart of her Renata's character and establishing it as the woman's flaw. Renata does not want to think about what has happened, she does not want to remember, but gradually she does share her past with us. The recollections themselves take a little getting used to. They spring upon the narrator midway through a scene, almost unbidden and certainly at times unwelcome. However this is part of the story's artifice, and a clever way of showing our narrator's shortcomings.

Planetfall is not a book that depicts a wondrous vision of the future, although there is very clear and consistent science behind the colony's construction that resonates with modern invention. The technology and scope is kept in tight focus and seen through the eyes of Renata as she introduces it to Sung-Soo and interacts with her peers. This works well to depict the decadent nature of some and the naivety of others. Science and religion have become blurred in the everyday life of this small isolated outpost. The cultural flaw of this society lies in the inconsistency between what they believe and their professed practice of evidence-based discovery. The Wizard of Oz is at work amongst these people, although his motives here are much less benign.

The twisted end when it comes, remains obscured enough to be a surprise, particularly when Renata finally returns to her past to make right of what went wrong. There is substantial loss and upheaval in this, the professed utopia is revealed as a delusion for some and to be wholly fragile.

The transformational nature of the conclusion makes for a delightful ending, demonstrating how a flawed creature might still rise above their faults and mistakes if they finally make the right choices. In this, we see that everyone's path to knowledge can be different and the destination is not dependent on us all following the same road. Indeed, this is possibly one of the best ended books I have read for some time as it leaves the reader with much to think about, but without the loose ends we have come to expect from sequel hunting writers.

Planetfall is an excellent read.