

A Debt of Survival

L.F. Falconer

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A Debt of Survival is an atmospheric novel and an engrossing entry in the horror genre.

A Debt of Survival by L. F. Falconer examines the price of war within an incredible character-driven supernatural horror ordeal.

In the idyllic town of Diablo Springs, Nevada, a gruesome crime takes a toll on Don Lattimore, the sheriff and an army veteran. The scene appears to be a satanic ritual to conjure a demon, but it is quickly written off as a harmless teenage prank—that is, until the town is rocked by mounting violence and grisly deaths.

For Lattimore, the deaths and gore usher in memories of his Korean War experiences and lead to vibrant hallucinations that threaten to unravel his sanity. Unsure who to trust, or even how to confront whatever force is wreaking havoc in his town, Lattimore comes to realize that everything is connected to the war and to himself.

A Debt of Survival is a polished horror story. The writing is sharp and adeptly shows instead of tells, such as when Lattimore is startled by an airplane-like noise and looks up at the moon; the sight causes him to reflect on Armstrong's current lunar landing and a nightmare from his past. All in one line, the time frame is established and a sense of unease settles over the story. This all occurs outside of the horrific crime scene that has yet to be described, prompting the tension and fear to mount with each paragraph.

All the characters are vividly drawn to life, but none more so than Lattimore. Coping with PTSD and burdened by the duty to protect his family and community, his convictions keep his actions consistent.

Every piece of dialogue and action builds upon another to examine a man damaged by war while suffering from mounting horrors. Character tics like Lattimore's tendency to quote his idolized father and favor his youngest son and dog over the rest of his family, as well as his discussions with exasperating colleagues, produce a protagonist worth rooting for.

As a horror story, *A Debt of Survival* excels. A strong and unique internal mythology draws from supernatural legends to add a layer of complexity to the story, which even so remains accessible. That same aspect of the story helps explain Lattimore's personality and actions. From the intense descriptions of smell to the ramifications of the crimes on Lattimore's mind and psyche, the horror is ever present.

A Debt of Survival is an atmospheric novel with undertones of social commentary; it is a unique and engrossing entry in the horror genre.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 25, 2017)

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