

### *Homecoming*

Sue Ann Bowling

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Reviewed by Marty Shaw for Reader Views (10/10)

Snowy is a young slave who has never known any other life than one of servitude. However, he and his friends have figured out a way that allows them to stay together. They dance so well together that they sell for a higher amount as a group than as individuals. The life of a pleasure slave isn't a good one, but Snowy and his friends make the best out of a bad arrangement, and Snowy has special gifts that allow him to make things as easy for them as possible. Snowy is able to use these gifts to catch the eye of a R'il'noid named Derik, who buys Snowy and his friends. As for as masters go, Derik really isn't that bad and Snowy figures that life might not be that bad with him, but then something happens that changes everything. Snowy gets deathly ill from a disease that has little effect on humans. This leads Derik to discover, with the help of his half-brother, Nik, that Snowy isn't human. Snowy only has a few memories of his mother and no memories at all of his father, so he's shocked and frightened to learn that Derik's brother, Lai, is his father.

Snowy is given the name, Roi, and begins the daunting task of learning to live as a free person. The fact that his uncle was formerly his owner is a fact that affects the whole family and causes some understandable tension, especially when Derik's history of taking slaves as lovers is widely known among others. Another source of tension is Lai, who carries a lot of emotional baggage associated with Roi's mom and the memory of her departure. He doesn't know what to do with this child who appeared from nowhere and he fears doing the wrong thing because he feels that he did something wrong in raising his other son, Zhaim, although he can't actually admit that to himself. Will Roi be a chance at redemption or proof that the madman, Zhaim, truly is the result of Lai's parenting?

It's easy to feel a little overwhelmed with "Homecoming" because there are a lot of characters that are tied to one another in some form or another. Fortunately, the author does a good job of keeping things in order so it doesn't become too confusing. Snowy/Roi is a likable character and that makes him entertaining to read about. I felt his fear as a slave trying desperately to keep his little family together, and I felt that fear slide towards terror when he was introduced to his new life. He's known some decent R'il'noid slave owners, but the majority of them were twisted and depraved. As a R'il'noid, will this now become his future? His father, Lai, is a good man with a lot of responsibility and a busy schedule. I wasn't too thrilled with Lai at first. His aloofness made it hard to like him, but the story focuses attention on him towards the middle of the book and I was able to get to know him better and I learned that he was actually a good guy who just desperately needed another perspective in his life to allow him to see some errors in his judgment. Roi's uncles, Derik and Nik, are both good guys who have the best of intentions for Roi, although Derik's wild past makes others

frequently question his motives. Zhaim is the half-brother that nobody wants to be related to and he causes more than his fair share of heartache and hurt in Roi's life. Ironically, Zhaim's attitude and constant plotting against Roi provides the fire that allows Roi to fully accept his new station in life. Marna isn't introduced until halfway through the book, but she is easily one of my favorite characters, second only to Roi. She is the definition of a true woman, elegant and formally polite when the situation calls for it, but a passionate warrior that won't hesitate to stand her ground when challenged. She's had centuries of heartache that could have destroyed a lesser spirit, but that history simply makes her stronger and more determined.

While "Homecoming" has an ending that confidently wraps up all the loose ends in this part of Roi's life, I'm left with the hope that Ms Bowling might one day let us see how Roi is doing as an adult. If you're looking for a science fiction adventure that has some thought behind it, I highly recommend this story.