



Born in Salt

T. C. Weber

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In the alternate history world of Born in Salt, the depiction of the banality of evil is as fitting as it is chilling.

A young man takes on a corrupt and vicious government in T. C. Weber's novel *Born in Salt*.

The book is set in a fascistic alternate universe where America is allied with victorious Nazi Germany. Ben's brother Jake died overseas, serving this dictatorial America. But cynical Ben and grief-stricken Rachel, Jake's fiancée, believe that there is more to his death than they've been told. To avenge him, they team up with a small group of local revolutionaries who are set on restoring democracy to the United States. When their quest lands them both in prison, Ben is offered a unique chance: if he betrays his fellow revolutionaries, Rachel will be freed. With Rachel's life on the line, Ben decides how far he is willing to go to save her, his family, and himself.

The rebels whom Ben falls in with are bent on stirring up trouble, but also hope to restore true democracy. But their methods, experiences, and backgrounds differ so much that the rebels become as great of a danger to each other as they are to the government. Conflict and suspense arise as a result, and Ben is never sure whom he can trust beyond Rachel and Sarah, a Black woman whom he has known since childhood, and who suffered much under America's oppressive regime.

The book's immersive world building includes thoughtful details, as with the incorporation of historical figures like aviator and America First politician Charles Lindbergh, and radio priest Charles Coughlin. Here, America is complicit in the world's suffering; it embraces racist and antisemitic policies, commits war crimes at its leisure, and drives small businesses and farms like Ben's to the brink of financial ruin. The story's villains are low-level law enforcement officials and bureaucrats, and they are ruled by professional indifference and petty rivalries. This depiction of the banality of evil is as fitting as it is chilling.

Ben is compelling. He is devoted to justice, mature, and self-aware, but also still a teenager who can be impatient, petulant, and naïve. As his attempted fixes fail, he falls into despair and drug addiction. Still, he does not succumb to his cynicism and grief. After many missteps, he conceives of an intricate plan to turn the enemy's own vices against them, leading to a satisfying, realistic ending.

In a grim world that's designed to grind the hope out of all, the heroes of the dystopian novel *Born in Salt*, whose cause is just, work not to lose themselves in the midst of war.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May 4, 2021)

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