

Edge of the Wind

James E. Cherry

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This is a pleasing and intriguing character-driven novel in which poetry is presented as a possible means of salvation.

James E. Cherry's *Edge of the Wind* is an intriguing look at human relationships as they play out in times of crisis.

Alex van der Pool is back in his hometown after seven years in Memphis, where he left behind a great job and a girlfriend. Now, he lives in his sister's spare room and talks to Tobi, one of the voices in his head. He decides that poetry, rather than medication for his schizophrenia, will be his salvation.

Alex's life violently intersects with those of five students, and their professor, in a literature class. He barges in with weapons, demanding that his poems be read and critiqued. In his way stands a nemesis—the county sheriff, who is headed for retirement.

The story seems to be set in the early 2000s and unfolds chronologically, though it includes several flashbacks. Abrasive language peppers conversations, and race relations are discussed throughout. The story acts as a forerunner to tumultuous events torn from today's headlines. There are no clear-cut villains and heroes; everyone is portrayed as an amalgam of his or her own experiences.

Descriptive language is a treat, as when a student is depicted as “buried in the lives of others, [so that] she didn't know that she needed air or that she was even conscious of breathing.” Diverse characters are not made to lapse into stereotypes. Alex is sympathetic, even though he holds the lives of six innocent strangers in his hands. When his alter ego speaks to him, Tobi's words are set apart in italics.

The story's timeline is fuzzy; some events don't correlate with earlier details. Still, *Edge of the Wind* is an enjoyable novel that richly delves into human stories, making it a pleasing, character-driven selection.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (Winter 2017)

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