

Faithless: A Jane Doe Thriller

Steven Ramirez

Glass Highway

(347pp)

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In the action-packed thriller Faithless, a mercenary with special powers but few memories works to find out who she is.

In Steven Ramirez's exciting thriller *Faithless*, a woman who's part of an experimental government project gains power, but loses her memories.

Jane Doe doesn't remember much. She woke up in a strange facility crawling with violent mutants and clandestine agents, to the realization that she's skilled at combat. Whatever happened at the facility seems to have given Jane accelerated healing abilities, but at a possibly lethal price. A few lingering memories point to military training, but her history, and her real name, remain a mystery.

Determined to rediscover her identity, Jane gets involved with Kersey, whose business dealings vary from legal to less-than. He promises to use his connections to help Jane find out who she is. In exchange, she assists on his jobs. She meets Raul while doing this work; they start a seductive, forbidden romance, using it to escape the madness of their lives.

Raul and Jane's mutual respect and a desire to protect each other are the book's emotional backbone. Its action scenes are punctuated by the complications of their soft, sad love. While Jane laments that she doesn't feel easy empathy, her thoughts suggest otherwise: she exhibits clear understandings of those around her, even when she's working to decide who to trust. To feel more normal, Jane also develops a friendship with a young girl whom she helps, but the sentiments of that connection are more forced, and they seem disconnected from the narrative.

Jane's fragmented memories and escalating sickness result in narrative unpredictability and urgency. Jane proves to be a direct, competent lead who knows how to use weapons well. Her natural toughness and aptitude for fighting are enhanced by her near invulnerability. In exciting action scenes, she showcases her abilities and elaborates on her new powers. The drawbacks of the experiments are made apparent, too, including that she develops a quick-hitting fever when she fights; it becomes more intense, and lasts longer, every time it happens.

As Jane's past is pieced together, many players are revealed; their various identities, organizations, and motivations require attention. A believable picture of government greed and scientific corruption emerges, centered on money and immortality. Ideas of villains and heroes shift as the novel moves toward its heartbreaking ending, in which some questions are answered, but the larger mysteries remain.

In the action-packed thriller *Faithless*, a mercenary with special powers but few memories works to find out who she is.

DELIA STANLEY (April 23, 2021)

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