



Inheritance of Crises and Dysfunction

James J. Maiwurm

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Inheritance of Crises and Dysfunction is an ambitious political novel in which a single man attempts to heal a fractured world.

In James J. Maiwurm's zigzagging political thriller *Inheritance of Crises and Dysfunction*, a retired lawyer and former employee of the State Department attempts to bridge divides at home and abroad in the midst of a pandemic and at the beginning of a new administration.

After living a life of government service and legal drama and losing his wife to COVID-19, Salt retires and moves away from DC to Carterville, the small Virginia town where he grew up. There he encounters people along the entire range of the political spectrum, each one dying to have their voice heard. Salt starts to think that everyone is more in the middle than they'd like to believe. A call from DC brings him back to the capitol for a plan proposed by the new presidential administration to heal the US's world image after the factious previous four years. A series of small diplomatic meetings between Salt and tenuous allies of the US follows.

Responding to persistent failures to communicate, the novel is dominated by conversations pertaining to Ukraine, the pandemic, and the struggles of small farmers to make a living while feeling the impacts of tariffs and grain consumption in China—an extensive tapestry of political consciousness and consequences. In the course of such exchanges, Salt spends much time trying to understand his fellow citizens and their views of the world. So many views are included, however, that the people who hold them are obscured; their perspectives are shared, but they themselves are not developed beyond their opinions.

The story rushes between personal and political scenes and situations; though they generate excitement, they're fast abandoned for the next scene. In one moment, Salt and a colleague are shot at by a sniper; a few paragraphs are devoted to the situation before the diplomats are shown back in the US, without sufficient space given to express what people are thinking. And there's a mix of small-town settings and world-stage meetings, such as those that Germany mediates between the US and Iran. Further, hundreds of years of historical context are incorporated into this blurry Boschian portrait of current affairs. In the end, the novel is so vast and so packed that it becomes dizzying.

Characterization is secondary in the pensive thriller *Inheritance of Crises and Dysfunction*, which is rich with historical anecdotes that are made to represent a bevy of recent political dramas.

BEN LINDER (January 24, 2024)

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