

Mercy's Quest

East S.M.

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In the fantasy novel Mercy's Quest, a woman comes of age in an occult context, working to understand and accept her deepest purpose.

In East S. M.'s occult fantasy novel *Mercy's Quest*, a fledgling witch is tasked with defending humanity against an evil brotherhood.

Mercy comes from a long line of Blood Moon witches. They specialize in balancing light and dark forces. They settled in Appalachia during the late 1800s, and have been helping locals with intuitive bodywork and energy healing ever since. But when Mercy starts having visceral visions of a tortured witch from the past, and a gruesome family relic is discovered, she leaves her humble life behind to investigate her origins.

Mercy's is an epic, metaphysical quest that brings her in contact with cosmic figures including Lucifer, King Solomon, ancient deities, and the Battle Crows of Carpathia. All hold clues to her heritage, helping her to unleash her otherworldly potential. Mercy learns to shed her human attachments and embrace her divine purpose in the midst of her explorations of metaphysical theories regarding death and the meaning of life. But time is of the essence: a nefarious, power-hungry Pythagorean faction is also working to understand Mercy's heritage, and they hope to use her to manipulate humans' mortality.

The book's world building is intricate. Everyday items, including a charmed spoon and Mercy's ruby-encrusted ball gown, are described with care. Lessons about occult practices and beliefs are incorporated in a seamless manner, too. And ample time is spent describing Mercy's supernatural experiences and visions: she travels through space, making note of "the arc of rings like a space rainbow of colors [that] flowed silver, to amethyst, to gold, jade finally pooling into a soft melt of teal." Such passages flesh out her world and its mythology in psychedelic, mystical ways.

But the book is so languorous descriptions, which are often expository, that the story's balance is compromised. And as Mercy meets a bevy of others, most of them are reduced to vehicles for information about her past. Many instruct her on how to wield her new powers; few are developed on their own merit. Mercy's grandmother, Aggie, is an exception as a warm, affectionate person who supports her—as are Mercy's lovers, with whom she is both vulnerable and sex-positive.

The book's action scenes are engaging, though they're also often used as opportunities for Mercy to try out her new powers. The climatic showdown with the Pythagoreans leaves a mess in its wake, though, most serving to carve out space for a sequel.

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JENNA JAUREGUY (May 31, 2022)

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