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Science Fiction

Necropath
Eric Brown
Solaris
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As French philosopher Emile Cioran once said, “If only we could see ourselves as others see us, we should vanish on the spot.” Centuries later, on an Earth spaceport called Bengal Station, Jeff Vaughn has that ability, due to a brain implant that allows him to read the minds of the recently deceased. Most days, he’s not that happy about it. Telepaths often have no friends. When one of the few he does have, a street kid called Tiger, overdoses on an off-world drug called rhapsody, Vaughn calls on one of his only other friends, police detective Jimmy Chandra, to investigate.

Back at his day job monitoring incoming craft for alien refugees, Vaughn discovers that his latest captain, Director Weiss, is lying to him. Could he be dealing with a rhapsody smuggler? And what is it about the drug that makes everyone who knows anything commit suicide before they can be questioned?

Not since the Retrieval Artist series by Kristine Kathryn Rusch has there been such an engaging anti-hero who struggles against the system to solve a series of murders and suicides. The world Brown has created is engaging and believable, a world in which the Thai and Indian cultures dominate old Earth, a world where Buddhist monks buy bodies for “Contemplation”—the practice of accepting death by staring at rotting flesh—a world in which the Church of the Adoration of the Chosen One worships golden children in a huge Holosseum…and something much, much more sinister. An alien universe in which justice is a matter of perspective.

Brown’s worldview is dark, yet pleasingly not without hope. His characters are flawed, but mostly likeable. As in real life, some have had to make unimaginably hard choices, choices for which they may be judged by others. This fast-paced blend of hard science fiction and murder mystery makes for a thoroughly entertaining read, with a couple of complete surprises at the end. The guns go off; all the nefarious plots are revealed and the ends tied up neatly—but not too neatly. And not without a few tears along the way. This page-turner is one of the best

science fiction novels of the fall.

Eric Brown is the author of over thirty science fiction novels, collections, and books for teens and young children; he has won the British Science Fiction Award twice for his short stories. He also writes a monthly SF review column for the *Guardian*. His latest works include the novella *Starship Summer* and the novel *Kethani*.

Holly Chase Williams