



## Purged Souls

**Kagan Tumer**

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*Brutality is juxtaposed with humor and compassion in this speculative, science-inflected novel about human nature in extremis.*

Twenty years after a pandemic devastated the earth's human population, survivors struggle to maintain their foothold in a futuristic wasteland called Marin. *Purged Souls* is a haunting, prescient vision of a post-plague world.

The mathematics of infection are just the beginning of the apocalypse: a mysterious virus halves the population every six months for four years. Left to their own devices, humans revert to tribal family structures, and armed guards defend tiny villages with their lives. Lori, a Special Forces colonel who retains memories of pre-Purge food, culture, and technology, joins her only surviving friend, Mika, to trace a mortally wounded soldier who disappeared from a hospital. As Lori and Mika investigate the cover-up, they expose the conspiracy that links the virus and its political fallout to the collapse of their species.

Brutality is juxtaposed with humor and compassion in this speculative, science-inflected novel about human nature in extremis. Although the novel is set in an unforgiving, lethal landscape, Lori's perspective provides softness and contrast. She recalls a world full of flowers, friendly cats, and peanut butter; Marin, the territory she lives in, is a dystopian nightmare in comparison. The trauma of outliving the old world hardens Lori and narrows her focus. She is not heartless, but is numb to the deaths she witnesses daily. After all, the virus could kill her at any time: her reaction is not to run from her fate, but to live each moment as fully as possible.

The novel excels at world building; its casual, confident incorporation of technology is remarkable. Machines and communication devices are described clearly, without fanfare: "Unlike its big-bellied, four-rotor cousins that could have carried their entire contingent, the light transport was a responsive craft. It was built for urban combat, two tilt rotors protruding from its wing stumps to provide vertical thrust when needed." These descriptions coexist well with more serene images, like a vision of Treasure Island shimmering in the bay. As she journeys through the wreckage of San Francisco, familiar landmarks intensify the contrast between the pre- and post-plague worlds. The Golden Gate Bridge becomes a war zone; the bungalows in Nob Hill are barracks.

Lori herself is a prickly paradox, complex enough to carry the story, and unreliable enough to be an interesting main character. She is a survivor with a temper, unconstrained by the expectations of others. With nothing to lose, Lori is loyal to herself and her ideals; this ferocious desire for justice drives the high tension plot. Lori's bond with Mika is complex, and their dialogues bring out the complicated history of their relationship.

*Purged Souls* is a rich science fiction story set in a brutal post-apocalyptic America—a tense and thrilling debut.

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