

## Recorder

**Cathy McCrumb**

Enclave Publishing (Nov 9, 2021)

Hardcover \$24.99 (368pp)

978-1-62184-199-9

Cathy McCrumb's thought-provoking science fiction novel *Recorder* asks whether one can understand humanity and still remain its impartial observer.

In a far-future time wherein human beings have found homes among the stars, Recorders are human-machine hybrids who were selected as children and charged with keeping accurate records of human events. They are implanted with chips that condition them to become less emotional and more analytical; they are rendered mere observers of humanity's struggles, and are followed by drones that keep them in check. For Recorders, emotional attachments are to be avoided: there is nothing more dangerous for a Recorder than a friend.

The novel focuses on a single Recorder; she tracks a salvage crew that's working to understand what happened to a lost colonial outpost. When their mission goes awry, the Recorder winds up forever altered. Her drone is destroyed, and her chip is removed. She is left to make sense of the universe not as a machine, but as a human being. Her attempts to hold on to her past life are emotionally weighty; she struggles to maintain her distance from people, even as her friendships—and love—begin to blossom.

Though human beings seem to be at peace in this setting, there's a dystopian quality to the text: they find that peace only under the watchful gaze of the ever-present Recorders. Those who are not Recorders interject drama as the book's love interests, friends, and flawed beings. As the Recorder begins to peel back the layers of illusion that control this society, she becomes horrified by what she finds. The secrets she uncovers about what happened at the lost station alter the ways that she understands herself and the universe.

*Recorder* is a complex science fiction novel about the intersections between human beings and machines.

JEREMIAH ROOD (November / December 2021)

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