



## The Journeys To New Home

**Elliott Combs**

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*Combs has fashioned a compelling tale of a man who struggles as much with the emotional toll of his new existence as the physical ones.*

*The Journeys To New Home*, by Elliott Combs, is the story of a young man left utterly alone—everyone he knows, and very possibly everyone else, has died. He has the knowledge and skills to survive, but living is not just about survival.

Alone in his airplane, a fireball lights the sky, and Chris Weddle finds he is perhaps the sole survivor of a worldwide holocaust. After fortifying his Iowa home to survive the winters, Chris is determined to locate other survivors. With only his dogs for companions, he sets out on long journeys in this strangest of all worlds. Without another soul to rely on, even a broken ankle could prove disastrous. His travels are fraught with danger—wild animals have lost their fear of man—yet he also appreciates glimpses of nature's beauty as he crosses the American plains. But always, utter solitude weighs upon him.

Combs's prose shines most when unbidden thoughts beset Chris. For example, no one is there to share his grief when he buries his parents and builds them a headstone that no one but he will ever see. Chris sits in their forlorn home, plays his father's favorite music, and cries for the "billions of people who had perished and not least of all, for himself and the terrible, terrible loneliness he had endured for more than seven years. All he could do was ask himself why and again there was no answer."

The setting does cause plot difficulties early on. Creating interesting conflict for a protagonist to overcome is problematic when there are no other characters for him to interact with. Due to the lack of interpersonal conflict, the early part of the novel tends to drag. The book spends considerable space chronicling many of Chris's mundane activities, such as finding food to eat and preparing his house for the winters. The story is more interesting when Chris is out on the road looking for others, where the unknown awaits him. It is easy to empathize with his desperation to find human companionship and perhaps make a new home.

Combs is a retired shop class teacher who would come in handy in a postapocalyptic world. He brings an obvious optimism to his writing. Despite its grim setting, the tale is ultimately an uplifting one, for Chris represents the very best of humanity in many ways.

This book will appeal to anyone who enjoys science fiction and stories of a person overcoming vast physical and psychological odds to forge a fulfilling life.

ALAN COUTURE (August 26, 2014)

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