

The Mercy Journals

Claudia Casper

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This complex tale puts global crises and personal crises hand in hand, and questions if morality must adapt.

Many dystopian novels feel distant, taking place in a time far from now, but Claudia Casper's *The Mercy Journals* feels like it's just on the other side of the door. Current global issues collide, causing disastrous wreckage out of which emerges a new social order, in this roller-coaster ride through the mind of an ex-soldier with PTSD.

Casper offers up the journals of Allen Quincy, an ex-soldier nicknamed Mercy. In the aftermath of war and a massive human die-off, Mercy has whittled what's left of his life down to the smallest common denominator, moving between work and home and keeping to himself as much as possible. Until Ruby comes along. And then his long-lost brother, Leo. Convinced to travel into the wilderness in search of other lost family members, Mercy must confront his past and question the moral stance it has caused him to take.

There is a deftness to Casper's writing that allows her to maintain control while juggling numerous complex layers. The combination of global problems explored here—climate change, war, refugees, famine—could easily become overwhelming, especially when combined with the sometimes erratic diary entries of a traumatized man, but each is given its place in the narrative, intertwined with Mercy's own issues of loss and mental illness. Likewise, while many post-apocalyptic stories have a cast of characters that all feel the same way about their new world, here there are a number of reactions, often falling along generational lines. This complicated web is weaved with Casper's lyrical prose: "Every movement she made, every sound she uttered was heightened, stripped bare, exposed in a raw clarity."

This complex tale puts global crises and personal crises hand in hand, and questions if morality can stay the same or must adapt. It interweaves destruction with hope, individualism with socialism, and bouts of mental illness with moments of clarity, all while maintaining a strong plot and protagonist that carry the story forward. It will be an excellent addition to any science-fiction library.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (Summer 2016)

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