



The Nothing Within

Andy Giesler

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In every way, this eye-opening post-apocalyptic tale is a true page-turner.

Andy Giesler's *The Nothing Within* is a fresh and ingenious take on the post-apocalyptic novel.

In North America in the twenty-second century, an apocalyptic event known as The Reckoning has wiped out civilization, leaving only a few communities functioning. Roaming the wild are chimeras, violent hybrid creatures that come into being when the Nothing that is within every person awakens and takes over. To protect the few humans who are still living, measures are taken against those who show signs of turning; they are burned alive in the Pit.

Living in this world is Root, a young woman struggling to fit in. Not afraid to ask the uncomfortable questions, she makes those around her wary, but because of her blindness, they leave her alone. But then Root hears a voice in her head that is not her own, and the Nothing inside begins to stir.

The book fuses fantasy with science fiction for its twist on post-apocalyptic tales. Two apocalyptic events occur: the destruction of society by the chimeras and The Reckoning, an attempt at rectifying the first apocalypse that leads to an even worse situation. The community that comes through The Reckoning are the Amish, who have the knowledge to survive when modern society ceases to function.

The book alternates between a timeline in the present and one in the past. Clues and answers are provided in both timelines in a seamless way. Suspicions as to the truth behind any situation are rewarded and epiphanies are many. The full answers only come to light toward the very end, and the magnitude of what is revealed can only be felt if full attention has been paid to what has come before. In every way, this is a true page-turner.

Characters are developed with thorough attention. Root narrates as an older woman, and is an entertaining storyteller with a distinct voice. Shepherd Aura Lee also stands out. Her way of expressing herself would make a sailor blush. The greatest narrative arc belongs to Ruth, a diarist from the past who transforms from a pacifist, abused Amish wife into someone who tackles the world head-on, and whose story is a thrill to experience.

Prominent themes include cautions against bioengineering and skepticism toward grand narratives—themes there for those who wish to focus on them, but not so pushy that they get in the way of the pleasure of reading this book.

The Nothing Within is a densely woven futuristic tale that maintains suspense from its first page to its last.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (April 24, 2019)

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