

The Other Side of Life

Andy Kutler

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With amazing characterization and a clever use of various genre tropes, this is a fascinating adventure through time.

Andy Kutler examines life, death, and more, in the haunting *The Other Side of Life*. Bound by war and buoyed by hope, three plots weave a fantastic yarn about faith and love in a time of great upheaval. Romance, intense battles, drama, and supernatural elements combine for a fascinating adventure through time.

Malcom Kelsey teeters at the edge of death during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. An opportunity presented to Kelsey offers him a chance to reset his life, wipe his memories, and allow him to start fresh in the past. Kelsey arrives in the days before the Civil War breaks out, but somehow retains all of his memories. His story intertwines with a husband and wife determined to survive together, and a soldier seeking to make a name for himself. As they all struggle to survive the war and the days after, Kelsey faces a choice that will have ramifications across time.

In *The Other Side of Life*, Kutler deftly combines elements from disparate genres to intriguing effect. The “other side of life” idea is just theologically ambiguous enough to prevent the story from becoming preachy. The love story between the separated married couple adds a soft touch of humanity that delightfully offsets the stark reality of a horrific war. The story is artfully paced, limiting its predictability and making for a powerfully charged emotional roller coaster.

Where *The Other Side of Life* shines is the characterization. Kelsey is a flawed man, plucked out of his own time and thrust into another war. He doesn't give up or attempt to change the time line, and sticks to his morals and ethics as best he can. Emily and Calvin Garrity, the married couple, are driven apart as Mexicans capture Calvin, and Emily flees the coming war by heading back to Virginia. Their dedication to each other and their drive to survive borders on an epic romance.

This is a fabulous character study of a man torn by loss and shattered by war, but who refuses to lie down and die. Kelsey's journey through time and beyond is engrossing, with each of the seemingly disparate plotlines connecting in a happy, if paradoxical, ending.

JOHN M. MURRAY (Winter 2016)

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