



## **Crisped + Sere**

*T.J. Klune*

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# Crisped + Sere

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**Crisped + Sere** T.J. Klune

*Sequel to Withered + Sere*

Twenty-one days.

In a world ravaged by fire and descending into madness, Cavalo has been given an ultimatum by the dark man known as Patrick: return Lucas to him and the cannibalistic Dead Rabbits, or the town of Cottonwood and its inhabitants will be destroyed.

But Lucas has a secret embedded into his skin that promises to forever alter the shape of things to come—a secret that Cavalo must decide if it's worth dying over, even as he wrestles with his own growing attraction to the muted psychopath.

Twenty-one days.

Cavalo has twenty-one days to prepare for war. Twenty-one days to hold what is left of his shredded sanity together. Twenty-one days to convince the people of Cottonwood to rise up and fight back. Twenty-one days to unravel the meaning behind the marks that cover Lucas.

A meaning that leads to a single word and a place of unimaginable power: Dworshak.

## Crisped + Sere Details

Date : Published August 23rd 2016 by DSP Publications

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Author : T.J. Klune

Format : Kindle Edition 340 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Science Fiction, Dystopia

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# From Reader Review *Crisped + Sere* for online ebook

## Ulysses Dietz says

*Crisped and Sere* (Immemorial Year Book 2)

By T.J. Klune

Dreamspinner Press, August 2016

Cover design, Paul Richmond

Digital ISBN: 9781634770682

340 Pages

Five stars

I checked out all of the online pages for TJ Klune's other books. Every one of them has gotten hundreds more reviews on Goodreads than his two epic dystopian Immemorial Year novels. This is not a surprise. Sales of these two books have not been great. Again, I'm not surprised. The author has been saddened by the relative lack of success of these two books. I understand this, but I don't want him to be sad.

So, this review is my open letter to our Travis, a man who 3500 people (along with me) have friended on Facebook because of his inimitable, quirky, passionate novels. TJ is young enough to be my son, but more talented a fiction writer than I'll ever hope to be. I admire him deeply, both his skill and his courage. He has made the brave choice to write as a gay man for those who want to read about gay men and about love. He has found his audience. I have loved all of this books.

Travis, be proud of "*Crisped and Sere*" and its companion. They are splendid. They are also dark and ugly and fierce. They are not what your vast circle of fans expects from you – all those folks who embrace your complex visions of flawed humanity and gay romance. Yes, you've hinted at darker things in "*Into this River I Drown*," and even in your werewolf romance, "*Wolfsong*;" but in "*Crisped and Sere*" you go really deep. You have plumbed the depths of your darkest places, and you have brought up a dystopian world as grisly and harsh as any I've ever experienced. These books were not fun for me to read; but I never once was bored. I never once ceased admiring your masterful prose or your austere, intensely vivid characters.

The narrative in "*Crisped and Sere*" is relentless, exhausting, even moreso for the fact that there are moments of almost lyrical gentleness that stand in jarring contrast to the gruesome violence at the core of Cavalo's story. The sense of place is both bleak and claustrophobic; a post-apocalyptic wilderness just a little more than a century into our own future. Cavalo is a broken man, a loner, whose tortured mind reveals itself bit by bit as he finds a destiny he never sought forced on him by others more afraid and desperate than he is.

His counterpoint is Lucas, mute refugee from a cult of savage radiation-damaged nomads, whose own madness hovers as near the surface as Cavalo's does, but for reasons that defy reason. The volatile, edgy relationship established between Cavalo and Lucas in the first book expands here, tapping into emotional resources neither man thought had survived the horrors of their individual lives. It becomes the nuclear core of the narrative, pulsing with a dangerous heat, always on the verge of cataclysm. Klune manages to avoid most of the accepted clichés of romance, while creating one of the most intensely counterintuitive couples ever put to the written page. As one character wryly comments during a rare quiet moment: "It's disconcerting to think that potentially the fate of our known world rests in the hands of two people who can't stop growling at each other like animals."

One of greatest miracles in this book is Bad Dog, a character that offers glimmers of the silliness for which

Klune is known. Somehow, with a limited (possibly imaginary) vocabulary and the basic simplicity of a family pet, Bad Dog becomes a note of light in an ocean of darkness. He is a post-apocalyptic Lassie, and Toto, too. He is sidekick and muse, and his non-human soul keeps Cavalo rooted in his own fragile humanity.

SIRS, the C-3PO-like robot who runs the abandoned Idaho prison that Cavalo and Bad Dog call home, is another brilliant balancing act. In a story that is all about lost humanity, SIRS becomes both assistant and savior, offering wisdom and wry comic relief in situations of increasing despair. He brings forth the old science-fiction trope of the robot with a soul, but does it in a way that transforms him into a character as powerful and affecting as any of the actual humans.

“I have a heart that beats. And Cavalo, I swear it beats because of you. It beats for you.”

It is not an accident that it is this trio – the monster, the machine, and the dog – who save Cavalo from his darkest self. They are the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly lion to Cavalo’s Dorothy. Only this is a very ugly OZ, liberally splashed with blood and battle. In the end, however, Cavalo pushes aside his own monster to help people as lost and alone as he is:

“My name is James Cavalo, like my father before me, like my son who came after me. They’re gone now. I do this for them. And I will do this for you.”

So, TJ Klune, I exhort you: sales and quality are not the same thing, even if your livelihood depends on your writing. Harper Lee wrote only one good book in her life (and I’ve read both of her books). You’ve already written a lot more than she ever did. “Crisped and Sere” is as strong and moving and well-crafted as any best-seller that the mainstream press will offer to its legions of mainstream readers. Be proud. Yes, write what your fans expect and they will reward you for it. But treasure these two books for what they are, not what they earn. They have earned my respect.

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## **Vivian says**

“Because I don’t want to be surprised by death,” he said. “If it’s going to take me, then it will be on my own terms.”

The journey continues. If you couldn't make it through the first half hour of *Saving Private Ryan* then you will probably have a very difficult time with this. Throw in some *Inglorious Basterds*, *Pale Rider*, *Deerhunter*, *Uncommon Valor*, and a touch of *The Postman* and you've got the general idea of what's going on and how it's going down.

Cavalo's just as broken as he always was. The repeated reels of the past playing through his mind are good at giving a sense of disorientation and questioning reality, again, but it also becomes redundant--slows things down, even action sequences. Like going down a big hill with the brakes always on, you don't get to feel the thrill of falling because you're so distracted by all the other images. It stretches time out, and while I like the feeling of tension it causes, it also numbs and feels too thin--like it is putting a veil over the scene instead of

ratcheting it until you're at the breaking point.

Loss and sacrifice.

The impending conflict with the Dead Rabbits meets the point of no return. Character relationships expand as they complete their own personal arcs while violence as yet unparalleled is let loose as the dogs of wars ravage the countryside. All this said, it's still a moderate read even with all the action due primarily to the inordinate amount of time spent in Cavalo's head. Frankly, as written, this is better as a movie than a book. The imagery is described, the psychotic sequences so detailed that it could be brushed through in a few seconds of film rather than breaks in the story's plot. If you approach this as a western, then the pace and trajectory work much better than a post-apocalyptic story. After all, Cavalo is the epitome of the American monomyth.

*We get bad guys and make them pay! And no matter where you run, if bad guys are after you, they'll find you. It doesn't matter how far you get, they'll find you.*

The ending... well you'll have to read it for yourself, but it has all been foreshadowed.

~ARC provided by NetGalley~

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## **Jason says**

### **Initial Thoughts**

Bleak and gritty, Crisped + Sere completes the tale of *Immemorial Year*. And what an amazing story it was! Klune's repertoire is quite varied. From comedic to serious, depressing or heartwarming, TJ never disappoints. But I feel he is most in his element when he does intense and dark, as he did with this series.

### **The Story**

One of the best post-apocalyptic stories I've ever read, *Immemorial Year*, tells the tale of Cavalo, a tough and rugged loner with a broken mind, struggling to survive the wasteland of Northern Idaho.

He faces many dangers. The greatest of which is a faction of cannibals, called the Dead Rabbits, who threaten to take away all that he knows, and what's left of his sanity. His only companions are his loyal canine friend, Bad Dog and SIRS, a robot from the time "Before".

### **The Characters**

Early on in the story, Cavalo takes a Dead Rabbit, Lucas, captive. Lucas is a particularly dangerous and brutal young man, however Cavalo is perhaps even more so. As the story progresses, these two killers come to understand each other on a primal level and eventually they develop a much stronger bond of partnership.

As always with a Klune title, the secondary characters were solidly written as well. From Bad Dog's loyalty to SIRS's wit, it was interesting to see non-human characters come to life as they did. And the relationship

they shared with each other was actually quite emotional at times. I'm reminded of Tom Hanks and Wilson from the film *Castaway*.

### **The Writing**

The first part of the story sets the stage in understanding the man that is Cavalo, and how broken his mind has become from years of isolation. The abstract thoughts that he had and memories he recalled were written in a dreamlike manner that told of his past and state of mind.

The world building and graphic descriptions were as bleak and intense as the story:

*One of them was slumped against the wall. A man. Cavalo could see part of his rib cage poking through shredded skin. It was white and wet. His tongue poked through the stiff split of his lips. Arms laid at his sides, hands hooked into claws.*

### **Final Thoughts**

I love post-apocalyptic stories and I love TJ Klune. The combined result made for one of the most satisfying reads for me this year. I loved the story, characters, and particularly the writing. Although he has a style all his own, the gritty nature of the story felt like a Cormac McCarthy novel. From a literary standpoint, this was his best work.

\*Favorite vocabulary word learned: **compartmentalization** (*noun*): a mild state of dissociation

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## **Optimist ?King's Wench? & MANTIES Champion says**

### **War is coming.**

The time has come to take a stand against the Dead Rabbits. Cavalo becomes the de facto leader much to his dismay of this little rebellion consisting of his makeshift family and the people of Cottonwood. Lives are lost. Hatchets are buried. Secrets are revealed. Friendships are formed. Blood is shed.

*Crisped + Sere* is much more gruesome than its predecessor but no less exhilarating to read. The Dead Rabbits are reminiscent of zombies which isn't something I go for usually. Thankfully the details of their appearance is kept to a minimum. They are mindlessly devoted to their demigod. They are relentless and their numbers are vast, but they fight without purpose. Whereas the people of Cottonwood are desperate. Desperate people who have accepted the inevitability of their fate thereby making them formidable foes.

The pacing of this entire series is breakneck. Clear your schedule and pack a sack lunch or two because if you can manage to put either of these books down you are stronger than I. Intense is an understatement and these battles bring new meaning to words the longest day. There is a lot of warring and gore but the life-force of this series is the characters and their quiet moments that are both evocative and heart wrenching.

The fact that no attempts are made to depict either of these characters as anything other than what they are is

daring and continues to be what I love most about this series. Cavalo nor Lucas suddenly become logical statesmen or merciful. They are both survivors who do what it takes to survive including being ruthless. Cavalo does begin to question his own reality, but honestly, he's the sanest insane character I've ever read. He can most definitely be a son of a bitch, but that doesn't make me like him any less. He's survived unimaginable horrors-bees, dancing trees, Mr. Fluff, rubber bands, snow globes-and is still capable of caring for and even loving others, though the way he shows that love is unorthodox. He is hardened, gruff and gristly. He's a man of few words and a misanthrope, but when he lowers the shield... it'll take your breath away.

Theirs is not a traditional romance but it is devastating in its own rite. The boy who cannot speak and the only man who can hear him. They both contemplate suicide at various times and they are constantly on the razor's edge of killing each other. Yet there is no fear between them. Their trust in one another is tacit, all posturing to the contrary.

But most of all, he wondered when Lucas had gotten so under his skin, like a shard of glass now breaking into pieces. He wondered if he could have stopped it if he'd even tried.

In addition to the two fully realized MCs the ever faithful Bad Dog and SIRS play their roles to the hilt and some of the townsfolk from Cottonwood play pivotal roles. I really love when strong female characters who are neither whiny nor bitches are given page time and there are two depicted in this series which is part of the reason why this series appeals so much to me-the making a family where there was none trope. That gets me every time and the fact that they embrace Cavalo and Lucas mental health issues notwithstanding charms me to no end.

He wasn't a stupid man. But sometimes, even the smartest of men fall prey to hope.

The ending is hopeful and realistic for the future of mankind. There isn't a doubt in my mind that Lucas and Cavalo will make it or die trying. And I legit squealed when I read there is more to come from this series. **This story does not end on a cliffhanger though.**

The quibbles I have are few and do not in any way detract from the **5 Hearts** I'm giving it. I continue to be dogged by *that quote*. I think I know what it means, but I can't be certain. I also am confused as to how Cavalo et al. have evaded the effects of the radiation whereas the Dead Rabbits have not. Makes me wonder what's in The Deadlands. ALSO! I really missed the illustrations! I kept thinking one would pop up sooner or later but I'm guessing they aren't in the ARC version. So congrats to all of you who didn't ARC review it.  
\*sad frown\*

Needless to say, I believe I'm starting to understand the Klunedimonium and I would highly recommend this



series. I might even pester some people into reading it. I won't go so far to say he's an autobuy, because ugly crying is a big ole NO, but I will read all his blurbs before making a decision from now on!

*An ARC was provided in exchange for an honest opinion.*

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### **Sahar says**

Je me suis beaucoup attachée aux personnages très atypiques de cette duologie et même si j'ai apprécié dans l'ensemble ma lecture, je reste quand même assez mitigée.  
Surtout par rapport à certains passages qui manquaient de cohérence ou de "crédibilité" à mon avis.

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### **Natalia says**

This was an amazing series and the illustrations were perfect! I can't wait for the next adventure!!

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### **Renée says**

My review will encompass both Withered + Sere and this book - the sequel and wrap up of the story begun in W+S.

This is a story unlike TJ has written before. It's harsh, gritty, **soul-crushing**. There is no happiness in this world he's built. But damn if it doesn't pull you in because you want to see just one **GOOD** thing come out of this fucked-up world.

This is a post-apocalyptic story in its simplest description. But it's so much more. The setting brings us about 100 years after the world has burned. 100 years after a mass, nuclear destruction of almost all of the citizens on Earth. The remaining, and who knows who is left other than those you see around you, are living a life of no contact, no order, no laws, no structure. Cavalo, our MC, is a loner who only remembers hearing stories of things like "motor cars." The world is in ruins with a blanket of gray in the sky that still hasn't lifted after all this time.

And what is a world without laws, without structure? Chaos. The worst of humanity has come out because there is only the fight for your life, for the lives of any family or friends you have left. Rape and murder are commonplace. Cavalo lost his wife and son in a tragic manner years ago, and he has no will to find any new attachments to people. He stumbled upon an old correctional facility from Before (the time before the world's destruction), and has 2 "friends": Bad Dog, his trusty companion, and SIRS, Sentient Integrated Response System, a robot from Before who "manned" the prison with his technology.

This story is about (in)humanity. And (in)sanity. Because what happens to humans with no laws and only

chaos when they are forced to endure the harshest and most brutal life you can imagine?

Cavalo can hear and communicate with Bad Dog. He hears voices (the bees) all the time. He hears *Her*, his wife and his son, Jamie. He hears and sees those that he has killed along the way. We infer, because we learn the type of man that Cavalo is, that these murders were justified. The type of justified that would exist in this world.

And then there are the Dead Rabbits, led by a man known only as Patrick. They are the most evil group known by Cavalo and the people he's around. They rape and cannibalize people while they're still alive before killing them. Everyone is afraid of them, but without "modern" technology, how can you stop such a brutal force when you don't even know where they are? They can lurk in the small communities of people hiding from them.

Cavalo comes across a Dead Rabbit one day in the forest. He bests him and takes him to the nearest community where he has acquaintances. But the UFSA is there, and they torture the Dead Rabbit. It is too much for Cavalo to bear, especially since he sees something in the eyes of this Dead Rabbit that looks too much like his own soul. So he kills the UFSA "agents" and brings Lucas to his penitentiary home.

Lucas has his own horrors that he's lived, and they are evident to those around him. He has a large, horrid scar around the front of his neck leaving him mute. The dynamics between Cavalo, Lucas, Bad Dog, and SIRS are amazing to read about.

The second book, even more than the first, is straight out of a horror movie, minus the scare factor. The blood, gore, and utter devastation from evil aren't for the faint of heart. Many have commented on the cover and how creepy it is. **I didn't think the story could live up to the cover. Let me tell you - the story far surpassed it.**

I can't say anymore without spoiling this story, but let me say that TJ has created a world here that I am in awe of his writing ability for. It captures a bleakness with a combination of hope that is stunning to experience. We do get an ending - no cliffhanger. And we do see the hope that we've been waiting for. I was smiling as I shut off my Kindle, which did **NOT** happen often, if at all, during my reading experience prior to that.

The writing, for its capture of (in)humanity and (in)sanity in this world he's built, is 5+ stars. I will settle on 4 overall stars due to the fact that it's not my normal subgenre. I was **WAY** outside my comfort zone on this one, though I can't say that I didn't enjoy the ride. Klune has outdone himself - truly. I am literally in awe of his writing ability.

For those looking for the types of stories that you found in **ANY** of his other books, this will leave you scratching your head. If you read him for his humor, there is none of that here. If you read him for his relationship buildup, well.....it's on the back burner. It's there, but like item #8 on Klune's list of topics with this tale. But if you read him for the stories he tells and his writing ability, then you will want to be swept away in this story, as I was.

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## **BWT (Belen) says**

Is anyone else as creeped out as I am by this cover? It makes me scared. Which makes me a scaredy cat.

But it's TJ...so I'll try to brave it...

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## **Karen says**

### *How long does it take to save the world?*

"We don't know who the monsters are anymore,"

21 days...that's how long Cavalo, Lucas, Bad Dog, SIRS and the people of Cottonwood have to prepare themselves for what will be the battle for their lives and what is left of the world that they know. Can it be enough? Do they have a chance against Patrick and his Dead Rabbits? Probably not...but there are worse things than dying...things such as giving up your freedom, watching those you love die cruel and brutal deaths, watching as all you hold dear is taken from you and destroyed piece by piece while you stand by complacently knowing that this is only the beginning of the end and that you failed to even try to stop it...to make a difference in the outcome...again.

'Crisped & Sere' is the second book of TJ Klune's series 'Immemorial Year' and like the world itself there is nothing gentle or kind about the force with which the author took me back to this world...to this time and all it's harsh brutality.

"People like... us. Who we are. We never live long. We're not meant to."

While the plot of this book was so emotionally draining and left me in pieces it was the strength of its characters that kept me going...kept me reading and wanting to get to the end. Characters like Bad Dog...

No. We're MasterBossLord and Bad Dog. We get bad guys and make them pay! And no matter where you run, if bad guys are after you, they'll find you. It doesn't matter how far you get, they'll find you. It's better to turn and fight than get shot in the back with a boomstick.

Cavalo who fought his madness to save a town and the family he created for himself knowing that in the end they would all probably die but making a stand together was better than dying alone.

Lucas...mute, raised in a savage world that many would not survive by a father devoid of goodness, compassion or any form of love. Willing to place his trust in a man whose nature is every bit as savage as his own and fighting beside that man to save people who would sooner kill him than have him among them.

SIRS (Sentient Integrated Response System) that's right a robot. A robot who repeatedly brought me to tears

with his humanity.

"...and you will watch his back like you've never done before. I know he tells himself he doesn't need that, that he's doesn't need anyone, but it's a lie. It's a lie he chooses to believe most of the time. He needs you both just like you'll need him. If you can keep each other safe, then you can all come home, and we can pretend this all was a very bad dream."

Of all the amazing characters TJ Klune has created with this series, SIRS is the one broke my heart, grabbed me emotionally and wouldn't let go. Made me cry those damned big ugly face tears that we all hate. It was SIRS who constantly brought humanity to light in the cold, harsh brutality that was the world of this book...

"You have fucked with the wrong people," SIRS announced, squaring his shoulders. "And now I am going to make sure you never hurt my family again."

This is not a story of sunshine and happiness of love and laughter but mired in the darkness, the cruelty and despair there is strength and determination, trust, friendship, hope and love. So much love in so many different forms.

We see it in Cavalo and all he does to try and save/protect his friends/family as he repeatedly refuses to abandon those he cares about and in his relationship with Lucas, while neither of them every puts a name to it, probably would have denied it and it may not necessarily have been the healthiest example of a relationship it was reflective of the world. That either of them was willing to die or kill for the other was undeniable.

SIRS and Bad Dog neither of them human but both are willing to give their lives to protect those they bound to by nothing more than love, loyalty and friendship.

For all the other thousands of reasons to read this book...those being that every word of this story is extraordinary, SIRS is the part of this story that stole my heart and of course there's the...uuuummm...ending...sweet baby jeebus the ending was for me sheer perfection or as perfect as an non-ending, ending can be in a book about what happens after the apocalypse.

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An ARC of 'Crisped & Sere' was received from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Heather K (dentist in my spare time) says**

**I love T.J. Klune.** He is one of my all-time favorite authors, and I've read nearly everything that he's put out. But I have my limits, and this book sailed past them.

I read Withered + Sere and gave it 4-stars, even though it was probably my toughest book to read this year so far. However, as soon as I saw the cover for Crisped + Sere I got a feeling of *dread* in the pit of my stomach.

**Dark T.J. Klune = too dark for me.**

I began reading Crisped + Sere, trying to will myself to be positive about it. I *really* hate sadness, horror, and

torture, and, yes, I'm aware that I'm a baby. As soon as the talk of cannibals and crispy human skin and children dying started creeping up again (yup, I expected it from the first book), I sort of... checked out.

**My mind went "la, la, la, la, la," back to my happy place.**

I put this story down SO many times, not because it wasn't poetic and well-written, but because **it made me think and feel things that I just didn't feel like feeling**. I ended up DNFing it, which is a first for me with a T.J. Klune book. I just *couldn't* with this kind of story at this point, and I think, no I KNOW, that it is a case of **it's me, not you**.

If you are brave, and you don't mind a book that will push you to dark, dark places, then keep going with this story. I'm going to disappear back into my happy world for a while, and stick to stories that don't make me want to weep.

\*Copy provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review\*

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**Lisazj1 says**

TJ is a genius. Only he could make me fall so in love with these damaged, scary, murderous, completely heart-wrenching characters.

Absolutely as incredible as Withered + Sere, and that's quite saying something.

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**T.J. says**

Updated 8/20/16: New Interview with myself and Blake Dorner, the illustrator for both Withered + Sere and Crisped + Sere, plus the release of the second of six illustrations. The first is shown below, and is NSFW.

<https://justloveromance.wordpress.com...>

Pre-Orders now available!

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B&N: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/crisp...>

Add on GR: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2...>

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## Vallie says

### Vicious.

The sequel to Withered + Sere is everything the first book promised. Seeing the violence which we only got a hint of in the first book was more satisfying than I was expecting –that’s me, bloodthirsty!

I am not sure how much of a review this can be, really, because one, I can’t talk plot, and two, I have started to sound like a broken record when it comes to Klune’s writing. I honestly cannot praise it enough. I just get it. It speaks to me. And the brilliance of the writing becomes even more pronounced when reading a story as dark as the one told here. But most importantly, the darkness did not feel gratuitous. There is *a reason* for Cavalo’s madness. There is *a reason* why his mind has splintered so badly. And there absolutely is *a reason* why someone as equally fractured is the one to call to Cavalo’s battered soul.

I am absolutely in love with these characters. I do not always understand them or their actions but I feel like I am getting to know them better than most characters I have read in books. They are unique but also relatable in ways than you would never think. They encapsulate each and every one of us. Not who we are, perhaps, but who we could potentially be if even a hint of what they went through happened to us. And that, right there, is why I could read hundreds of pages about them.

The world created here is not real. It’s fantastical and filled with the stuff of nightmares. It’s a glimpse of the human condition in its basest form and a study in human nature put under immeasurable strain. And it’s done so magnificently that I can’t but applaud the effort.

This is DSP publications so of course the romance is not the focal point. But like in real life, there is always a glimmer of hope in the bleakest of situations, as long as we are willing to see it.

**Gorgeous, once again, and 5+ stars.**

Highly recommend.

*ARC provided by the publisher in exchange for an honest review. See this review on Gay Book Reviews.*

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## Kristen Burns says

**4.5 Stars**

## Full Review:

\*I received a free ecopy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. Quotes used in this review were from an ARC and may be different in the final book.\*

This book was not the end of the series (update: scratch that, it did end up being the end), but it did complete the story arc started in *Withered + Sere*. And since the two books do feel so connected, much of my review will pertain to both.

There's just something *magical* about this series. It's so dark, yet it's so beautiful, and it'll break your heart, but in a hopeful way rather than a sad one.

If you haven't read the first book yet, you don't understand how impossible this review is to write because *there just aren't words*. Nothing I say can describe these books because the way they're written is so different and beautiful. The very writing itself, not just the story, builds up into all these layers, and I could show you a million quotes, but it still wouldn't do the books justice because it's all the little details and nuances, the different voices Cavalo hears, the words and names each character uses, the repetition of specific phrases, the fluidity, the way everything comes together and works together and builds up onto each other—THAT is what makes it so amazing. It's completely and utterly indescribable, and I've never encountered another book like it.

Another one of the amazing things about these books is Cavalo's insanity. Does he actually hear Bad Dog and Lucas in his mind??? Every time he questioned it in this book, I would get so confused and conflicted! I feel like... I feel like he does. I believe. Does that make *me* insane? But he *saw* things this time, like a vision, even! I don't know what's real and what's not sometimes in terms of what Cavalo hears and sees, and normally I hate when books are like that, but, in these books, it's just part of the magic. It's written in such a fluid way that, instead of confusing, it's just wondrous. It sucks me in. And it's never used in a sneaky way to mislead the reader, it's simply part of the story.

Then there's the characters, the broken, complex characters and their heart-breakingly beautiful, complex relationships. How is it that a dog, a robot, a psychopath, and a man who is maybe not quite a psychopath but still has rather questionable morals can make me so emotional and invested in them???

As for this book in particular, some of these characters were *messed up* (I'm looking at you, Lucas, especially in that "*DO YOU TRUST ME NOW?*" scene), but I *felt* for them. Even while they were repeatedly stabbing people, I just wanted to give them a big ol' hug. (Ok, well, not during the stabbing. Maybe, like, after.) And every time Bad Dog or SIRS said something sweet or did something nice for the other even though they pretended to hate each other, I got all mushy inside. Every damn time. And when Cavalo felt something after seeing Lucas pet Bad Dog. And when Bad Dog was happy that the two men smelled like each other. And when SIRS caught them kissing and told Cavalo to "blink slowly." And when Cavalo just needed to be touched. And when Lucas's grin, that cocky, bloody, psychopath grin, faltered.

The bloody smile wavered. Trembled. And for the briefest of moments, the clever monster was gone, and in its place stood a young man, barely in his twenties, hurt and afraid, bloody and bruised, and didn't Cavalo's heart just ache then?

I don't know about Cavalo's heart, but mine sure did. Mushy. Mushy all over the place. I don't think I even have organs in my body anymore because they all just melted at the touching moments in this book.

Of course the book was still dark and gruesome though. This one had maybe more violence because of the battles between Cottonwood and the Dead Rabbits, but it also had more light and hope.

It was also still quirky and funny. I just can't get over that part when Hank asked if the marks on Lucas's face were from the Dead Rabbits. The juxtaposition of the truth and the lie were so perfect. And there were other parts that cracked me up too, some with a dry kind of humor, others with what is maybe, ah... an acquired type of humor.

"Who's Lucas?"

"The Dead Rabbit."

Her eyes widened. "He can talk?"

"No. He wrote it in blood on the walls."

The book was also *intense* sometimes. Like, completely-lost-in-the-moment, goosebumps level intense.

Anyway, I have done my absolute very best to explain how incredible these books are, even though I'm sure I've failed. If you're deciding whether or not to start the series, I encourage you to read my review for the first book. If you're deciding whether or not to continue it, well, this book had all the same stuff but with more violence, more hope, and Lucas's fascinating backstory. To put it simply though, both books were dark, quirky, and beautiful with incredible writing and some of the most complex, broken characters I've ever read about, and I've loved every second I've spent reading them.

#### **Recommended For:**

Anyone who likes dark yet quirky books, broken characters, and M/M romance that's more complex than it is romantic, who doesn't mind graphic violence, and who wants to read something powerfully unique and beautiful.

#### **Original Review @ Metaphors and Moonlight**

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#### **Chris says**

This was artistry ... The storytelling was intense, the relationships and chemistry was brilliant and the characters all in their own ways were loyal, determined and "feared in reverence." This really is an epic dystopian story about survival - not only survival in the elements but survival of themselves. There was love and caring here, but it was through the lens of a black mask, razor sharp teeth, blood & bones. I can see how this series can be stressful for people, there is no joy here, just shades of grey and black against a backdrop of ice and snow. It's harsh, cruel and yet compelling to read. TJ has an extraordinary mind to be able to depict such tangible emotions.

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