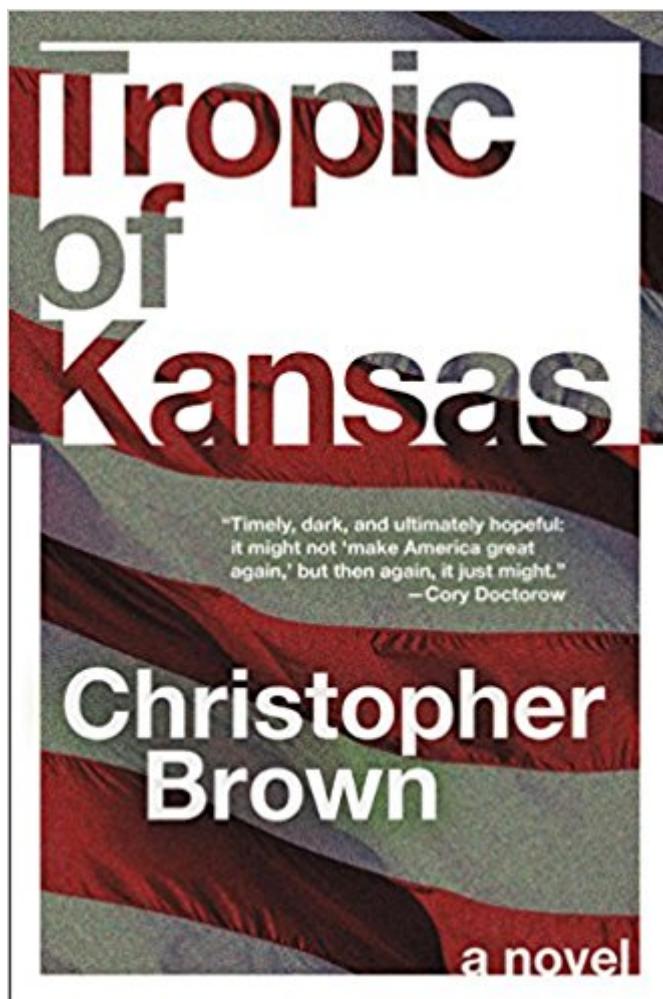


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Tropic Of Kansas: A Novel



Synopsis

“Futurist as provocateur! The world is sheer batshit genius . . . a truly hallucinatorily envisioned environment.” William Gibson, New York Times bestselling and award-winning author “Timely, dark, and ultimately hopeful: it might not make America great again, but then again, it just might.” Cory Doctorow, New York Times bestselling and award winning author of *Homeland* Acclaimed short story writer and editor of the World Fantasy Award-nominee *Three Messages and a Warning* eerily envisions an American society unraveling and our borders closed off “from the other side” in this haunting and provocative novel that combines Max Barry’s Jennifer Government, Philip K. Dick’s *Man in the High Castle*, and China Mieville’s *The City & the City*. The United States of America is no more. Broken into warring territories, its center has become a wasteland DMZ known as “the Tropic of Kansas.” Though this gaping geographic hole has no clear boundaries, everyone knows it’s out there—that once-bountiful part of the heartland, broken by greed and exploitation, where neglect now breeds unrest. Two travelers appear in this arid American wilderness: Sig, the fugitive orphan of political dissidents, and his foster sister Tania, a government investigator whose search for Sig leads her into her own past—and towards an unexpected future. Sig promised those he loves that he would make it to the revolutionary redoubt of occupied New Orleans. But first he must survive the wild edgelands of a barren mid-America policed by citizen militias and autonomous drones, where one wrong move can mean capture . . . or death. One step behind, undercover in the underground, is Tania. Her infiltration of clandestine networks made of old technology and new politics soon transforms her into the hunted one, and gives her a shot at being the agent of real change—if she is willing to give up the explosive government secrets she has sworn to protect. As brother and sister traverse these vast and dangerous badlands, their paths will eventually intersect on the front lines of a revolution whose fuse they are about to light.

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Customer Reviews

“This book is a powerful vision of an America that might be, an America that some nights seems as though it is all too likely to be, filled with powerful characters and a chilling presentiment of how far our country could fall...a novel well worth reading.” (San Francisco Book Review) “Futurist as provocateur! The world is sheer bat-shit genius” a truly hallucinatorily envisioned environment. (William Gibson, New York Times bestselling and award-winning author) “The great American novel about the end of America. This book is marvelously propulsive, big hearted, and whip smart.” (Kelly Link, Pulitzer Prize-nominated author of *Get in Trouble*) “Timely, dark, and ultimately hopeful: it might not make America great again, but then again, it just might.” (Cory Doctorow, A New York Times bestselling and award winning author of A Homeland) “Tropic of Kansas is like a modern dystopian buffet [...] It is, in this particular moment in history, frighteningly prescient. It is the nightly news with the volume turned up to 11.” (NPR.org) “This stunning novel of a time all too easily imaginable as our own highlights a few of the keen-voiced, brave-souled women and men who balance like subversive acrobats on society’s whirling edges...Read it to burn with the joy of realistic hope.” (Nisi Shawl, Tiptree-award winning author of A Everfair and Writing the Other) “A unique blend of Philip K. Dick, Kafka (just a smidgen), and a whole lot of Christopher Brown. Adventure novel meets political satire and the finest elements of realistic sci-fi, and it’s so well written it goes down like a greased eel. It’s hopeful dystopia. What a book.” (Joe R. Lansdale, author of the Hap and Leonard series) “Tropic of Kansas is the tale of a politically desperate USA haunted by a sullen, feral teen who is Huck Finn, Conan and Tarzan. Because it’s Chris Brown’s own imaginary America, this extraordinary novel is probably more American than America itself will ever get.” (Bruce Sterling, award-winning author of *Islands in the Net* and *Pirate Utopia*) “Tropic of Kansas is a great novel. Brown’s writing is tightly composed, and flows nicely...Definitely recommended.” (Civilian Reader) “Tropic of Kansas is savvy

political thriller meets ripping pulp adventure-a marriage made in page-turning, thought-provoking heaven. It's a vision both frighteningly prescient and already too real, and a story of valiant heart and brain up against the worst architectures of greed and power. (Jessica Reisman, SESFA award-winning author of *Substrate Phantoms*) "A real page turner." (Gavin J. Grant, Bram Stoker Award-winning editor and author)

The United States of Americ is no more. Broken into warring territories, its center has become a wasteland DMZ known as the Tropic of Kansas. Though this gaping geographic hole has no clear boundaries, everyone knows it's out there that once-bountiful part of the heartland, broken by greed and exploitation, where neglect now breeds unrest. Two travelers appear in this arid American wilderness: Sig, the fugitive orphan of political dissidents, and his foster sister, Tania, a government investigator whose search for Sig leads her into her own past and toward an unexpected future. Sig promised those he loves that he would make it to the revolutionary redoubt of occupied New Orleans. But first he must survive the wild edgelands of a barren mid-America policed by citizen militias and autonomous drones, where one wrong move can mean capture . . . or death. One step behind, undercover in the underground, is Tania. Her infiltration of clandestine networks made of old technology and new politics soon transforms her into the hunted one, and gives her a shot at being an agent of real change—if she is willing to give up the explosive government secrets she has sworn to protect. As brother and sister traverse these vast and dangerous badlands, their paths will eventually intersect on the front lines of a revolution whose fuse they are about to light.

Tropic of Kansas by Christopher Brown is a highly recommended dystopian/political satire set in the alternate reality of a future, fractured USA. Sig was an illegal from the USA hiding in Canada, until he was caught and sent back over the border wall into the area that was once Minnesota. Now the Midwest is just part of a wasteland of warring factions and provincial militia groups. This area has been dubbed The Tropic of Kansas and is known for the third world lawlessness that thrives there and the various greedy leaders who control parts of it. Sig, the son of political dissidents, is a survivor and escape artist. He essentially trusts no one. He's difficult to keep as a prisoner because he will find a way to escape. He will also find a way to survive. Tania was once Sig's foster sister. Sig's mother dropped him off at her house for Tania's mother to care for when her arrest was imminent. Tania is now a government investigator. She got into a little trouble in Washington D.C. and is now looking for Sig to rectify her mistake and to try to get her own mother free from

imprisonment. When Tanis goes searching for Sig, she comes to terms with her own past and perhaps the direction of her future. Chapters alternate between Tania and Sig. You'll be rooting for Sig as he manages to escape from one predicament, betrayal, and impressionist after another. You'll also be hoping Tania sees the light, and the corruption of the government, and finds Sig along with a new goal for herself. Brown takes present ideological differences, technology, factions, and widely different beliefs among citizens in the USA today and escalates all of it into a dystopian setting while setting his characters into this action packed satire. It's a wild ride through politics, drones, guns, and bullies. It's also an easy to read novel, with short chapters that avoid much detailed descriptions of settings or other characters. This is entertaining - certainly a good airplane book. It is worth noting that you should anticipate that Brown will hit you over the head with pc politics along with the expectation that you will naturally believe all that he believes. But, since this is also set in an alternate reality USA, it is much easier to just go with the flow and accept any precautionary statements that might be leached out of the adventure. Disclosure: My review copy was courtesy of HarperCollins.

From the clever title to the swiftly intelligent writing and sympathetic characters, it was clear to me that I had found a special piece of literature in 'Tropic of Kansas'. The immediate impulse, even before starting the book and based on the synopsis alone, was to draw comparisons to current events and put myself in that head space. Instead, when I was introduced to one of the protagonists, Sig, I immediately felt like I was fifteen again and reading Kerouac. At that age, when confronted by those who lived a bohemian ideal, the whole thing felt subversive to me and in fact, compelled me to have my own 'On The Road' experiences. Now, at Forty-One, and reading an entirely different book, I was filled up with that same yearning to subvert the course of the norm. I wanted to hit the road again. To escape the responsibilities of modern life and try and exist beyond societal expectations. It was a feeling that stuck with me the whole way through the novel. Initially, there isn't much to draw the free and wild Sig and his more conservative foster sibling, Tania, together, except a loose, familial bond. But once you begin to recognise that both characters long for the same thing, just from opposite sides of the fence, then you really get to the heart of things. Both are prisoners, to some degree, of a shared history, and both long to escape. But of course, this is the future, and in the future, there never truly is an escape. Brown's speculation is not so much future as alternate future based on alternate past, although to be honest, it's not much different than the one we live in now. The weird mesh of celebrity propaganda, constant surveillance, ecological terrorism and uneasy foreign policy is just as current as it is in our own timeline. It's interesting to

see the author's take on it and I was fascinated by his use of the written word to crystal ball things and put a new spin on past and present problems. Everything fits well from a world-building sense, but never occludes the plight of the protagonists, which is sometimes an easy thing in novels of this caliber. Never once was I left feeling disassociated with what either Sig or Tania were attempting to achieve. That makes everything so much more heightened and believable and the pay-off for the reader is worthwhile. The ending left me feeling hopeful, which is a rare and valuable achievement with the current state of play at home and abroad. Ultimately, I'll return to my modern day life of spreadsheets, reports, meetings, scrolling through feeds, eating and drinking too much and exercising not enough. The difference is that now, I have had time out from the humdrum by reading this book. The journey amongst the pages of *Tropic of Kansas* allowed me to escape on a road trip of invention that catered to my rebellious side, if just for a little while.

Brown imagines a parallel US where Reagan was shot and Alexander Haig took control, which looks a lot like the US we might all be living in soon. It's a sort of vision for the future, and what might come after the apocalypse. But above and below it all, it's the story of two siblings who choose different paths to the same place, and Brown heartfully doesn't let that get lost amid the "thriller" part of the story.

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