

Prophet

Sin Blaché

Helen MacDonald

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Weaponized nostalgia endangers the world and forces a reckoning between old friends in Sin Blaché and Helen MacDonald's novel *Prophet*.

An American-style diner, a bouquet of flowers, and a board game are among the objects that appeared at random near a military base in England. Such a bizarre mystery calls for a bizarre investigator: Rao, an outwardly flippant, traumatized, mentally ill drug addict who can distinguish truth from falsehood at a glance, and who has seen people commit evil in the pursuit of "truth." He and his handler, Adam, trace the cause of the phenomenon to a Colorado laboratory, where scientists have used an ever-changing substance, dubbed Prophet, to incapacitate people with longing for their fondest memories. Rao and Adam are the key to unlocking Prophet's secrets—and the secrets of the insidious minds behind it.

Prophet is striking in its originality and its capacity to instill unease, even terror. It evolves over time, with the consequences of its use growing ever more disturbing and incomprehensible. Even Rao, with his abilities as a "human polygraph," feels control slipping away from him and into Prophet as the chaos spreads. A question arises: whether Prophet is also capable of learning, mercy, and perhaps even love.

Rao displays wild snark, and Adam a nigh-unbreakable deadpan voice, humanizing them as they face what is inhuman. Each would give anything to save the other. With Prophet's threat growing by the day, they may have to. The book's final confrontation is horrifying: Adam and Rao battle the objects Prophet has made and face a staggering truth.

Prophet is a chilling speculative thriller in which some suffer, and others profit, from idealizing the past.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July / August 2023)

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