



Sordidez

E.G. Condé

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Indigenous culture is at war with imperialism in E. G. Condé's haunting novella *Sordidez*.

In a future ravaged by climate disaster and biochemical warfare, Puerto Rico is caught in the new cold war between China and the United States and abandoned by both. Its inhabitants return to their old ways deep in the mountains. And while the verdant green of Mexico is turned to desert and ash by a vicious, anti-Indigenous tyrant, in the Mayan ruins, something that has slumbered for half a millennium is stirring.

Vero, a trans man, becomes the leader of a small group of survivors eking out an existence in Puerto Rico. Bolstered by his grandfather's stories, he and his sisters use the Taino Arawak language to communicate, building a grassroots resistance movement. In Yucatán, Doña Margarita sows and tends to a garden of plants and people devastated by human-made pestilence and plague. Her path was chosen as a means of survival and forgiveness for the regime that tore her family apart.

Evocative and descriptive, the language captures the lushness of Puerto Rico and the devastation of the desiccated Yucatán peninsula. It is dreamy and vengeful, a character unto itself. It is also multilingual, highlighting words and phrases from Arawak and Mayan languages.

Vero and Doña Margarita's stories, told in alternating chapters, converge in ways that have far-reaching consequences. Though changed as a result of war, climate change, and the politics of peace, the issues that led society to destruction are pervasive. Vero and Doña Margarita illustrate two ways of resistance and coping with and overcoming trauma. But the imperialist history of the region looms. The past is never forgotten, and the future is uncertain.

At its heart, *Sordidez* is a clarion call to recognize that the political and biological ecosystems of the world are intertwined.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (July / August 2023)

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