



See You In September

Charity Norman

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Cassy blew a collective kiss at them. 'See you in September,' she said. A throwaway line. Just words, uttered casually by a young woman in a hurry. And then she'd gone.

It was supposed to be a short trip - a break in New Zealand before her best friend's wedding. But when Cassy waved goodbye to her parents, they never dreamed that it would be years before they'd see her again.

Having broken up with her boyfriend, Cassy accepts an invitation to stay in an idyllic farming collective. Overcome by the peace and beauty of the valley and swept up in the charisma of Justin, the community's leader, Cassy becomes convinced that she has to stay.

As Cassy becomes more and more entrenched in the group's rituals and beliefs, her frantic parents fight to bring her home - before Justin's prophesied Last Day can come to pass.

A powerful story of family, faith and finding yourself, See You in September is an unputdownable new novel from this hugely compelling author.

See You In September Details

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Author : Charity Norman

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From Reader Review See You In September for online ebook

Maggie says

I have been a huge fan of Charity Norman ever since I read & adored 'Freeing Grace' so I was really looking forward to the arrival of 'See You In September' on my Kindle.

'See You In September' is the story of Cassie. When travelling in New Zealand she has an argument with her boyfriend & travelling companion and ends up taking a lift from a happy bunch of people who invite her back to their community. She is enthralled by the atmosphere created by these caring people and decides to stay a while. Her stay lengthens, the life appeals to her more and more. Eventually she rejects her old life marries one of the community and the inheritance from her Grandfather is happily signed over to Gethsemane.

Meanwhile her family try to get in touch and reach her but all in vain. From the very beginning we know that this joyous community is not all it seems. I raced through the story fearing the worst!

A lot of thought and research has gone into this book. It highlights how easily people can be drawn into a place where they feel loved and where they belong. It also highlights the saying that if it looks too good to be true it probably is! Gethsemane certainly comes into that category.

This is another great book from Charity Norman & one of the best books I've read this year.

Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says

*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

4.5 stars

Faith, alternative living, family and guiding relationships form the essence of Charity Norman's 2017 release, See You in September. This is a novel that completely monopolizes your attention so all you can think about is THIS novel. See You in September puts the spotlight on cults and organised religions, through Charity Norman's in-depth examination into one British young woman's experiences of Gethsemane, a New Zealand based farming collective.

Cassy is on the adventure of her life. With her long term boyfriend Hamish, the two have been navigating around one of the most tranquil locations in the world, New Zealand. Cassy is determined to make the most of her trip, before she returns home to the UK for a close friend's wedding. When Cassy and Hamish have a disagreement, the damage is done and the two break up. Cassy makes an impulsive decision and hitchhikes solo, which leads to an invitation to stay at an exclusive farming collective. Cassy is seduced by the pure serenity of the location and the giving nature of those that populate this close knit community. Cassy decides to break her travel plans and she begins to transition to a new life in Gethsemane, the farming community. While Cassy immerses herself deep in the group's practices and beliefs, her parents back home are utterly bereft. While they devise plans to bring Cassy home, the powerful leader of Gethsemane, Justin, has a deadly plan for his followers and this includes Cassy.

See You in September signals a return experience to the work of Charity Norman. I was first introduced to Charity Norman's writing when I read The Secret Life of Luke Livingstone in 2015. This was one engrossing novel that I never failed to forget. Again, Charity Norman produces a highly original storyline focus that sheds a great deal of light on a topic I have read very little about; organised cults and alternative

collective forms of living.

I made a rapid connection to Cassy, the intelligent and open British girl at the centre of See You in September. It was easy to see how Cassy felt pressured into a certain way of life, her future decided for her in the opening of See You in September. It is easy to see why she retreated from this pre destined life and chose the enchanting Gethsemane group as an alternative. In today's society, it is easy to see why the lure of communities off the beaten track may appear attractive. Through this novel we witness Cassy's complete character back flip. We watch on as Cassy chooses to shun British society and her family, with heartbreaking results.

My knowledge of organised religions and cults is not terribly expansive, but See You in September both broadened my perspective of this topic and challenged the preconceived notions I held. I admire books that have the power to do this. I implore anybody with a passing interest in cults, or different alternative living to consider reading this book. The careful and almost seducing structure Charity Norman takes to this novel seems to cover all bases in the cult corner. We have three shared perspectives. The first is Cassy's, which covers her recruitment into the Gethsemane doctrine, her transformation and eventual efforts to escape. Secondly, through the point of view of Diane, Cassy's mother, we are privy to the psychological impacts on a family devastated by the shock exit of their daughter. Norman extends this further and examines Cassy's father's anguish and the crisis faced by Cassy's younger sister. Finally, a third voice in this novel emerges, a manual used by a cult leader. This chilling outside account reveals just what is involved in recruiting and maintaining followers, such as Cassie.

The New Zealand based setting is what really adds to the atmosphere of this novel. I am yet to make it across to New Zealand, I hope to one day. In the meantime, Charity Norman satisfies my desire to discover as much as I can about this country by her climatic prose. The prose perfectly showcases the tranquillity and natural beauty of this part of the world. There is a strong pictorial presence in Norman's writing, I could easily visualise many of the scenes playing out in this book in my head and could also see it transferred to screen successfully. The hidden valley enclave of Gethsemane is so vividly presented by Norman, it will be sure to leave a stain on your mind.

Readers will find See You in September an evenly paced read that cultivates the reader's mind for the whole time spent with this book. It is a book that takes a scrupulous look at personal belief, sustainability/alternative lifestyles, forced control, love and devotion. It wrapped me in its arms for the duration of my reading session and I know I wasn't keen to let go.

*Book 'N' of the a-z author challenge 2018

Suzanne says

Just what I like in a thriller. Could. Not. Put. This. Down.

Weekend reading = dirty house. I always do this :(

A lovely English lass embarks on the trip of a lifetime in New Zealand, back pack and boyfriend at the ready. Right on queue, enter fight with boyfriend in pouring rain and a warm van packed with hippies.

A nice addition to this story is the step by step 'Cult Manual' at the beginning of each chapter, which is voiced between Cassy who is immersed in the horrible cult, and the voices from home; the grieving family.

Very easy reading, and at all stages captivating and maddening. The scenery is lush and the mind play from the cult members and their crazy leader blood boiling. Cassy's family left behind were believable and the new family created by Cassy were lovely but oh so misguided.

Added to the fiction were many real life inclusions of the realness of cults, and a lot of real life disasters used by the leader to support his warped visions. Recommended; I almost read this in a day.

Tripfiction says

Novel set near Rotorua, New Zealand.

This review first appeared on our blog where the author also talks about locale:

<http://www.tripfiction.com/novel-set-...>

I have always enjoyed Charity Norman's novels and she always chooses an interesting subject for each book. See you in September is no exception.

Cassy's family waves her and her boyfriend, Hamish, off for a Summer trip to New Zealand. She is part way through her law degree and is having a few doubts about the course her life is taking. Does she really want to go for the high pressure job, with long hours but good money? Her parents have encouraged her to take this particular path and are happy for her to have a couple of carefree weeks before she has to buckle down to the final year, starting in September. But in the car to the airport there is the hint that Cassy is having serious doubts about her future. A slightly fraught departure ensues.

Partway into the trip Cassy and Hamish hit a real low point in their relationship and she is whisked off by a van full of up-beat and jolly people who take her to a remote encampment by the Lake at Mount Tarawera. She can, of course, leave at any time... at junctures the author slides in snippets from The Cult Leader's Manual by Cameron Allsop, a several stage guide to ensnaring new acolytes, just to underline the gradual process of entrapment.

Cassy is bright, she takes the community for what it is, set in the most tranquil and idyllic location away from the horrors of the world. The members have formed a community with a laudable moral and spiritual ethos that is very seductive, all under the watchful and caring eye of Justin Calvin – a listener to whom the acolytes are in thrall. It is also no coincidence that the members are named after places around the world...Rome, Cairo, Aden, Gaza...

Just how deeply involved does Cassy become?

Most of us are unlikely to ever find ourselves in the position of becoming enmeshed in a cult and I think the author has done a great job in showing how the tentacles of entrapment slowly take hold. Most community members have place names and it is hard as a reader to quite get a grip on who is who, the members are an amorphous mass of people – this demonstrates just how powerful our own names are to give us identity. Lose your name and personal items, and you lose your 'self'. Members' thinking is gradually changed too because no negativity is allowed. Negative thoughts, however, help us to process our understanding of the world; take that out of the equation and we can only function on half the cylinders. Already, perceptions are changing... As time passes it becomes clear how seductive the rituals and the group mentality become, and

how closing off the outside world aids in institutionalising the individuals within the community, leaving them fearful of functioning outside in the horrible big wide world. People are taken back to childlike dependency and innocence.

I found this read really gripping, well written with a very interesting subject at the heart. The end was a little drawn out for me it lost its punchy pace, which however picked up again towards the end.

“And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music”
Friedrich Nietzsche

Karen says

It's a scenario that plenty of families deal with every day. Teenager's off to spend their gap year travelling in far flung locations - in this case British backpacker Cassy heading to New Zealand with her boyfriend for a short break before returning to her best friend's wedding, study and a normal life. When Cassy gets to New Zealand, however, normality becomes a split with her boyfriend, a chance encounter with some very welcoming people in a van, and years away from home, a life in the midst of a cult in the beautiful, and isolated wilds, of New Zealand.

Research about the ways in which people are beguiled into cult life must have been done for SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER, as the slip into the life is seamless and cleverly done. There are points where the reader is almost as bewitched as Cassy - the lifestyle is gentle, friendly and stress-less. The people are inviting, non-judgemental and seemingly blissfully happy with their living arrangements. It doesn't, initially, even feel like a cult - this is a community that's welcoming, enveloping and then it's controlling and threatening and very discomfoting. But by that stage Cassy is embedded and her parents impotent from such a distance, desperate.

Vulnerable and controllable, Cassy's exactly the sort of young woman that you'd expect to be pulled into this scenario which makes this slightly less punchy than it should be - that and a tension arc that gets a bit bogged down at points with a tendency to belabour points that are pretty self-evident. Whilst this detracts a little from the pace and ultimate tension of SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER, overall the novel makes up for that with a fascinating depiction of a young, vulnerable woman all too susceptible to an ideology of acceptance, the promise of a perfect life, happy to give no thought to the ease with which she might have found it.

<https://www.austcrimefiction.org/revi...>

Bookread2day says

Review by www.ireadnovels.wordpress.com

Absolutely fantastic! One thing all readers can be certain of is that Charity Norman will come up with fresh exciting stories. I have read The Son In Law and The New Woman. In my view See You In September is the best novel that Charity Norman has written. I loved every sentence. About the story Cassy Howells had been with her boyfriend for two years and has called Time on their relationship. Cassy goes of traveling. Cassy finds herself at a cult religious place. She seems to have been brain washed by them. Cassy now thinks that her parents don't know her anymore and she cancels her flight home. She believes that the people at the religious place are good kind people. The Cult leader Justin Calvin wants Cassy to stay with them forever. Will Cassy stay forever or will she miss her parents and want to go home? So much goes on in this fantastic

story. Highly recommended. Don't miss a page.

Miriam Smith says

UNPUTDOWNABLE!!! I can't praise "See You In September" by Charity Norman highly enough. I was utterly entranced by it from the very first page and even found myself wanting to continue reading it during the night and I've never done that before. So at three o'clock in the morning, the light was on, tea was made and I was catching up on the final few pages of this superb and suspenseful story.

'Cassy blew a collective kiss at them. "See you in September"' she said.....And then she'd gone.' Only intending it to be a short trip before her best friends wedding, Cassy is enjoying her visit to New Zealand with boyfriend Hamish. However, when she and Hamish decide to call time on their relationship, she decides to accept a lift from a very happy, smiley and welcoming group of strangers. Accepting their invitation to stay on their rural self sufficient farm, Cassy becomes entranced by the peace and beauty of the serene valley and the charismatic charms of the community leader Justin. Cutting all ties from the outside world Cassy commits to the community and becomes one of the 'family'. But is all as it seems and will her family accept her decision?

I truly felt every emotion Cassy's parents were feeling while they were trying to encourage her to come home, as a parent myself I would be distraught at the thought of one of my sons being recruited into a religious cult and feeling utterly helpless at not being able to reach them. I liked Cassy as a character and I could sympathise as to why she felt the need to seek solace with the group of such welcoming and warm hearted people. From reading the description myself of the beautiful scenery and the idea of being self sufficient with no negativity, just love, it sounds very appealing and I imagine I would have had my head turned too. I particularly liked Cassy's sister Tara, she played the wounded sister perfectly and the author conveyed the many emotions and feelings of all the family members involved perfectly.

There's obviously been a lot of research carried out regarding religious cults, their recruitment processes and New Zealand in general and I could easily see this book being made into a movie, it would definitely make compelling viewing. The ending was just brilliant and really did have me on the edge of my seat.

Suspenseful, emotional, intriguing and totally gripping, I'd give this ten stars if I could, I thoroughly enjoyed it and would go so far as to say, it's one of my top ten favourite reads for 2017.

5 fabulous stars (and then some).

I would like to thank the Goodreads Giveaways for my copy of the book.

Rachel Hall says

See You in September is a top-down exploration of one families experience when their eldest daughter's planned short break to New Zealand results in her making a life-changing decision to join a idyllic sounding farming collective. When the community swiftly evolves into something far more sinister than simply a shared belief in sustainable living and stewardship of the land it becomes more akin to resembling a brainwashing cult prophesying doomsday with shocking implications to come. In this ambitious novel Charity Norman uses a dual narrative structure to illustrate the perspectives of both daughter, Cassy, and the family she has left behind through the voice of her mother, Diana. Despite the specifics being purely fictional many of the principles of cult psychology are weaved throughout a clearly well researched story ensuring it is not only emotive but also an insightful read. However this is no flash in the pan, as evidenced by Diana's haunting prologue five years after twenty-one-year-old law student Cassy Howells and her then boyfriend Hamish jet off for a fleeting break to New Zealand before returning for a planned final year of university and

the ensuing treadmill of the corporate ladder starts in earnest.

Leaving Croydon behind idealistic Cassy sets out on a student rite of passage, much to the chagrin of her ex-army father, Mike, whose “dog eat dog” perception on her future career prospects sees him pushing her towards a law internship. Glad to be free of the pressure of pursuing her father’s dreams on her behalf, Cassy jets off only to part company with her rather shallow boyfriend after his insensitive reaction to her pregnancy scare. Turning her back on Hamish, Cassy is cold, tired and has never felt so alone and the answer to all her prayers is the dated white van which stops to offer her a lift. Packed with high-spirited and friendly faces who invite her to visit their farming and market gardening collective of Gethsemane in Rotorua she finds herself transported into a vision of paradise. Situated around a cultivated valley on the shores of Lake Tarawera the group emphasise their self-sustainable and low impact lifestyle and the peace and escape from the pressures of the modern world. Setting foot in the community a feeling of contentment washes through Cassy as she finds herself become steadily entranced by the attention showered upon her from people who share her ideological beliefs.

Alongside this harmonious side to life the members are keen to downplay the ritual daily toll of bells calling ‘optional’ prayer meetings, what looks suspiciously like a uniform and stress that they are not Christians and they do not take the Bible literally, simply hating intolerance. As Cassy’s planned departure date is pushed further and further from her mind she finds herself drawn to the charismatic cult leader, Justin Calvin, whose magnetic energy seems to empower the community. Self-appointed and revered within Gethsemane, Justin is keen to point out the lack of stranger danger, the escape from technology and the satisfaction of working for a collective cause in a community of skilled individuals. Against these definite positives are more sinister aspects (children “belonging” to the entire community of Gethsemane and being named by Justin), the less than opaque recruitment process and Cassy’s enforced name change (Cairo).

The overly simplistic manner of Cassy’s rapid transformation from a feisty and obviously intelligent student at Durham university and a family of atheists to a smiling non-questioning disciple without any substantial explanation of the communities religious beliefs however disappoints. Within just ten days of her arrival at Gethsemane, Cassy is already contemplating the prospects of a longer stay and has willingly handed over her mobile phone, wallet and passport. This portrayal appears even more unlikely given that Cassy is courageous enough to have recently split with her boyfriend of two-years in an alien country and hitch-hike alone beforehand. Instead of Cassy slowly becoming distanced from her life in the UK she seems to forget about her friends and family in the blink of an eye and it doesn’t ring true that she would become so submissive and unquestioning with little, if any resistance. So whilst a lot of what happens following this initial acceptance is well portrayed, from the depersonalisation and shunning of those who question Justin, I was utterly unconvinced by how a non-religious and intelligent girl seemed to lose all of her independence in a matter of days.

In the second narrative a more immersive side to what unravels is told by Cassy’s mother, Diana, who is ideally placed to provide a heartbreaking commentary on the fallout within the family unit left behind. Younger sister Tara gives herself over to drunken nights out and nurses a growing enmity to her sister, and father Mike’s well-intentioned concern swiftly turns to irascible frustration and downright anger. As the Howells reach out to a variety of sources for advice from an expert in cults to a New Zealand based Private Detective, an increasingly anxious Mike makes the journey to Gethsemane and is turned away from the community after receiving a hostile reception. Throughout all that unravels mother Diana remains the voice of reasoned calm as she steadily retreats from her social circle and Mike’s health suddenly deteriorates. As See You In September builds in readiness for a rousing finale it is the increasing focus of Charity Norman on the religious element and that a poorly reasoned second coming would see Justin appointed as the true spiritual leader which led to my interest waning and into the final twenty percent I found the story dragged. Scattered throughout are extracts from The Cult Leader’s Manual written by Dr Cameron Allsopp (the director of the Destructive Cults Information Trust at Sussex University whom advises Diana and Mike) which serves as a timely reminder that whilst it is easy to view cult psychology objectively in the cold light

of day it is markedly more difficult when exposed remorselessly to such aspects such as love bombing. See You In September provides an insightful and suspenseful take of one families experience of life for a daughter within a cult and the fractured bonds of a formerly tight-knit and loving family left behind. In an emotive and powerful story, slowly bridging the divide and reconciling both parties proves an arduous feat requiring understanding and patience and contributes to making this a thought-provoking read.

Many thanks to book reviewer and friend Miriam Smith for kindly sharing the novel with me.

Sharon says

Waving goodbye to her parents, Cassy sets off for a quick trip with her boyfriend, Hamish around New Zealand. Little did they know this could be the last time they see her.

Standing along the side of a highway trying to hitch a ride Cassy and Hamish have an argument and Cassy storms off leaving Hamish behind. Moments later Cassy gets chatting with a friendly crowd of people who suggest she comes back with them to their commune. Cassy takes them up on their offer and once she arrives at their commune she is slowly introduced to everyone.

Before too long Cassy finds herself becoming quite involved with the commune and she is starting to accept their way of living and decides she doesn't want to return home. Cassy's parents are overcome with worry when she doesn't come back home in September like she was meant to. Once Cassy's parents find out what's happening, they do all they can to get their precious daughter to return, but it seems it may be too late.

This was a really powerful and interesting story which gives us the reader an insight into the world of cults. It amazes me just how people get involved (brainwashed) in these cults and how hard it is for them to leave if they want to. Well written story which I highly recommend.

Andrea says

Something a little bit different for me, but I was tempted to read this on the basis of good reviews from a few trusted GR friends. I found myself totally absorbed in the story, but at the same time acting as a curious bystander, observing my own reactions to the characters and events.

Set in New Zealand, on the shores of remote and ruggedly beautiful Lake Tarawera, this is the story of British backpacker, Cassy, who meets some friendly locals and goes to stay at their sustainable farming collective for a few days. She's a bright, educated, independent, modern girl, so does she realise it's a cult? Well...

At first she understands that this community is a bit different and her guard is up, but she's in a very vulnerable position at the time, and the members actively withhold the details of the true nature of their community. What Cassy sees and experiences at Gethsemane is a safe, happy, nurturing and self-sufficient community where everybody from the very old to the very young is loved and cared for; where everyone has a purpose and can contribute for the benefit of all. She likes it - she decides to stay for a while.

Then she meets Justin, the charismatic founder of Gethsemane, and she falls under his and Gethsemane's spell.

Five years later, her family back in England is still trying to release her from Gethsemane's pull.

Wow, it's easy to see how this sort of thing can happen. What really surprised me about my own reaction was that I was on Cassy's side! 'Leave her alone', I thought, 'she's happy there!' They're not hurting anyone... Perhaps though this was partly because I didn't like her parents - her dad in particular. I thought they got too worried, too quickly. It seemed like a gross overreaction, when she'd only been there a few days. But as time passed, I became more sympathetic to them. It was also interesting at times when the author let us into Cassy's head to see that inwardly she was still rational, even if her outward behaviour belied this.

As you would expect, the ending of this story was very dramatic. Not all happy endings for everyone, but quite realistic I think.

Apart from the insight to a very different world, I also loved the setting. At first I didn't realise that Lake Tarawera was a real place, but one morning I was sitting on the couch reading this book, when I registered that someone on breakfast TV had just mentioned Lake Tarawera, so of course, off to Wikipedia I went to find out more.

I haven't read anything by this author before, but I will be checking out her other offerings.

Mandy Radley says

Another excellent book from local author Charity Norman. We've been waiting a while for this and I read it over three evenings and now can't wait for her next book. This book is set in New Zealand and we follow Cassy who with her boyfriend are backpacking around New Zealand. While trying to hitch a lift from Auckland down to Taupo she tells him she's pregnant. Obviously this doesn't go down well with Hamish and he doesn't want anything to do with it. Tired, cold and wet, Cassy accepts a lift from a group of very happy looking people in a white van, Hamish decides not to go, not convinced the van will get them very far. This separation is the beginning of what becomes a very different way of life for Cassy. The chapters alternate between Cassy's story and that of her mother Diane in London. I found the story a little predictable but thoroughly enjoyed it and didn't get out of bed Friday morning until I'd finished it. Luckily there wasn't too much left to read otherwise I would have been late for work.

Antoinette says

4.5 STARS.

A mesmerizing look inside a cult- how they recruit a person and draw them in; how they manipulate you into believing what they wish you to believe. This book was utterly terrifying but utterly believable.

We meet Cassy, who goes on vacation with her boyfriend. They have an argument and go their separate ways. She receives an invitation to a isolated farming community which seems too good to pass up on. There she becomes totally enraptured with their life and philosophy.

We also meet Diana, her mother, who is beyond devastated when her daughter does not return home. The fear and anxiety changes their family dynamics.

The author has written an enthralling book that I found hard to put down and hard not to keep thinking about. I highly recommend this book!

Jo Barton says

Whilst on holiday in New Zealand, Cassy has a row with her boyfriend, Hamish. After abandoning him, she hitches a ride with a group of people who persuade her to join them in Gethsemane, a rural community which lies within the volcanic shadow of Mount Tarawera.

Living a sustainable existence in such an idyllic location is an attractive proposition to Cassy and even though she knows should return to her family in London, she is entranced by the group's ideology and decides to make her home with them. When Cassy fails to return, as planned in September, precious family memories are all that Cassy's parents, Diana, Mark and younger sister, Tara have to sustain them through the missing years.

I think what is so powerful about this story is the utter believability of how Cassy was taken in and how, almost without conscious thought, she was brainwashed into believing that the life she was now part of at Gethsemane was the absolute truth. The indoctrination at the heart of the story is subtle and so cleverly contrived that I almost wanted to join the community, and follow the teaching and philosophy of Justin Calvin, for myself.

I read See You in September over the space of a couple of days and even when I wasn't reading it I still had Cassy on my mind. As a parent, I felt every inch of Diana and Mark's anguish at not being able to communicate with their precious daughter, and yet, due to the author's vivid description of life at Gethsemane I also understood why Cassy felt compelled to remain there with her new family and friends.

Powerful, upsetting and more than a little disturbing, See You in September is an unputdownable novel by an author at her absolute best.

Dale Harcombe says

Three and a half stars

Before she returns for her best friend's wedding, Cassy plans a short break in New Zealand with her boyfriend Hamish. So they catch their plane but plans have a habit of changing as they both find out. After an argument with Hamish Cassy accepts a lift from a van of happy, friendly people. They invite her to stay at their farming collective called Gethsemane. Everyone seems to be so happy and get along so well that a short stay becomes longer. The longer she stays the more Cassy finds out about the place, the people their beliefs and their leader the enigmatic Justin. Meanwhile her parents are wondering at the silence from Cassy. They struggle to get in touch but are seemingly blocked at every turn. Could Cassy be in danger? Her parents have serious doubts about the validity of this Gethsemane group and what Cassy is learning. Will Cassy ever come back?

As well as giving the story of Cassy's integration into this group and the fear experienced by her parents, in particular her mother Diana, each chapter starts with a message written by Cameron Allsop from the Cult leader's manual and the eight steps to mind control. I found this an intense read that kept me turning the pages, though somewhere around the middle I started to feel it spent a bit too much time going over the same material.

However I was interested enough to keep reading. It does give a chilling picture of how cults prey on the helpless and vulnerable and draw them in. I found it a little hard to believe the choices Cassy made and how gullible she is, as she is drawn in to the life of this cult and their belief in the prophesied Last Day. Her parents also took a while before they started to worry about her, but once they did I could understand why they reacted as they did. The ending didn't quite work for me. It was just a little too neat the way things fell into place and some of it not believable given attitudes prior to that. I did find third an interesting read, even

if stretching credibility at times. However, the book is still definitely worth reading for the subject, the insights given and the tension that is maintained throughout.

Deborah says

I'd put off reading this book. I wondered if a book about a girl joining a cult would be heavy-going or too obviously a cautionary tale of sorts. But, as it happens, it was neither. I actually wrote very few notes as I read it in a night, and the only thing leaping out of my jottings is the phrase 'surprisingly riveting' with several exclamation marks for good measure.

This book actually opens with Cassy's mother Diana at the site of her daughter's former home-cum-haven and she's seeing first-hand, the outcome of the camp leader's Last Day prophesies. So there's a sense of trepidation from the moment the prologue ends and we rejoin Cassy, her mother and sister as they're packing for the 21yr old's overseas trip.

I engaged with Cassy straight away, though Norman puts us in both Diana and Cassy's heads. Of course it's hard to read this without a sense of cynicism and I kept trying to challenge myself to try to imagine being Cassy... unhappy with life and reaching out for something. It's easy to watch something unfold from the outside and see the inherent dangers but far more difficult to imagine what leads someone to that point of desperation. Or temptation. There'd be no addiction or co-dependence or bad habits if people weren't fragile and have many needs that we struggle to meet ourselves.

Littered through the book are a fictional cult expert's pointers for mind control and Norman cleverly prefaces each chapter with the tactic the group is utilising at that point in Cassy's recruitment. Again, we're looking from the outside, so even when Cassy (very occasionally) prevaricates it's hard not to want to reach in and shake her.

Of course the challenge of this book is that many of those who are part of the Gethsemane community are there for reasons that make sense. Even for the 'right' reasons. And at the end of the book – the camp's spokesperson tries to stop the media demonising the camp and promote its commitment to sustainable living, self-sufficiency and sense of community.

It's a reminder – as I've discovered in many books lately (and perhaps as a reflection of life in general in this increasingly online and angry world) – that it's almost impossible to look at things in black and white.

I also kinda liked that – though Justin had his foibles and fell into a few of the usual cult leader classics – Norman didn't write him as a caricature. There were elements of what we come to expect from books and TV shows (and the odd documentary) but Justin and his followers were also just people looking for some peace and purpose; many starting afresh with their lives and others, born into the community.... knowing nothing else.
