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Book Review - The Agony of Survival: A Novel

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Off the SHELF

The Agony of Survival: A novel by Dr. Spyros Vrettos, translated and reviewed by Harikleia Georgiou Sirmans (Infinity Publishing, 2011; ISBN: 074146909X, pbk. \$13.95)

The Agony of Survival is the first book in a trilogy written by Spyros Vrettos. The book addresses the vital issue of survival as well as the fate of modern humans. The advance of technology, degradation of the environment, neglect of nature, and the exploitation of natural resources have brought upon humanity multiple, imminent dangers. Threatening disasters, natural disasters, pollution of the environment, mass murders, epidemics and deadly diseases, destruction, failure of the worldwide economic system, and other horrors that afflict our planet are explored. Despite the threatening visible or invisible dangers, Vrettos is optimistic that there is hope. There is still time to save our planet and the human race, by seeking intelligent avenues of escape and rebirth. The question of whether human intelligence suffices to prevent the course to destruction is the related theme of *The Incredible Machine*, the second book in the trilogy (published in Greece in 2009). The last book (in process of writing), *The Peacemaker*, addresses the general conditions which could salvage our planet by diminishing the agony of human survival, and creating the global passage to an optimistic future.

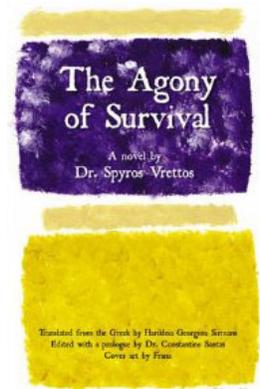
The Agony of Survival revolves around two couples who escaped the dreadful reality and seek peace, love, and art in a remote village. Aris, the main character, is an exceptional man and a brilliant investor. He senses destructive forces are developing worldwide and he traces them through his complicated electronic systems. He thinks that he can survive these forces. That's why he constructed a modern building with rare electronic equipment which

allows him to live in, and communicate with, the entire planet to obtain information. This way he can successfully and universally control his investments. His friend, a film director who is now dead, has helped Aris to better comprehend the threatening reality with a film he made in which Dante and Virgil fly over the entire Earth and witness horrible disasters and diseases that plague the planet. Aris realizes that the salvation of the economy, and life itself, require far more intelligence to resolve.

Aris lives with a young painter, Danae, a woman full of optimism and femininity. She is "a true breath of life" for Aris. Aris assumes the reason Danae stays with him (besides fear and obligation) is love.

The second couple is Thomas and Eleanor. Thomas, a brilliant young economist, collaborates with Aris, and like-minded people, as he seeks to apply his economic theories. Thomas eventually moves to the building constructed by Aris. Thomas brings along Eleanor, a young woman who seeks the true meaning of modern life. Eleanor hopes to regain strength and youthfulness and to feel love.

The prose of the book is realistic, but also artistic and poetic. It raises questions about the fate of modern humans. Are we at the edge of self-destruction because of the development of technology? We live in a poisonous environment that causes illness; we suffer devastations such as floods and hurricanes; we are attacked by terrorists; we are vulnerable and we try, by any means, to avoid death.



Despite the environmental changes that threaten our survival and deteriorate our health, we were gifted with the intelligence to manipulate nature to survive and to “cheat” death. Scientists constantly search for ways to improve and lengthen our lives. The optimism of the book is that when facing a survival threat, we have the ability and the means to avoid it or fight it. We can live a happy and secure life if we embrace nature and protect it.

The timeliness of *The Agony of Survival* is verified constantly today: the massive earthquake in Japan (March 11, 2011) that triggered the 23-foot tsunami; the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant explosion; devastating weather phenomena; financial crisis; diseases; and various other threats plague our planet daily. The author does not wish to spoil the serenity of his readers, but

rather to offer them the joy of involving themselves directly in issues about their lives and their survival. He wants to believe that humans will survive all odds and that our planet will survive—a planet that will never cease to emit the beauty and joy of life. The romance interwoven with the philosophical ideas makes this book accessible not only to philosophically inclined readers but to the everyday man or woman who searches for meaning in the chaos of modern life. Enjoy the book!

Harikleia Georgiou Sirmans grew up in Greece. She holds a B.A. in English Language and Writing, and a minor in French. She currently pursues her Master's in Library and Information Science. The Agony of Survival is her first translation (Greek to English). She works at the Valdosta-Lowndes County Library as a cataloger.