

HOLIDAY HOUSE

READING GROUP

GUIDE



Take All of Us

by Natalie Leif

★“Sharp, surreal prose . . . a deliciously readable ode to disabled kids fighting for survival.”

—Publishers Weekly, Starred Review

ABOUT THE BOOK

A YA unbury-your-gays horror in which an undead teen must find the boy he loves before he loses his mind and body.

Five years ago, a parasite poisoned the water of Ian’s West Virginia hometown, turning dozens of locals into dark-eyed, oil-dripping shells of their former selves. With chronic migraines and seizures limiting his physical abilities, Ian relies on his best friend and secret love Eric to mercy-kill any infected people they come across.

Until a new health report about the contamination triggers a mandatory government evacuation, and Ian cracks his head in the rush. Used to hospitals and health scares, Ian always thought he’d die young . . . but he wasn’t planning on coming back. Much less facing the slow, painful realization that Eric left him behind to die.

Desperate to find Eric and the truth before the parasite takes over him, Ian, along with two others left behind—his old childhood rival Monica and the jaded prepper Angel—journeys to track down Eric. What they don’t know is that Eric is also looking for Ian, and he’s determined to mercy-kill him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Think about the following genres: realism, horror, supernatural/fantasy. To which genre does this novel belong? Debate whether the novel belongs to more than one genre. Make specific references to the book to support your thoughts. Explain the skull motif at the beginning of each chapter. How does it contribute to the mood of the book?
- There are elements of humor among the gruesome and macabre scenes. Debate whether humor is found in the actions and dialogue of the characters, or in components of the plot. Explain the purpose of humor in this novel.

- First sentences often set the stage for a novel. Think about the following opening sentence: “I first realized I loved Eric a couple hours after Mr. Owens died, when me and Eric found his body rotting in the park” (p. 1). How is this an appropriate way to begin this novel? What does Mr. Owens’ body symbolize?
- Describe Kattakoop, West Virginia where the novel is set. How does this setting contribute to the horror of the novel? A deadly parasite poisoned the water in Kattakoop. Think about why Ian’s family moved to this small town, and discuss the irony of this deadly outbreak.
- Contrast Eric and Ian in stature, and in personality. Discuss whether their family life contributes to the differences in them. The boys have been friends since they first met in daycare. In what way does Ian need Eric? What does Eric need from Ian? How does Ian say that puberty changed Eric? At what point does their relationship become romantic? Why is Ian reluctant to tell Eric that he loves him? How do things change for Ian when he learns that Eric loves him back?
- Ian and Eric are at the mall when an emergency evacuation is announced. Ian has a seizure and hits his head. Explain what Ian means by “I’d died like an old country man with a lungful of used fountain water” (p. 18). Discuss Ian’s need to know why Eric left him to die. How does this scene contribute to the overall conflict of the novel?
- Who is Angel? Discuss what she means when she tells Ian, “You died quick and young, so you’ve got a while before your body catches up” (p. 27). Why does Angel offer to kill Ian? Describe Monica Delaine. How has Ian always felt in competition with Monica? What is the purpose of her appearance in the novel? Explain what Ian means by “Disabled kids don’t get to have a self, not really” (p. 205).
- In horror fiction, the plot provokes an emotional, psychological, and physical response within readers, triggering fear. Discuss the emotional response that the novel triggers.
- Debate whether the novel might be considered a “psychological thriller.” Explain the most grotesque scenes. Cite scenes that cause you to react physically. Point out a specific scene where you need comedic relief.
- Explain Ian’s dreams at the end of the novel. Many novels for teens end in hope. How do Ian’s dreams contribute to a hopeful ending? Discuss the title of the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: Michael Shedric Simpson

What is there to say about the mysterious **Natalie Leif**? A Wisconsin graduate with a BA in Technical Writing, Leif is an author, illustrator, and library page. By day, they shelve books and talk to patrons. By night, they write stories about undead kids and draw illustrations about magic. Their writing and illustration work has appeared in several anthologies, including the Tankadere series by Crab Tank and *Then It Was Dark* by Sarah Benkin, as well as on the site Reflex Fiction. They’ve won the Seattle EPIC Writers contest for fiction and poetry and drew the nonprofit graphic novel *Crossing the Road* for the city of Lynnwood, Washington. Learn more at NatalieLeif.com.