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Human in Death: Morality and Mortality in J. D. Robb's Novels

Kecia Ali

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Kecia Ali's *Human in Death* explores the best-selling futuristic suspense series In Death, written by romance legend Nora Roberts under the pseudonym J. D. Robb. Centering on troubled NYPSD Lieutenant Eve Dallas and her billionaire tycoon husband Roarke, the novels explore vital questions about human flourishing.

Through close readings of more than fifty novels and novellas published over two decades, Ali analyzes the ethical world of Robb's New York circa 2060. Robb compellingly depicts egalitarian relationships, satisfying work, friendships built on trust, and an array of models of femininity and family. At the same time, the series' imagined future replicates some of the least admirable aspects of contemporary society. Sexual violence, police brutality, structural poverty and racism, and government surveillance persist in Robb's fictional universe, raising urgent moral challenges. So do ordinary ethical quandaries around trust, intimacy, and interdependence in marriage, family, and friendship.

Ali celebrates the series' ethical successes, while questioning its critical moral omissions. She probes the limits of Robb's imagined world and tests its possibilities for fostering identity, meaning, and mattering of human relationships across social difference. Ali capitalizes on Robb's futuristic fiction to reveal how careful and critical reading is an ethical act.

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