

MERGING PATHS: The Curtis Jefferson Series Book 3

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Rating: 5/5; Highly Recommended!



Having escaped unjust imprisonment at the Fort Grant facility for juveniles, Curtis Jefferson is on the run, in *Merging Paths*, the third installment of Vince Bailey's gripping, paranormal, *Curtis Jefferson Series*.

With only a small jug of water and the clothes on his back, Curtis has to cross the Sonoran Desert and find a way back to his mother and grandmother in Jacobs Well. But his trip is plagued by more than thirst, hunger, and fear of animals. A racist sheriff's deputy, Myron Aycock, is hellbent on finding Curtis not only for the acclaim such an arrest will give him but also for vengeance against the beating he received at the hands of the aspiring boxer.

Trapped and desperate, Curtis is rescued by a mysterious figure and taken to Isabel and Ray Cienfuegos.

After hearing Curtis's unsettling stories about Fort Grant, the two understand that they have all been fighting the same evil forces – under the control of the sadistic Ezra. In a final confrontation, Isabel faces off against the wicked spirit, but just as they believe their problems are over, a new threat arises under the guise of friendship, and Isabel makes a life-changing decision that will mark her forever.

Intuition plays a huge role throughout the series, becoming vital to the central characters in this final book.

Throughout his harrowing experiences at Fort Grant, Curtis has relied upon his innate sixth sense to warn him of impending doom. A gift passed from his mother, this awareness has guided him to carefully choose his friends. Through this sense, he trusts Isabel and Ray, even seeming to know parts of their story before they tell it. He accepts Isabel's questionable actions because his instincts tell him they were her only choice.

Isabel shares this remarkable perception. In fact, Isabel trusts her intuition so far as to commit acts most would consider insane. While Curtis's near-clairvoyance is a guide, Isabel's is a force. This sense helps Isabel to understand the evil of Ezra and tells her how to rid herself of him forever. But her intuition pushes her to one final act of destruction as well – the murder of a former confidante – a choice that will haunt her for the rest of her life.

Isabel and Curtis aren't the only characters with an advanced awareness of evil. Father Frank Culen, a priest to whom Isabel goes for confession, shares the gift. He has always doubted Curtis's guilt, and when his not-so-chance meeting with Isabel brings him back into Curtis's life, he uses his sense to help bring Curtis home.

But he could never have accomplished the deed without the intervention of Natchez Mendoza, a former judge and the son of the man Ezra was in life.

Natchez is, perhaps, the most "knowing" of the quartet. Natchez first appeared in book one, where he recognized the evil in twelve-year-old Harvey Huish. He also first met Curtis in book one, under extremely unusual circumstances, so when they meet again some eighty years later, Natchez knows Curtis's story intimately and helps to release him from Fort Grant's grasp.

Justice becomes central to the final struggles of these characters.

Will Farnsworth is a silent, but important example of this need for justice. Having died via decapitation in a car wreck during book one, Will has served as a knight errant since, responsible for the rescue of both Ray and Curtis. As a lawyer for the corrupt Huish family, he hated his job and his clients and longed to be free of both, but it was only in death that he could become the very thing he tried to be in life, the good guy riding in to save the day.

However, Isabel's pursuit of justice is more complicated.

Her quest to rid the world of Ezra's evil is commendable and noble, but her later conflict with Freddie Hightower approaches the slippery slope of vengeance. Freddie's betrayal angers Isabel to the point of no return. She deems him unforgivable and takes matters into her own hands, perverting justice. Other characters like Sergeant Joe Garcia, Constable Frankie Quintana, Deputy Myron Aycock, and Sheriff Pete Alvarado represent the legal side of justice, both good and bad. Natchez Mendoza, white cane and all, straddles the line between legal and supernatural, determined to keep Curtis safe for his own contribution to justice for his massacred tribe.

The Curtis Jefferson Series won Grand Prize in the 2022 CIBA Series Awards for Fiction Series.

