

Amphibian

Tyler Wetherall

Ig Publishing (Oct 22, 2024)

Softcover \$18.95 (300pp)

978-1-63246-207-7

In Tyler Wetherall's novel *Amphibian*, a prepubescent girl grapples with new desires, codependent relationships, and incomprehensible threats.

Eleven-year-old Sissy is an outcast at her new school. At home, she serves as caretaker to her single, mentally ill mother. But when she's with Tegan, an imperious classmate who wants to grow up too fast, Sissy feels powerful and special. Indeed, Tegan's fickleness both frustrates and enchants her.

In the privacy of her older sister's apartment, Tegan shares distressing secrets; at school, she looks on in silence as the other students tease and torment Sissy. Tegan also pulls Sissy into a series of reckless escapades, with the girls trying to take back control of their spiraling lives by adopting adult personas and assuming ever greater risks. Sissy is forced to choose between protecting her fragile mother or siding with secretive Tegan—a choice with life-changing consequences.

Surrounded by events beyond her understanding, Sissy can only relate her experiences to myths and fairy tales about how women suffer inevitable, unwilling transformations beneath the weight of men's desires. Intimate depictions of the casual cruelties of schoolyard rivalries, sexual awakenings, and being young and powerless against adult problems intertwine with delirious scenes of impromptu rituals and encounters with threats both real and imagined. One of Sissy's fantasies involves jarring racial stereotypes regarding Roma, though.

The book's ordinary settings—including Tegan's homes and the chippie that Sissy sneaks off to—are made menacing by the all-too-recognizable fears and threats they face, even among those meant to protect them. And the ending includes a satisfying reprieve: at least for a moment, the girls find a unique way to empower themselves in the face of great horrors.

Dark and devastating, *Amphibian* is a coming-of-age novel about the dangers and pleasures of impending adulthood.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2024)

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