

Inner Terrestrials and the Gireens: The Discovery

John Greene Jr.

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Inner Terrestrials and the Gireens is an entertaining science fiction novel in which a New Mexico teenager learns that aliens are living beneath the earth's surface nearby.

In John Greene Jr.'s funny science fiction novel *Inner Terrestrials and the Gireens*, a disaffected teenager learns that aliens are living on Earth.

While his parents are abroad for their work as museum curators, thirteen-year-old Jack lives with his grandparents in a New Mexico retirement park that doesn't allow children. It's an idiosyncratic place that's fleshed out with mentions of tumbleweeds, golf carts, and geckos.

Even after a failed attempt to run away, the angsty young troublemaker maintains the will to have at least a mental escape. When Jack meets Billingsly, an old man who introduces him to Area 51 and the potential for alien life in the area, Jack finds just the distraction he's looking for. On the night of a meteor shower, Jack and Billingsly witness a UFO crash and fall into a crater that leads them to an underground alien habitat that even the imaginative Jack couldn't have envisioned. But Jack and Billingsly are separated soon after their arrival underground, and for the bulk of the story, Billingsly remains out of sight.

The creatures whom Jack encounters underground are a family of hair-covered extraterrestrials from Helios V, the Bennots, who have lived on Earth undetected for hundreds of years. Their debate on what to do about the humans, and their hopes of keeping their earthly presence secret, is the source of the book's reigning suspense. Further, the controlling, attentive Bennot family is juxtaposed to Jack's human family, with his absent parents and neglectful grandparents. Jack, though a captive, begins to feel like he is part of a functioning family for the first time. He spends time with Jen, a human girl who was also adopted by the Bennots; she is his sidekick in his efforts to avoid impending alien and terrestrial threats.

Still, even as the Bennots' ultimate decision looms over the story, its focus shifts to world building, with Jack learning more about the Bennots' way of life. Flashback chapters detail the Bennots' interstellar travels from Helios V to Earth, though their relevance to the plot is ambiguous for a long stretch. There are also infusions of humor and quirkiness, as with a tiny, talking feline creature, and thanks to Jack's precocious observations. Still, when Jack makes a terrifying discovery and a war erupts, the new plotline and added but superficial characters who are introduced in quick succession muddle the story further.

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AIMÉE JODOIN (April 22, 2023)

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