

Justyce Scales of the Otherly and Obscura

Norma Rae

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In the fun fantasy novel Justyce Scales of the Otherly and Obscura, a troubled, lost teenager travels through a surreal world, confronting bickering gods and mystifying creatures in the process.

In Norma Rae's fantasy novel *Justyce Scales of the Otherly and Obscura*, a girl is stranded in another realm.

Luci has daymares and has trouble separating reality from her hallucinations. Her therapist teaches her coping mechanisms, including to use a camera as an impartial viewer. She manages to keep her daymares at bay for her sixteenth birthday trip with her mother—until she sees a billboard with her face on it, suggesting that she's missing. Before she can determine if the billboard is real or a hallucination, she's knocked unconscious in a car crash. When she wakes, she's alone in Otherly, and the car is surrounded by thick fog.

Luci gets lost in the fog, following a stranger's voice deep into its midst. She's directed toward her mother's location with an ominous warning: she must complete three trials, or she'll never return home. In this alternate realm, she encounters wondrous beings with strange foibles and mannerisms, as with a humanoid being who speaks only in questions and who reveals much to Luci in the course of a patient conversation.

Otherly is both surreal and naturalistic. Two sisters are fighting each other for control of the realm, with some creatures trying to back one sister. As Luci explores, though, she acclimatizes to this unusual place and comes to understand its inhabitants. She becomes a compelling heroine who presses on even when she's faced with danger. She works to apply logic to her situation and to understand why she's in Otherly.

Balancing its surreal wonders well, the book includes such beings as sword-bearing river sharks and sentient vines, all of which are enlivened by sensory details. A handful of chapters narrated from the perspective of Otherly's inhabitants are out of place in this mix, though; they add little to the narrative, and their tone is more mundane than what surrounds them. Still, Luci's struggles are relatable. She confronts the rulers of Otherly and learns more about her family's fate. A cliffhanger ending hints at a continuation of her tale.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (October 19, 2022)

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