

Nell & the Netherbeast

Adi Rule

Ash Szymanik, Illustrator

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In Adi Rule's fun supernatural novel *Nell and the Netherbeast*, a girl works with a malodorous beast to solve a mystery at her aunt's bed and breakfast.

Twelve-year-old Nell had intended to spend her summer helping at a local shelter. Instead, her mother informs her that she is being sent to Deep Valley's Rose Cottage Bed and Breakfast with her sister, Lulu, to assist her Aunt Jerry. Resentful, Nell heads out back, where she spots a bizarre odoriferous beast. She manages to almost tame it—at least, it hops into the car with her and her sister.

In Deep Valley, Lulu and Nell find that their aunt's once-charming inn has fallen into disrepair. A nitpicker with nefarious plans threatens its future, and a cold voice whispers names from its haunted basement. It is up to Nell to set the situation right. If she does, she might also receive her Junior Shelter Volunteer badge—a prospect that sweetens helping her aunt and escaping the wrath of the basement dwellers.

Nell is a resonant heroine who is frustrated when situations are out of her control. Her sister teases her; her mother makes the final decisions about her summer plans. Only her friendship with the Netherbeast is boundary-breaking. It's a shapeshifting creature—fascinating as it melts from looking like a cat into the shape of a banana or a flat stole around Nell's neck. Their friendship is both hilarious and heartwarming; the Netherbeast functions as Nell's id, encouraging her to embrace her independence and autonomy. It is her unexpected but perfect companion; even her relationship with Lulu evolves and matures after she meets it.

Nell and the Netherbeast is a funny, fantastical, and farcical novel in which a girl's summer adventures are transformed by the introduction of a beast.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July / August 2023)

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