

Ripples

Jasmine O'Hea

River Grove Books

(324pp)

978-1-63299-704-3

Two teenagers stumble upon a dystopian version of their town where their mettle is tested in the exciting fantasy novel Ripples.

In Jasmine O'Hea's supernatural novel *Ripples*, teenagers move between mirror worlds to save their friendship and each other.

When his mother dies, Nolan is rendered an orphan. He's thrown into the care of his clueless uncle and aunt in Maine. To escape their presence, he heads to the woods. There he meets Harlow, the mayor's daughter and his next-door neighbor. The two become unexpected friends.

Then Nolan and Harlow discover that the woods house a secret portal. It's found in a pond, and it leads to another world that somewhat mirrors their own. The alternate version of their town is run by a sadistic governor—a mirror-double of Harlow's father—who wants power and control above all else. Years before, a citizen of his city-state escaped, and he is determined never to let such a slip happen again, regardless of what must be done to prevent it.

While Nolan and Harlow's own world is drawn in distinctive terms, its mirror version leans into dystopian tropes. There are segregation practices; laws are formed on the principle that "might makes right"; oppression is rampant. However, as Nolan and Harlow answer questions about their home, the apparent gap between the worlds narrows. Their answers reveal hard truths about their own society's imperfections.

The story is filled with surprising developments, as when the teenagers contemplate kinks in the magic of the pond portal, or when they wrestle with the moral implications of their decisions. They have to determine what are they willing to sacrifice to protect themselves and their families; in time, they become like family themselves. However, some elements of the tale strain credulity, including when it comes to their discovery of the portal and its powers: a mysterious photograph, a missing identification card, and another portal traveler function as awkward devices for getting them there.

Still, Nolan and Harlow are compelling heroes who are driven to fight for each other and themselves. Indeed, their values are embedded into their very fibers. The chapters move between their perspectives well, resulting in regular insights. And the secondary characters in both worlds are well-developed too. Their conversations with one another reveal much about their bonds and about the concerns of their worlds, which range from mundane issues like upcoming tests to consequential ones, like mourning. Further, complexity is assured because each character with a double has to consider their life in the other version of the town—and what they might be missing or gaining on the other side of the portal.

Ripples is a fascinating adventure novel in which two teenagers encounter a dystopian world, enduring challenges in the name of friendship.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (January 18, 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.