

The Merry Dredgers

Jeremy C. Shipp

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A woman's attempt to avenge her sister leads to a fantastical adventure in Jeremy C. Shipp's novel *The Merry Dredgers*.

Seraphina is a birthday party princess, a pet feeder, and the only person left who cares about her spirited, troubled sister, Eff. When Eff suffers catastrophic injuries in an apparent "accident," Seraphina takes it upon herself to investigate the strange and isolated community, the Merry Dredgers, that Eff has been living with. Along the way, she guards herself against physical, psychological, and romantic threats.

Seraphina's clumsy, humorous investigation takes her to an abandoned amusement park, Goblinropolis USA, that's owned by an eccentric millionaire and possible cult leader. His smug and creepy mannerisms are the least of Seraphina's concerns, though: she navigates eerie, broken-down rides infested with dead animals, while her growing feelings for Nichelle, a beautiful candlemaker who helps Seraphina adjust to life with the Dredgers, add another layer of risk to her undercover work.

Seraphina is imaginative, cynical, and isolated. She surprises herself by bonding with all of the quirky people who live at the park. Despite her unexpected encounters, she also works to open herself up to the possibility of happiness at long last. Her story is filled with outrageous imagery, including strange dreams and a psychedelic "initiation" that she must pass to stay with the Dredgers. The Dredgers themselves are almost as bizarre as the park; they keep Seraphina on her toes as she probes for the truth about Eff's accident. A frightening situation proffers the answers that Seraphina needs, but it also forces her to fight for her life—and forces Nichelle to decide where her loyalties lie.

The Merry Dredgers is a fun, offbeat mystery novel set in an unforgettable location.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2023)

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