



2019

The Riverman

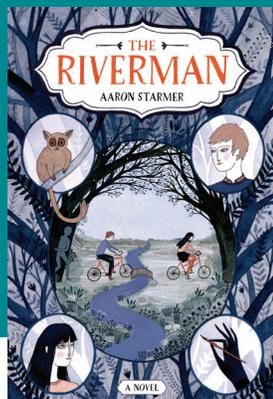
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Book Review

The Riverman

Author

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Reviewer

Emma Patton

Rating

Excellent

Level

Young Adult

Pages

320

Year

2014

ISBN

9780374363093

Publisher

Farrar Straus Giroux

Fiona and Alistair used to be friends, so it's not exactly shocking for her to approach him. What is shocking is what she's asking him to do. Fiona wants Alistair to write the story of her life, just as she tells it. Alistair is too intrigued to say no, so Fiona begins to relate her story. But Fiona's story is strange. She talks about going to another world called Aquavania, where she can create a new world without limits. But children are disappearing from Aquavania and Fiona thinks the Riverman is to blame. To Alistair, Fiona's story seems fictional. There's no way that Aquavania could exist, but Fiona's fear of the Riverman seems genuine. Alistair wanders if maybe Fiona is calling for help but hides the truth behind this story to make it more manageable. For that reason, Alistair knows he needs to listen to her story until the end and find a way to save Fiona from whatever, whoever, is tormenting her.

This is a strange book but is also incredibly poignant. Alistair has to ask himself what it means to be a good friend and lives with the weight of wondering whether he should keep Fiona's secrets or break her trust and get her some help. Though Fiona's situation is pretty unique, this is a really important question in friendships, and Alistair's feelings of helplessness and internal battle over the best thing to do is highly relatable. With the inclusion of Aquavania, this story could be classified as magical realism, but the question of whether Fiona's stories are real or not makes the boundaries of reality unclear. As tortured as Fiona seems, she is a complex female character in the middle of growing up who is also committed to being unapologetically herself. Rather than mimicking the stereotype of an adolescent girl, Fiona is incredibly three-dimensional, and she doesn't shy away from her own oddities. In this way, Fiona is a great role model to anyone who is tired of pretending to be something other than what they are.