

A World on the Island's Edge

Matthew Rudd Reynolds

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Matthew Rudd Reynolds's *A World on the Island's Edge* is a tender novel with a magical-realist twist.

Andi is twelve and trying to keep her life from falling apart, both at home and while confronting bullying at school. She discovers a golden dolphin in a cove near her home that emits a magical force that temporarily keeps her grandmother's encroaching dementia at bay.

Andi enlists the help of her brilliant but misunderstood twin brother, Artie, to keep the dolphin a secret, while she discovers a means to harness its magic for her grandmother to temporarily delay the possibility that child services will remove her and her brother from her grandmother's care. Even when she is confronting heavy issues, Andi's spirit remains indomitable.

The book is contemporary and realistic, though underpinned with magical themes. Reynolds upholds both threads well. Throughout are scenes in which the magical realm that Andi discovers imbues her world with magic. Much of the book is reminiscent of classic middle-grade novels in this way; many of the themes and symbols feel almost too familiar.

The strength of the story lies in its clear language, which pulls through a very adventurous—though punctuated with immense sadness—series of events. The fearless taking up of difficult themes by a strong female protagonist makes the journey worthwhile.

Beautiful sentences demarcate the magical from the realistic realms and make the book a delightful read full of surprises. Straightforward word choices and clean sentences make emotionally wrenching content accessible.

The text plants details and clues that keep the plot moving forward without giving up too much of the magic, and that sets the stage for further installments. Black-and-white spot illustrations are included throughout, though their explanatory captions feel unnecessary.

The work is suitable for many ages. Hopefulness imbues both Andi's actions and the tenor of the text. Difficult emotions thread through the entire book and are dealt with well, without ever making the story feel too heavy or melodramatic. Andi's motivations are well explained as she acts as an emotional buffer and caretaker for her twin brother, who is incredibly brilliant at math but finds elements of daily life difficult.

A World on the Island's Edge is a hopeful and satisfying book about grief and coming of age, in which both children and adults are often forced to confront hardships and changes beyond what they think is possible.

NATASHA GILMORE (May 22, 2017)

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