

## A River Called Time

**Courtia Newland**

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Courtia Newland's *A River Called Time* is an expansive speculative novel in which the British did not colonize Africa, but instead sought to learn from its cultures.

In an alternate reality London, Markriss has been selected to live inside the Ark, a giant building that houses a city's worth of people who never see real sunlight, but who are promised greatness. His tough youth on the outside made him want a better life. But once Markriss is inside the Ark, he sees that the divisions between the rich and the poor are just as bad as they were on outside. He decides to team up with a band of revolutionaries who nurture his astral projection skills.

The book's methodical storytelling reveals the particularities, personality, and lore of its world. From the Ark's desolate Poor Quarter, to the chaotic levels below ground, class warfare and authoritarianism run rampant, though the media, for whom Markriss works, only share positive stories. African Kemetic cosmology is the dominant religion, suggesting that human greed and tribalism exist independent of spirituality. Motifs from ancient Egyptian religions hint at realities beyond Markriss's own, and at an ending that ties the disparate issues of his dystopian world to his astral projection.

Markriss's relationships with those whom he loves are a story stronghold. His wife's sharp combination of compassion and barbarism holds him accountable and challenges his beliefs, while his long-lost younger brother is like a ghost of what's wrong with the world, showing what could have been. As alternate realities reveal themselves, characters move in and out of the roles that define them, their identities shifting to fit their contexts.

Involving spirituality, colonization, and quantum realities, *A River Called Time* is an immersive speculative novel set in a dystopian city that's facing an uprising.

AIMEE JODOIN (May / June 2021)

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