



Ahe'ey

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Jamie Le Fay

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Ahe'ey contains a richly imagined world that raises complicated and timely questions about our own.

Jamie Le Fay's *Ahe'ey* is an action-packed love story that puts forth a nuanced vision of gender stereotypes, body politics, and the dark side of seeking perfection.

Morgan, a champion for girls' empowerment and an avid lover of all things beautiful and important, is slated to speak about her work with the Hope Foundation. Upon her arrival in New York City, she finds herself enamored with the dapper but enigmatic Gabriel, who has been assigned to tend to Morgan during her stay.

They are hopelessly drawn to each other, despite Gabriel hoarding a complicated slew of secrets—not the least of which is that he comes from Ahe'ey, an island-meets-alternate-reality that subverts the core beliefs around which Morgan has built her life's work.

In *Ahe'ey*, it's the men who live as second-class citizens, reviled as rapists and murderers by the matriarchal ruling class. The Ahe'ey people have achieved stupendous feats in bioengineering, with genetically "pure" members of society possessing almost supernatural abilities to heal and regenerate their bodies, among other neat tricks. How can Morgan—a diehard feminist and mere mortal—reconcile her world with that of the royal-blooded Gabriel?

Short, quickly paced chapters oscillate between different points of view and time periods. Taken together, they work as interwoven vignettes that richly depict a multifaceted dystopia. Though the zigzagging chronology at first seems to sacrifice exposition—key background information on Ahe'ey and its characters does not appear until well into the book—it is ultimately consistent with the confusion Morgan herself feels as she navigates a world order that is a fun-house mirror of her own.

Once the narration settles into its rhythm, it delves into questions so big that the answers are worth sticking around for, like what it means to be oppressed, what it means to be powerful, and what it means to be good.

A direct and down-to-earth writing style jibes well with denser action scenes. Characters are strong and complex, if a bit aspirational, especially Morgan, who is in many ways the life force of the book, but who sometimes comes across so witty and articulate in her dialogue that she loses relatability.

This does not necessarily mean her dialogue is unsatisfying to read: In one particularly enjoyable scene, she goes head-to-head on Fox News with Walter Zanus, a sexist demagogue and presidential candidate. She trumps his arguments with aplomb, but her sheer amount of grace under pressure feels too good to be true.

Ahe'ey is most successful in portraying its eponymous island, where the grimness of political history is matched only by the elegance of its cosmogony, and where technology complicates and deepens the stakes of pursuing equality for

all.

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EMMAJEAN HOLLEY (April 5, 2017)

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