

As Oceans Fall

Brian M. Birkland

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As Oceans Fall exists somewhere between science fiction and suspense, with a sprinkle of spirituality.

In Brian M. Birkland's *As Oceans Fall*, a young man embarks on an obsessive quest to connect with his dead father, only to find himself linked to a world-destroying disaster. While humanity struggles with science and spirituality in the face of an impending apocalypse, Andrew Gaeta's enthralling adventures explore the potential of the human mind and our metaphysical connections with each other.

Andrew's goal of piecing together secret messages from his long-dead father is a study in dangerous devotion. A smart and awkward boy, Andrew is determined to follow his visions and sensations on a scavenger hunt of cryptic messages. More is revealed about him throughout the book via a series of flashbacks. Though chapters transition from past to present and back again, it's easy to follow the story's timeline. Andrew's character is well developed through natural dialogue with others, as well as honest and sometimes humorous descriptions of his thought process.

Andrew continues to hunt clues into adulthood, although the process is physically painful for him. The descriptions of his reactions to the clues are bizarre and captivating as he doubles over with painful visions. Though some of Andrew's actions are undoubtedly drastic, anyone who has lost a loved one and felt the yearning to reconnect will understand his motivations.

With the book's focus on Andrew's misadventures, it's easy to forget that they occur against the backdrop of life-threatening disaster. A sinkhole-type anomaly called "The Abyss" is sucking in the earth's oceans and land. Despite lengthy descriptions, the Abyss is hard to picture, and some of the scientific theories around its existence are hard to follow. The presence of this abyss moves the characters to discuss science, religion, and unification during disaster, themes that follow Andrew as he helps the U.S. government in its attempts to reverse the effects of the anomaly.

Despite the fact that Andrew has spent his entire life searching for messages, attempting to break their code, and figuring out the connection to his father, he is eventually content to refocus his life around a woman whose importance is overstated yet contextually underdeveloped. Andrew's love interest is professed to be his destiny, though there's not always ample interaction and sentiment between the two to validate his shift in priorities.

Birkland's *As Oceans Fall* is compelling in its pacing, jumping in and out of suspenseful situations. Those who like novels somewhere between science fiction and suspense with a sprinkle of spirituality will find *As Oceans Fall* to be a page turner.

DELIA STANLEY (October 14, 2016)

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