

Between Wild and Ruin

Jennifer G. Edelson

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In Between Wild and Ruin, the desert landscape and atmosphere set the stage for a young adult romance with strong paranormal themes.

Jennifer G. Edelson's contemporary paranormal romance *Between Wild and Ruin* features a love triangle with a twist.

Ruby is about to begin her senior year of high school. She's just moved to a small town in New Mexico with her Aunt Liddy. Both are fleeing the pain of Ruby's mother's death. Ruby makes new friends and meets three boys who attract her in different ways. She also finds comfort in the ancient ruins near her aunt's house, though they lead to disquieting visions. Ruby narrates with growing awareness of otherworldly phenomena.

Descriptions of the New Mexico landscape are rich and atmospheric, arousing the senses with references to the scent of smoke and juniper, the predatory roar of mountain lions, and the brilliant dazzle of stars in the desert sky. The writing conveys a sense of timelessness, making it easy to believe Ruby's sense that the land is spirit-haunted and that Leo, the handsome young man she encounters near the ruins, is somehow connected to it all. Still, despite Leo's good looks, Ruby is more interested in prickly, scarred Ezra, while Angel, who is a few years older than Ruby, is smitten with her.

Ruby is an interesting lead. She hikes out alone to sketch mountains and ruins, blends in with the crowd at a local diner, and looks forward to college at Stanford. But as Ruby spends more time with Ezra, she becomes self-centered. Her interest narrows to her own feelings, and awkward metaphors and strained analogies are introduced. As the book progresses, the diner becomes the book's main stage, its air filled with repetitive conversations.

Ruby's friends seem content that Ruby is the center of every conversation, but Ruby shows little interest in their lives. Her conversations with the boys focus on the other boys, and at points she uses Angel for her own comfort. She expresses resentment when Liddy strikes up a romance more stable than her own.

The book moves faster near its end, with increased paranormal phenomena woven into the history of the ruins. Warnings are delivered by spectral auras and there are revelations that Ruby isn't sure she can handle. Most of this is conveyed via too-extensive dialogue, and the book flip-flops from one possible resolution to another. Ruby's final decision contradicts the text's paranormal rules, leaving her fate in doubt.

In Between Wild and Ruin, the desert landscape and atmosphere set the stage for a young adult romance with strong paranormal themes.

SUSAN WAGGONER (July 30, 2019)

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