

Fog & Fireflies

T. H. Lehen

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In the eerie, suspenseful fantasy novel Fog & Fireflies, a brave girl confronts a relentless and mysterious force.

The world is encased in fog that births dangerous phantoms and false voices and that spirits away anything that falls into its reach. Only children are untouchable by the monsters of the fog. In T. H. Lehen's fantasy novel *Fog & Fireflies*, a determined girl learns about her world and herself while fighting this menacing natural force.

Fourteen-year-old Ogma is dutiful about patrolling the wall that separates her village's fearful adults from the miasma. Her routine is interrupted by two events: first, she saves a mysterious boy, who doesn't speak her language, from drifting away to regions unknown. Then, on a rare clear day, caravaners who are able to navigate the fog arrive from beyond the walls, leading Ogma to look beyond what's familiar, right into the heart of her murky world.

Ogma is a memorable heroine who displays bravery and commitment to protecting the other children. Resourceful and quick-thinking, she is willing to descend into the fog with nothing but a tether during an emergency rescue. With her at its center, and thanks to dynamic worldbuilding, the book's predominant sense of instability and danger is gripping.

Involving details are proffered throughout, such as the fact that the foundations of Ogma's village feel unstable, despite the seeming steadiness of its walls. And the children have a habit of reaching out to wave away the bits of fog that curve above the village walls. Sight and human voices prove unreliable; to locate each other, inhabitants depend on the chiming of bells and the flickering luminescence of fireflies to navigate the atmospheric haziness. A sense of menace dominates, placing understanding just out of reach. In her initial inclination to stick to the comforts of home and hearth, Ogma is sympathetic.

As if it is also vulnerable to the fog, this world's history is at first obscured; it is then revealed in pleasing bursts. Mythical stories within stories fill the pages, via fascinating oral histories that are shared among the villagers. There are tales about the fog using shadow puppets; enlightening news is brought by the bizarre caravaners, too.

The characterizations are also shaped by the pervasive fog; they are somewhat directed by village hierarchies. The children are charged with protecting the adults, but despite their strenuous patrolling shifts, they are still children—and not yet fully formed. Unanswerable questions consume them, as when Ogma wonders why people become fearful as they get older. The book's older children, on the cusp of adulthood themselves, wind up having the most depth. Still, their personal traits are constricted by the overwhelming dread and geographical limitations that they face, so that the atmosphere is often more interesting than any one individual.

Might and vulnerability are inverted in the fantastical novel *Fog & Fireflies*, in which children are tasked with defending their village against a threatening, world-encompassing miasma.

ISABELLA ZHOU (March 14, 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to

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