



Here By Mistake: The Secret of the Niche

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Three teens must find their way home after being sucked back in time in this suspenseful page-turner.

Three upstate New York teens in 2005 accidentally pass through a portal and find themselves forty years in the past in New Orleans. Their only hope is locating an adult family friend—himself now only eighteen years old—and convincing him to help them return to their own time and place. This debut novel about an event that tests the bounds of friendship is a suspenseful page-turner that entertains readers of all ages.

Longtime friends Brandon (who also goes by the singular letter B) and Sarah have just finished their freshman year of high school. Their new friend, Stephen, gifted athletically and intellectually, is a year behind. Brandon sneaks house keys away from Quinton (Quint) Coster, a family friend and the accountant of his recently deceased great aunt, so he can explore her twenty-three-room mansion and show off to his friends the museum-quality items stored there.

After being drawn to a niche in the basement wall, the three wind up time-traveling back to November 1965 New Orleans, where Great Aunt Faye lived at the time. Brandon realizes that Quint is also living there and is their only hope; it's up to the three of them to convince him—a much younger version of himself, actually—of their life-altering predicament.

The author succeeds in suspending readers' disbelief because of the realistic dialogue between the layered characters he's created, especially Quint and Brandon. Quint's Southern dialect, charm, and earnestness ooze through the pages. He's only a couple of years older than the kids who show up at his door with a wild-beyond-belief story. Brandon is all bravado—a typical fourteen-year-old boy—who must learn to rein himself in during certain situations. He's argumentative, has some hang-ups with his dad, and blames himself for the situation he's gotten his friends into.

Stephen, an African American, learns some difficult lessons about this time in American history. He's depicted as reserved, smart beyond his years, and fascinated with the cars of the era. Sarah seems to be less fully written. She cares for Brandon, but wants to get back home and is fearful every time Quint's '57 Edsel backfires.

The author's precise attention to detail fills and completes the story as Quint learns about cell phones, digital watches, and no-smoking laws, and the younger set watch *The Beverly Hillbillies* on a black and white TV with a dial they actually have to get up to change.

Despite the bickering among themselves and the circumstances they're in, they recognize and relish in some lighthearted moments as they work on a plan to get home. For example, Stephen, the car fanatic, is aghast when Quint tells them he paid only fifty dollars for his Edsel and then goes on to explain:

"The only real expense is gas. It's up t'thirty-one cents a gallon in these parts. Can y'all believe it?"
Brandon looked at Sarah, who looked at Stephen, who looked at Brandon.
"What is it?" Quint asked.

"We're like you—can't believe it," Brandon said.

Though the protagonists are in their early teens, the issues they face and the American history they encounter make this an enjoyable story for adult readers as well as its probable intended teen audience. In fact, those older readers may appreciate it even more.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (June 9, 2014)

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