



In the End

Ken Saik

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In the spiritual adventure novel In the End, twelve friends are faced with heartache once their world collapses.

In Ken Saik's spiritual novel *In the End*, twelve teenagers face death together, choosing to stick with one another nonetheless.

When Sampson and eleven of his friends decided to throw a party, none of them expected a giant sinkhole to swallow up the garage it took place in—and with it, the lives they knew. Trapped in a pit with no way to escape or call for help, the boys are relieved to discover a series of caves through which they hope to reach safety. But they also find an old journal in the caves, which describes a city, Vanna, that they decide to try to find. Only Perry senses that a dark force is at play; his suspicions seem confirmed when tragedies strike.

An omniscient narrator follows the unwieldy cast, including the twelve boys and their grieving parents, who all believe their sons to be dead. But while the early portions of the book focus on the despair of those left behind, much of the book is devoted to the boys' attempts to find Vanna; their parents are abandoned, and the boys give up their hope of seeing their families again with surprising ease. Further, few of the twelve are well developed as individuals, beyond a handful of standout qualities, such as Perry being spiritually sensitive, Victor being loyal, and Len and Larry being competitive but devoted.

Though packed with action and instances of danger, ranging from steep cliffs to poisonous gas, the story becomes repetitive; interest stagnates as one boy after another meets a terrible end. And the book's blend of New Age ideas with Christian themes muddles its messages: the boys recite the Lord's Prayer for comfort, and often speak of their faith in God, though their notions of salvation are more aligned with principles of personal enlightenment—especially after a sage appears to guide the boys to Vanna, helping each to realize what he values most along the way.

The importance of one's personal relationships is a more consistent theme, and the boys' loyalty to one another, even when they are scared, is touching. Calvin tries to make sure Arny does not injure himself further; Perry risks his life to rescue Victor from the side of a tower. Still, the book's happy ending feels rushed and deviates too notably from the tragedies that preceded it. It introduces a radical new reality via a lengthy dialogue between the sage and one of the boys, but without answering many of the questions that arose during the adventure.

In the spiritual adventure novel *In the End*, twelve boys who are bound by friendship are faced with heartache once their world collapses.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (February 24, 2022)

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