



Kaitlyn's Wheel: A Novel

Chris Halvorson

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Alien encounters and earthly devastation impact teenagers in the fantastical novel Kaitlyn's Wheel.

In Chris Halvorson's novel *Kaitlyn's Wheel*, teenagers use stories of alien encounters to cope with their difficult life events.

Kaitlyn knows that her father was taken by aliens, though everyone else believes that he died. She's seen the aliens' craft in the night sky, looking just like Ezekiel's wheel as described in the Bible. Still, even as she tries to be upbeat for her mother's sake, her grief puts a damper on her senior year. And she dreams of going to college somewhere more exciting than her Iowa farming community.

Over a thousand miles away in Washington, Zachary dreams about joining Greenpeace after high school. After skipping class, he tells the principal that he was abducted by aliens. A national media circus ensues, with serious consequences for Zachary, his school, and his family's business. The publicity makes it easy for Kaitlyn to locate Zachary online, and the kindred spirits form a friendship that blossoms into love. But tensions rise as Zachary worries that if Kaitlyn discovers that his abduction story is a hoax, it will break her trust and end their relationship.

The novel is emotional and intense. Its heroes express the heightened need to be accepted by their peers, and they contend with relationship angst, academic issues, and decisions about their futures. Such issues loom large in the story, as do topics of loss and mortality and feelings of betrayal over unanswered prayers. People's inner reflections are also present to deepen a sense of their motivations. There are also muted references to the historic symbolism of the wheel; additionally, the teenagers discuss the possible intervention of aliens in human evolution.

Strange occurrences make the novel's supernatural elements more believable. While driving her father's truck, for example, Kaitlyn's radio station goes down, her hair stands on end, and she catches a faint whiff of her dad's aftershave. Elsewhere, Zachary falls asleep to colorful lights swirling outside his window and dreams of a huge flying saucer passing over his house, but he credits his half-remembered visions to their new security system.

Revelations about Zachary's decisions lead to crescendoing tension. A series of exciting events, including a tornado, lead into a surprise conclusion. However, there are also instances of missing words, muddled sentences, and awkward scene changes. And Zachary's principal is developed in inconsistent terms: at first, he seems too gullible and childish for his position; later, he is positioned as an unworthy role model who takes advantage of Zachary's notoriety for his own ends.

Nonetheless, *Kaitlyn's Wheel* is an engaging novel in which teenagers grapple with adult issues.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July 21, 2023)

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