Nowhere Near You

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In this epistolary novel, the sequel to Because You'll Never Meet Me, Ollie and Moritz take up their correspondence once again. Each is going through major changes in this alternative world: Ollie is going on his first road trip away from the woods, complicated by his allergy to electricity, and Moritz—a boy who is eyeless and wears a pacemaker—is choosing a new school and navigating adolescent relationships. Both meet other strange “experimental kids” like them, products of mysterious science experiments.

The novel launches into the strange and unsettling at once, as Ollie details his road trip away from his cabin in northern Michigan, during which he dons a gas mask and rides with a mysterious gentleman who mutters that he is glad he packed tranquilizers. Ollie is off to meet other kids like him, though the trip gets off to a nauseous and unpleasant start.

The world of Ollie and Moritz rarely feels safe; both narrators are witty and amusing at times, even in the darkness of their surroundings, but despair seems to stretch just beneath the surface of their words. Their affection for each other is strong but sometimes needy, made all the more tragic by their distance. Ollie and Moritz's universe feels terrible at times, but Nowhere Near You avoids lapsing into complete hopelessness by virtue of the quirky, upbeat nature of the two narrators.

The potential romance between the two characters also at times feels uncomfortable, in large part because it is not reciprocated on one side—though it’s not entirely possible to determine the reliability of each narrator. What results is an ambitious look at the emotions and changing affections of two young boys in a peculiar, dark world that remains fascinating even when it feels perturbing.

Nowhere Near You is narrated by two eloquent and intelligent protagonists who are just as odd and complicated as the world they inhabit. The book is an ideal read for science-fiction fans who don’t mind journeys into the unknown, led by meandering characters full of their own complications.

STEPHANIE BUCKLIN (Children's 2017)

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