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Parts Per Million

Julia Stoops
Gabriel Liston, Illustrator
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Parts per Million veers back to the early 2000s, as America somberly moves into a new millennium already shadowed by 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Three activists have banded together in Portland, Oregon, sharing a house and a passion for justice and change. They are intense, committed, and uniquely flawed, and their actions and relationships give *Parts per Million* an impressive depth beyond its social messages.

Fetzer is the eldest of the trio, a free spirit and Vietnam veteran, generally up for a challenge while managing to be both sage and young at heart. At twenty-eight, Jen is the most strident, willing to protest on the streets or subversively, as well as waging cyberbattles, hacking her way into classified places and riling up fellow rebels in chat rooms.

Nelson, a former US Forest Service employee, left his steady government job and materialistic marriage to do more and take action. Nelson can be moody and uncertain, but he has excellent public speaking skills and the ability to compel and persuade others.

The novel shifts perspective among these three main characters, including their varied perceptions of aspiring photographer and recovering addict Deirdre, who makes her mysterious way from Ireland to their doorstep and changes the group dynamic. Deirdre and Nelson's romance adds a poignant sensuality to the plot, but it fortunately does not diffuse the broader outrage against covert government activity, ecological destruction, and oil wars. The city of Portland also becomes a colorful presence in *Parts per Million*, fostering its well-known culture of protest and spirited nonconformity.

Deftly layering humor, strong rhetoric, and human complexity, *Parts per Million* is inspiring without being preachy and gives a sense of the individual's role in fighting the wrongful status quo. Fetzer, Jen, and Nelson bring different strengths to their collective fight and tirelessly refuse to accept no as an answer.

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