

## River Mumma

**Zalika Reid-Benta**

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In Zalika Reid-Benta's fantasy novel *River Mumma*, a woman without a sense of direction reconnects to her heritage while on a quest.

Alicia thought that, when she finished graduate school in New York, an opportunity in publishing would open up for her. Instead, she ended up back in Toronto, living with her mother and working in retail at the age of twenty-six. The stagnation in Alicia's career killed her motivation and left her with a pessimistic view of the world—not the best position to be in before embarking on a quest. Nonetheless, River Mumma, a Jamaican water deity, visits Alicia and gives her one day to track down and return her comb. With the help of two of her coworkers, Alicia traverses Toronto, chased by vengeful spirits called “duppies,” in search of the comb.

The slow pace of the novel is a perfect match for Alicia's journey—both on the day-long quest and through her young adulthood. She feels stuck in her career; and while she's searching for the comb, public transportation shuts down, leaving the roads gridlocked and making her movement through the city painfully slow. The novel also does an excellent job of blending fantastical and realistic elements: Alicia has visions throughout the day featuring her ancestors in Jamaica; when she's dropped back in the present, the dissonance is captured well. And the story is grounded by its well-developed relationships and embodied conversations. When fantastical elements press in and disrupt that reality, it forces Alicia to reconnect with the old folk tales told to her by her cousins and grandmother.

A goddess sends a girl searching for an artifact in *River Mumma*, an action-packed novel that explores the anxieties and stressors of young adulthood.

JULIA DILLMAN (March / April 2024)

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