

Rolling in the Deep

Arthur Kevin Rein

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Rolling in the Deep is a coming-of-age novel in which a displaced teenager and his grieving new friend reckon with their losses and rediscover their identities.

In Arthur Kevin Rein's mystery novel *Rolling in the Deep*, a grieving teenager digs up evidence on a cold case that shakes a small town.

After his older brother's death in Afghanistan, seventeen-year-old Sam's parents purchased a resort in northern Wisconsin, hoping for a change of scenery. Sam, who still feels jealous and resentful of his brother and his family's high expectations, struggles to fit into his new community. He spends much of his time helping his family run the resort, as well as fishing and avoiding his schoolwork. He cultivates tentative friendships with Max and with popular, troubled Diane.

While fishing, Sam dredges up an old belt buckle. It belonged to Jean, Diane's sister, who disappeared several years prior and is presumed dead. Jean's husband's powerful family jumps to keep the discovery of the belt buckle quiet, threatening foreclosure on the resort. Worrying that Jean's whereabouts will remain unknown forever if they don't, Sam and his friends investigate the case. But Diane also yearns to keep believing that her sister is alive; she even attempts to subvert Sam's investigation.

Diane's perspective shifts over the course of the story in a way that mirrors Sam's experiences of grief. As relationships develop and ulterior motives are revealed, Sam gains confidence in his personal value, eschewing mere comparisons to his brother.

Though the story takes place in 2013, the book has an incongruent midcentury atmosphere. This is due in part to its rural setting, but also to people's tendencies to spend all their free time doing outdoor chores and activities; technology and modern hobbies are absent, despite some people's apparent wealth. Some conversations sound contrived, making use of dated and anachronistic colloquialisms. Still, the book is meticulous about its details, incorporating local gossip about a creepy mansion and the myth of a skull at the bottom of a lake into its regional lore.

At times, the book's central mystery is subsumed by its central cast's teenage antics. They party and flirt; Sam's inner turmoil roils; the story's progression halts. But as Sam takes increasing risks to impress girls and to get justice for Jean, the suspense increases, pushing the book toward a gratifying conclusion.

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AIMÉE JODOIN (March 20, 2023)

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