

The Bridge

J.S. Breukelaar

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Gothic and feminist, J. S. Breukelaar's novel *The Bridge* is moving in addressing science, sisterhood, and storytelling.

Meera is a Made: a genetically engineered person born into a cult ruled by the Father, who believed that women and girls were devils, and so altered their genetics to remove "demonic" traits. Now that the Father is dead, Meera is enrolled in college. She yearns to move on, fit in, and grow as a writer, but her past haunts her.

When Meera is accepted into an exclusive spoken-word writers group, she asks the "witch" who helped her as a child, Narn, to remind her about her past; she cannot remember much, but hopes to gain ideas for stories. Memories of Meera's deceased twin, Kai, resurface, and the terrors of her childhood intrigue the listeners in the writers group. Meanwhile, a hunter stalks the campus, attacking Mades, and Meera struggles to reconcile her physical realities with the culture that surrounds her.

Though Meera deals with her trauma through writing and sharing, the book also condemns those who exploit survivors' stories as "trauma porn." Its scenes of body horror, and its conversations that detail the Father's destructive beliefs, reveal both the inventive alternate reality and the parallel pervasiveness of abominable facets of contemporary culture, including sexism, racism, narcissism, and exploitation. Against this background, Meera's coming-of-age story is compelling, though some of the comments made about her natural hair are problematic.

The Bridge is a dark novel featuring a mad scientist, obedient ravens, an enigmatic witch, and twins whose bond withstands even death.

AIMEE JODOIN (July / August 2021)

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