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Clarion Review ★★★★☆ YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Given

Gary Clark
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(286pp)
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The Given *is a radiant fantasy novel in which a young adult grows into her magical powers and embraces them.*

In Gary Clark's fantasy novel *The Given,* teenagers flee a government that wishes to capture and neutralize anyone with magical powers.

Eighteen-year-old Jay vibrates with magical potential, and she yearns to let her powers bloom despite the dangers of revealing them. Jay's father knows she is one of the Given, but urges her not to use her magic. Family members, protestors, and even the corner bookseller can disappear at any time. The Given are pursued by an ominous horde of Readers, or former members of the Given who are reprogrammed to track them down.

Fearing for her safety, Jay takes off with her little brother and a group of friends for the Interland, a hidden refuge for those blessed with magic. The only problem is that no one knows how to find it. The teens only have bedtime stories and cryptic maps to rely on. They use those maps to find ley lines—the lines between historic structures and landmarks that seem to contain supernatural powers. While how the ley lines and other features of magic work is under explained, leaving questions like why a numeric rating of magical ability appears on characters' wrists, unanswered, a map is provided at the beginning of the book to help those who feel lost amid all of the geographical references.

Jay and her friends unpack their adolescent baggage while on the move. Bullying, bad relationships, abandonment, love interests, and acceptance all have a place in the story. At times, they are brash and seem to be on a lark, drinking booze and reveling in the freedom of summer as they leave behind the constraints of society. Their journey comes to seem most about being on the cusp of adulthood and finding their inner strength. But when Jay begins to open up to her powers, the writing courses with the same energy that she does. Water bursts like an unleashed dam, the air whispers comfortingly, and the fish and birds radiate love.

Jay's joy in her connection to the environment is countered by the malice and jealousy of Marcus, an especially powerful Reader who hunts the group. He is motivated by his lust for power. The government believes the Given are a threat, and boosts the evil powers of those seeking to repress it. Though Marcus is not especially evolved as a character, his troubled backstory links him to the others. As Jay and Marcus battle in increasingly dangerous settings, they threaten each other's abilities to exist as they are.

Despite the hazards they face, Jay and her fearless friends are flush with possibility. *The Given* is a radiant fantasy novel in which a young adult grows into her magical powers and embraces them.

BRANDEE GRUENER (May 10, 2021)

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