

The Hidden and the Maiden

Eben Mishkin

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This gripping modern fantasy is well thought out and oddly believable.

Stephen King once wrote, “Monsters are real, and ghosts are real too. They live inside us, and sometimes, they win.” Despite its supernatural elements, this statement speaks about the duality of the world both around and within us. This is a central theme of Eben Mishkin’s debut novel, *The Hidden and the Maiden*.

To the naked eye, James and Zephyr seem like typical young men who work at Odd Jobs, a strange organization that solves problems for people. But things are not as they seem. James is from Three Pit, a mining slum with roots in magic where a wizard has trained him to perform spells. Zephyr sees dead people, including his deceased mother, JJ, who possessively protects him from any soul, living or dead.

Both men are assigned to help Helena Lawson, a wealthy widow who has fallen under the influence of Kenton Dean, a former Three Pit police-officer-turned-medium. While Dean is a huckster, he has darker motives for keeping Helena under his spell. Now, James and Zephyr need to work together to break that spell before it’s too late.

The Hidden and the Maiden is a modern fantasy that is well thought out and believable. Through the use of dramatic scenes, tight pacing, and suspenseful tension, Mishkin keeps readers on the edge of their seat and turning pages.

The book’s greatest strength is the richly developed characters, who have the right mix of corruption and humanity. James and Zephyr are imperfect as they both struggle with their supernatural abilities, initially trying to hide them from each other. Another example is JJ, who can switch from caring for Zephyr, to violent as she threatens to kill James when the two men meet, to tender as she comforts the soul of a dead child who can’t understand why her parents can’t see her anymore. Even Dean, whose backstory is foreshadowed in the prologue, is a complex, yet sympathetic antagonist.

It’s clear from the story that Mishkin is familiar with the fantasy genre, but at times, this works against him. There are elements of the world that are never really explained, such as what kind of business Odd Jobs is, exactly. It’s a small omission, but it’s one where a reader might feel lost when all of the other details in this world are carefully crafted to be believable.

Nonetheless, *The Hidden and the Maiden* is a gripping novel that is sure to appeal to fantasy readers as well as attract people who aren’t as familiar with the genre. It shows that while monsters and ghosts may be part of our world, there is something, sometimes luminous inside us, that has the potential to win, too.

KATERIE PRIOR (November 18, 2015)

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