

Time's Musicians

Mark Paul Oleksiw

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Time's Musicians is a suspenseful novel whose characters search for redemption, hoping to solve long-standing mysteries.

In Mark Paul Oleksiw's psychological thriller *Time's Musicians*, a comic book writer and a retired therapist work together to solve a decades-long mystery.

In the first section of the book, a shy, curious fifth grader, Billy, meets a boy who claims to have found a black hole through which he can time travel. It's in a dangerous cave that's deep in the forest. Billy is the last person to see the boy alive before he goes missing, and Billy doesn't know what to believe about his disappearance.

A few years later, Billy meets John at a summer camp. John's penchant for meditating in the woods at night gets Billy in trouble when he follows him and is injured. Later, Billy and John become college roommates, and John's sleepwalking and nightmares drive Billy to commit an act that destroys their friendship.

The book then jumps forward ten years. Billy works as a comic book creator and a volunteer social worker; his unresolved past issues, and his devotion to the happiness of his friends, drive him. In scenes from his adulthood, focus shifts from Billy to a therapist, Carrie, who has just retired. She receives a distressed call from Billy asking for her help after he has a prophetic nightmare. She arrives at Billy's home to find that he has left on a cryptic "camping trip," leaving Carrie and Billy's colleagues to discern the true nature of the nightmares and John's mysterious past.

Carrie's inquisitiveness and yearning for the truth propel the story, but she's short on personality beyond this. Her computer illiteracy and her love of chocolate chip cookies seem to define her more than any other characteristics. Her wife and son have similar names, resulting in confusion.

Dialogue is the chief agent of the plot. Information that only one character knows is shared at just the right time to maintain suspense and raise the stakes. But because the book skips from Billy's fifth-grade year to the summer camp to the college incident and then to Billy's early thirties, where the bulk of the story takes place, its major scenes feel incomplete.

Hints at the potential supernatural origins of John and Billy's plights are intriguing. Most of the plot strands merge, and are tidily wrapped up, in the end, though some questions, as about what happened to John as a child, and about the purpose of secret experiments at Billy and John's college, are murky. However, the musical, magical world of Billy's comic book series is alluring, and Billy's search for its perfect ending adds another electrifying layer to the plot.

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AIMEE JODOIN (June 5, 2020)

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