



## Unfathomable

**Thomas Pryce**

Cenozoic Publishing (Oct 28, 2019)

(347pp)

978-0-9846691-3-4

*Unfathomable is a high-energy science fiction adventure made intriguing because of its modern and environmentalist viewpoints.*

In Thomas Pryce's science fiction thriller *Unfathomable*, an environmental activist uncovers a conspiracy of apocalyptic proportions.

In search of secrets, Jake boards the Phantom Run, a fishing vessel that doesn't seem to haul a lot of fish. He receives a communication from his ex-girlfriend, Ellie, another environmentalist who is out at sea attempting to stop whaling vessels. In addition to sparking old flames, Ellie reveals that there is a new kind of sonic harpoon being used by poachers. Jake wonders if the Phantom Run is also creating a weapon. But the truth is more bizarre and destructive than imagined.

Jake questions his sanity. His body is changing, possibly even evolving, in ways he cannot explain. Aboard the Phantom Run, Jake witnesses large patches of disregarded fishing net and plastic capturing helpless sea creatures, complemented by brutal images of whales being hunted and killed. As Jake becomes able to perceive the ocean's vibrations and the status of other creatures around him, the sea itself becomes part location and part character in its own right; its feelings and sense of health are shared. Jake works to balance his priorities and adapt, hoping to stop the Phantom Run's deadly mission.

Jake, a determined environmentalist who is willing to put his life on the line for oceanic causes, interacts with the boat's crew in a way that drives the novel's tension. He's quick thinking and able to improvise, but is also on the autism spectrum; he has trouble with social interactions. His dynamics with others, coupled with his childhood memories, result in a mixed portrayal of autism. It is explained in realistic and sensitive ways, but some language around autism is controversial; the book suggests that Jake "grew out" of some tendencies because his mother treated him "normally," for example.

A secondary character, Bruce, survived a traumatic brain injury, and his relationship with Jake is developed in a two-fold manner: Jake is at first fearful of Bruce and compares him to Sloth from *The Goonies*, but as he gets to know Bruce, his thoughts become more sympathetic and understanding. Jake's feelings of being "othered" are reflected in Bruce's experience, too.

Jake's relationship with Ellie is emotional, and Ellie's story helps to elaborate upon the duo's activism and philosophies. Jake and Ellie do not interact much in person in the novel, but their thoughts of each other help to establish the complexity and depth of their feelings. Ellie's attractiveness is made secondary to her intelligence and competency, both of which Jake values. She's a calm and nonjudgmental addition to the book.

Supported by enough science to stir the imagination, the book is further enlivened by doses of humor in Jake's wandering thoughts. Even as it becomes chaotic, the story holds attention, though its conclusion generates more

questions than it does answers.

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DELIA STANLEY (February 26, 2020)

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