

★ **Wellside****Robin Shortt**

Candlemark and Gleam (Jun 15, 2017)

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This absolutely enthralling fantasy tests the limits of imagination.

Robin Shortt's *Wellside* is an amazingly creative fantasy novel about two young adults who face uncertain futures and who go on a mind-bending journey. The book introduces new and fascinating ideas about how a universe might be organized and what kinds of life might inhabit different worlds.

Ben may be heading for prison after graduation, but that is not the only thing on his mind. He is fascinated with Essa, a loner who started at his high school just over a year ago. An ill-thought-out retort to the school's sociopathic bully leads to their escape together through a door in the school gymnasium, and straight into an adventure that will determine the fate of the worlds.

The idea of mysterious doors that lead to other worlds is not necessarily new, but *Wellside* is wonderfully unique. In this book, the doors do not lead to other worlds, but into the Well, a place that exists outside any world but that connects to many.

Essa tries to describe it to Ben: "Someone took a core sample. A biopsy of reality. And the Well's what's left behind." The inhabitants of the Well and the worlds that control it are not all humanoid; some are made of iron or stone, some are more machine than flesh, and some are really just thoughts.

The plot is complicated and unfolds slowly, with flashbacks to Essa's earlier years as a Librarian in Red Sand City, interspersed with the challenges that Ben and Essa meet as they try to navigate the Well. Well-thought-out and complicated world building is achieved seamlessly and supports the story line beautifully. Characters are compelling, and waiting for their fate to be determined makes the book difficult to put down.

This is a story that tests the limits of imagination. The order of the universe, and ideas about what constitutes a living creature, are expanded and remade in this absolutely enthralling book. A satisfying conclusion leaves room for the possibility of more adventures to come, which many will hope for.

Wellside is not a journey that has been taken before; anyone who enjoys fantasy should be excited about this book.

CATHERINE THURESON (July/August 2017)

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