

BOOK REVIEWS

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By Jessica Kealy

Girl in the Window by Penny Joelson

Admittedly, I had far too high expectations for this book. Excited about the news of a book with a lead character that had M.E./CFS., in my head I was expecting a book which I could hand to people and say, "Here, read this for an accurate representation of M.E./CFS."

I enjoyed Penny Joelson's first book, *I Have No Secrets* – which has subsequently won a couple of awards – and expected something just as good with *Girl in the Window*. The main character is a witness to what looks like an abduction but the police can't find any evidence. The only other person who possibly saw something was the mysterious girl in the window opposite.

But when Kasia, our main character, tries to find out more about this possible witness, she's shocked to learn that the girl opposite doesn't actually exist. Or at least, that's what "they" claim.

I wanted to love this book, but the plot took too long to be unravelled for my liking. In between the bits of plot, there were too many issues going on as well. It was easy to get confused as to what was happening. Every character seemed to have a problem which *had* to be resolved, even if it had nothing to do with the plotline. One character we were updated on throughout the book, yet he had nothing to do with the plotline except that he contributed to a happy ending.

As I touched upon previously, the main character supposedly had M.E./CFS.

However, there were points when it didn't seem very realistic to me, and there were a couple of irritating inaccuracies (one such being when a character said, "Negativity! The enemy of progress and recovery!" during a conversation about what the main character could manage). Kasia, who at the beginning hasn't managed to go down the stairs for 10 weeks, improves to a point where she can go out for a 15-minute walk without any problems, in less than a year of having M.E./CFS. From my own personal experience with M.E./CFS., this felt quite strange. Kasia also seemed a bit annoying to me at times, constantly overdoing it, and then magically returning to "normal" again in a couple of weeks, when in real life, it might have potentially caused a longer full-blown relapse.

The book does touch on numerous modern-issues such as child-trafficking, slavery and illness, and most of the time, it does this quite well. But the problem lies with the word *numerous*. There were too many issues for the characters in this one book to address – perhaps, if it had been spread over a couple of other books with a stronger plotline, these might have been a bit clearer. But for a stand-alone novel, I struggled with trying to remember what had happened previously when we were reintroduced to another individual's ongoing issue.

That aside, the plotline itself is a good idea and is approached in an original way. There's just too much else going on to focus on it fully, including a rather clichéd romance (which seems to be the driving force throughout this book?).

Overall, for those who love mystery genre books, and don't mind a slow-paced plot, you could like this book! For me, it just didn't stand out in any particular way.



Percy Jackson & The Olympians (series) by Rick Riordan

For fans of the Harry Potter series or other fantasy genre books, this series is a must-read! Witty, original and for any age (well, above the age of about 8), Riordan creates a whole new world based on the old Greek myths that we all had to learn about at some point in our lives.

Written from the point of view of young demigod Perseus (AKA Percy) Jackson, this series follows Percy on his quest to stay alive. Well, OK, that isn't the actual quest, but Percy experiences so many near-death situations that this is probably his major goal after everything that he's been through.

Taking old Greek myths, Riordan puts a modern twist on them: what if demigods and the Greek gods were alive in the twenty-first century? And living in America, no less.

The first book in the five-book series, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, sets up the series to be a thrilling read. While the story revolves predominantly around Percy, throughout the series we find out that the "sidekicks" (a bit of an understatement for one of them) and their individual stories are just as important to the plot. There's lovable Grover –who isn't quite who he seems in the beginning of *The Lightning Thief*– and a strong female lead, the demigod Annabeth Chase.

In fact, the whole series is full of inspirational characters, both female and male. They are inspirational in their own ways yet each has their own flaws that are touched upon throughout the series. Each book has a serious edge to it, and certainly none of the characters have had a very easy time of it (although, how could you, when you spend most of your life having to fight ancient Greek monsters to

try and stay alive?) yet thanks to Riordan's seemingly endless supply of humour, although you might be crying on one page, you might find yourself laughing by the next.

And, yes, I said crying. It might seem like a light-hearted series, and for the most part it is, but there are heart-breaking moments to be found here as well. Character deaths are common in the later books, and Riordan knows just how to tug on the heart-strings. Sometimes he does this in happy ways, but often in sad ways (the last book... well, let's just say "sad" is an understatement).

However, generally speaking, these are funny books, full of charm and wit. And the great news is that if you enjoy the first series, Riordan hasn't stopped writing! The next series includes most of the characters from this series, and the books are just as enjoyable (and even more diverse!).

It's a great series to read if you love the fantasy genre, or are just looking for another series with an excellent fandom to become a part of. Although not quite as big as the Harry Potter community, the Percy Jackson community is still far larger than many other fandoms, and most people have the same opinions on the characters.

Oh, and the author himself is hilarious... you'll know what I mean after you've read these books. His ideas are genius and so well-executed in a funny manner. I really can't praise this series enough.

