

Book Blogger Reviews

A Year of Reading

<http://readingyear.blogspot.com/2009/09/ghost-in-machine-by-patrick-carman.html>

I just finished GHOST IN THE MACHINE by Patrick Carman. I LOVED Skeleton Creek and was thrilled to get a review copy of this book. It will be released in early October.

Ghost in the machine is the 2nd in a 2 book series. Skeleton Creek started the story and this book finishes it. I was so worried that this second book would be a disappointment because I liked the first one so much. I was anxious to see where it went after reading the first book. I must admit, it was a pretty scary story. Not only was it a ghost story, but the format made it scarier than had it been text only.

For those of you new to this series, it is a new kind of book. Patrick Carman has integrated video and text to create a story. So, the book is technically Ryan's journal. Ryan was hurt in an accident at The Dredge in his city, Skeleton Creek. He was with his friend Sarah and because of the accident, he is no longer allowed to see her. But, she sends emails and videos. (Sarah films EVERYTHING!) So, when she sends Ryan a video, he writes that it has arrived in his journal and we are to go to the site, use the password and watch the video. The video and text work together to create the story. Neither is whole without the other. It is VERY well done. I find myself reading the book with book in hand and laptop on my lap, waiting for the next video from Sarah.

Although I considered it a ghost story when I read Skeleton Creek, I see now that this is more a mystery. And a really good mystery. A mystery that is perfect for kids in these upper elementary/early middle grades.

This is a hard review to write because I don't want to give anything away. I know you'll all want to read it, but this has everything that a good mystery has. Scary parts, codes, secret meetings, secret messages, and more. Carman does a great job of dropping just enough clues so that readers pay attention to something they may have missed. This mystery seems sophisticated and yet accessible for kids.

One of my favorite things-something I'll need to revisit soon--is the cleverness of the passwords that Sarah sends to Ryan for each video. They invite readers to do a little more research to see the connection. A fun code embedded in the story that adds new layers to the story. It is a great story, written well and one that you can't get through fast enough. Lots of suspense that kids will love. (You can see the first clip from Sarah-the beginning of the book--here.)

I was anxious to read this book for several reasons. First of all, I was dying to see what happened. But more importantly, I wanted to make sure this book truly was appropriate for the ages that it is marketed to. I worried a bit about how scary it was and the fact that it was a ghost story. For me, how the story ended was critical. As I said, this book is scary in different ways from the first--in this book, the kids are in dangerous situations but not always at the Dredge. But, it ended in a way that was satisfying, appropriate and believable. I think it is very appropriate for the 5-7th graders that it is marketed to--well, 5th-7th graders who enjoy scary stories with ghosts and bad guys. Definitely some bad choices on the part of the kids who continue to put themselves in dangerous situations but I guess when I think back to Nancy Drew and The Secret Seven--my favorite mystery series in 4th and 5th grades, those characters put themselves in danger too. I guess it is all part of the genre of mystery and kids know that.

I am still fascinated by Patrick Carman and the brilliance it took to write these books. Like I've said before, I am a book girl. The idea of a book/video combo seemed odd to me. But they worked together so well that I have totally bought into the idea that books can be a little different from the way they are now, from the way we've always experienced them. I just read about a video chip that will be part of a magazine ad and I can't even picture how that will be or how that will change my reading experiences in the future. So this whole idea of various formats together as one is pretty intriguing to me.

If you loved Skeleton Creek, I would preorder this one! Definitely not a disappointment!