

Book Information

Title

Rules for Camouflage

Creator

Kirstin Cronn-Mills

Format

Print book

Version

Published copy provided by the publisher

Publication date

2024

Length

327 p.

Audience

Young adult



Reviewer Information

Lauren Melissa

Independent reviewer

Critical Review

Stonewall Book Award winner Kirstin Cronn-Mills returns with a young adult novel centered around neurodiversity. The story follows the adventures and musings of Evvie, whose perspective is explored through narrative, text messages, and bulleted lists from the first-person perspective. Evvie navigates life as a recently diagnosed neurodivergent individual who prefers to be unlabeled. Bullies abound, in the form of both teachers and

fellow students, but Evvie and her friends find support in understanding adults, passionate interests, sensory-safe spaces, and one another.

Evvie received at least one neurodivergent diagnosis in high school, and while I personally was not diagnosed as autistic until my early twenties, I could relate to the social, sensory, and academic difficulties that Evvie faces throughout the novel. Indeed, Evvie and the neurodiverse pals she spends time with come alive on the pages. However, the adults and antagonists of the story are less fleshed out. At times, the kind and understanding support of the adult comrades comes across as a barely veiled guidebook for adult readers of the novel, and the villainy of the individuals standing in Evvie's way veers toward one dimensional.

Cronn-Mills makes the creative decision to eliminate the names of diagnoses throughout the novel. The neurodivergent characters refer to themselves as having different brains or unruly brains, and the traits of their disabilities are either experienced or described in context. The author's choice to lean into this ambiguity may have been an effort to avoid labels, destigmatize neurodivergence, and emphasize individuality. Whether Cronn-Mills succeeds in accomplishing these goals may vary from reader to reader. Personally, I was frequently frustrated that the characters' disabilities were not named. After all, disabilities and diagnoses are not dirty words.

Nevertheless, Cronn-Mills' novel is an engaging and heartwarming read. Evvie openly and enthusiastically shares her passion for octopuses, which serves as a recurring anchor throughout the book. The fun octopus facts and fascinating descriptions will spark the curiosity of the reader. I had never considered that a beautiful, unique, and often misunderstood aquatic species could metaphorically exemplify the neurodivergent experience, but after reading *Rules of Camouflage*, I will never see an octopus the same way again.

In sum, this book is

Recommended