

**Title: *The Kingdom***  
**Author: Jess Rothenberg**  
**Genre: Science Fiction**

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Anna P. 8th Grade**

**Date Reviewed: April 12, 2020**

The Kingdom, a book by Jess Rothenberg, is set in a futuristic fantasy theme-park of the same name in the United States. One of the most prominent corporations on the planet, it is world-renowned for providing entertainment to all in a technologically advanced age. Their scientists and computer engineers create feats like no other, spanning from synthesizing extinct animals to fill their recreated biome exhibits to even playing God in making their own. But out of all the Kingdom's attractions, the most successful are the Fantasists. The Fantasists are a small group of "princesses," meant to entertain and help the park's guests, idealized by young girls and enjoyed even by adults. Except, they aren't human, but hyper-realistic android bodies with the world's best AI and human-mimicking processing system. Ana, the first-person main character of the novel, is one such Fantasist.

Ana lives with her, "sisters," (the other Fantasists) in the Kingdom. She is programmed to enjoy life and be a kind and compassionate emblem of what a princess is. The Fantasists live under the watch of, "Daddy," (the chief engineer responsible for maintenance and creation of the Fantasists). In addition, they are monitored closely by the park and corporation itself - they are the chief revenue source for the business, of course. The brand and public image are heavily controlled. From this, a firewall blocks anything online that may be deemed, "inappropriate," for a princess to see or concerns the going on of people outside the park. Their knowledge of the world is limited to what the park wants them to know, and they are constantly told how terrible life is in the world. They should be glad to live in the park, and work for the Kingdom. Stories of Fantasists who left the park circulate as horror tales to the girls. The park is their paradise, or is it?

Ana meets Owen Chen, a smart and sarcastic animal maintenance worker about her programmed age. They banter and talk about animals. Speaking with Owen makes Ana realize that she knows little of the world, and has a harder time processing emotions than she realized once they reveal their shared feelings for one another. The mirage of the park, her world, slowly begins to unravel. One of her sister Fantasists, Nia, is gone for weeks after being accused of stealing a phone (which we later learn to be false). She learns one of the older Fantasists, Kaia, is being sexually abused by a high-level employee whom Owen works under. After seeing a physical lash out of a whipped and abused sick polar bear hurting a boy, she wonders if the feelings and creatures are really fake, or if they (including her) are developing further consciousness as people. When Nia returns, albeit with her memories wiped, things take a shift for the worse. Nia and another Fantasist each attempt separate acts of horrifying violent protest, Ana receives confirmation that she isn't alone in her thoughts. Both of these girls are, "shut down," through unknown methods. After subsequently learning that Owen was originally meant to be monitoring her, we skip to a trial and are convinced through other characters' testimonies that she murdered him. She herself mourns him after being shown to have had a panic attack. Even after a riveting trial that convinces you that the Kingdom corporation will lose, their law team comes out victorious, hinting at corruption in the system. After Ana returns to Daddy's lab, it is revealed that shut down is a painful, punishing process in which Ana will eventually die. "Daddy," takes particular joy in releasing his emotions on her. In a forced, "confession," Ana reveals that did not kill Owen despite even the corporation being convinced of this. As intermittent flashbacks display them hatching a

plan to both run away from the park and the company through a faked disappearance, Owen (alive) walks into the operation room. A scuffle ensues as the doctor attacks, leaving him dead (an accident) in the process (though Ana does not feel guilt). Ana and Owen escape in disguise, and the story ends as the pair drive away from the Kingdom in Owen's car listening to formerly prohibited music on the radio, planning a future together.

*Did the plot(for fiction) or presentation of information (for non-fiction)keep you interested?*

The plot of the Kingdom definitely kept me engaged and interested. It had riveting turns and plot twists, as well as in-depth dives into the corruption of the corporation involved. On the same topic, many issues with society and the world presented in the novel reflected real-world experiences and really got me thinking. One example was within the Formerly Extinct Species program presented by the theme park displaying, as the name suggests, formerly extinct animals from the earth. Interestingly, some of these included polar bears, penguins, and rhinoceros, showing a possibility of what may happen if poaching, climate change, and deforestation are not stopped. Another is an advertisement targeted towards little girls presented as, "girl power," and seeking equality in empowering young women while only marketing towards the park's image in favor of their target demographic. The advertisement is depicted in its own chapter of the book with no input from any of the characters as a screenplay complete with a voiceover script as well as script for the actors, ending in a graph titled with, "My Kingdom App," for which it is implied the ad markets. Through this, it is conveyed how staged the public interactions are, including any good messages. The use of support in social movements is a strategy many real companies are rumored to use, and the book highlights this concern in modern-day consumers. To continue, the book also highlights bribery, corruption in the judicial system, internal company politics, and even unethical practices within companies through the trial of Ana and her observances of the Kingdom's inner workings.

*Was the pace of the book too fast,too slow, or just right?*

The pace of this book was definitely just right for me. We learn early on that Ana, "kills," Owen. The story skips between Ana's flashbacks and interviews, testimonies, and evidence presented within the trial. When the reader is finally at the point of the trial and (thinks they are) all caught up, in the middle of Daddy's final interview with Ana one more flashback to when Ana and Owen hatch their plan to fake his murder in attempt to get out of the park (the lab is the closest point to the perimeter). The story progresses well, and it speeds up as Ana learns more about her situation almost as a metaphor for her coming up to speed with real life.

*What grade level(s)is this book appropriate for?*

I would say the book is appropriate for grade levels 7 to 12, or at least those people who are more willing to read the more depressing aspects of a novel. The book shows Ana having what we can interpret as a panic attack twice, almost sees her sister commit suicide, and even feeling her life as she knew it fall apart in distrust for those she had loved and meaninglessness.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

As stated before, I would recommend the book to readers willing to read into the human mind, thought process, and exploration of how we think in a literary manner, centering the age-old debate of the ethicality of if a human-created machine gains consciousness, and the meaning of humanity.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

I believe an important disclaimer to my praise of the in-depth psychological display of this book is its inclusion of our finding out about the sexual abuse of Kaia by big-name donors to the company and an

animal trainer of the Kingdom. Ana has strong feelings about what happened, and the disgust she feels at the company for allowing this and her horror at the mistreatment of a loved one is part of what pushes her to retaliate. Those who are sensitive to this topic may want to proceed with caution, and while I believe the subject is handled well, it is an important word of caution to note in the recommendation of this book.

I would personally rate this book as:

*5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!*

The reason of my high rating of this book, as mentioned numerous times, is the exploration of human emotional response to stimuli. I think the subject works particularly well with this book, as the main character is most definitely not human. However, while we see Ana react in very human and nuanced ways to unpredictable situations, we are brought to question what we think if placed in a scenario similar to hers or her supervisors. What makes a person a person, and when is it time to start treating robots as humans? This book handles sensitive issues well and writes a person's thought process onto paper accurately and impactfully, and this rollercoaster of feeling almost had me in tears by the end (a good thing!). This beautiful novel is definitely worth a read, and is amazingly crafted to give a great experience to the reader while we take something away from it.

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Adam B. 9<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Date Reviewed: May 29, 2020**

*The Kingdom* is set in the not-so-distant future, in a theme park called The Kingdom. Through technology, The Kingdom has created robotic animals and have even revived extinct animals. The park has also managed to create robots that look and behave like humans. These androids, called "fantasists", serve as mascots for the park. These princesses are beloved across the world, and appear in commercials and merchandise. That being said, many people are wary of the princesses, going so far as to call them monsters. Ana, the protagonist, is one of these "fantasists". Ana feels a close connection with her youngest sister, Nia. In addition, she feels that her oldest sister, Eve, is entitled and snobbish. Ana also witnesses another of her sisters, Kaia, be taken advantage of and made fun of for being "slow". She has also heard stories of Alice, one of the older Fantasists, who was taken and killed. Ana and her sisters are often told about the horrors of the world outside the gates of The Kingdom, and have been trained to fear the outside. Ana and the other fantasists have lived and worked in the park with little disturbance, until some of her sisters begin to malfunction, becoming violent to themselves and others. At the same time, Ana begins to experience new, more complex emotions. Soon enough, she begins to fall in love with a maintenance worker named Owen. Owen specializes in androids, and teaches Ana about the issues that park has been having with their animals. As her relationship with Owen blossoms, Ana discovers that she can experience deeper feelings, and learns more about herself as she learns about Owen. That love, however, is shattered when she is accused of murdering him. Through interviews, courtroom testimony, and Ana's own memories, a tale of love and life unravels, and asks the question: what does it truly mean to be human?

*Did the plot keep you interested?*

The plot of *The Kingdom* kept me engaged, not only because of the plot itself, but in the way it was told. Much of the story is told through various documents and transcripts, and, rather than advancing in a linear way, the plot jumps around in time. As the story advances, more pieces of the puzzle that is the book's plot begin falling into place, making the plot very engaging.

*Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?*

The pace of the book was good, however, the book felt rushed near the end, and it seemed as if not as much care went into it as did the rest of the book.

*What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?*

This book is appropriate for eighth grade and up. There are some graphic scenes, as well as some graphic implications.

*What type of reader would you recommend this book to?*

I would recommend this book to any fan of science fiction, as the ideas presented in it are unique and interesting.

*What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?*

It's helpful to know that this book is written unconventionally, but that makes it more rewarding to read.

*I rate this book 4 stars.*

I rated this book 4 stars, because, although the book has an interesting premise and an interesting way of conveying the plot, the pace is not consistent, and feels rushed at the end, making for a less satisfying ending.

**Reviewer Name and Grade: Oliver W., 8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

**Date Reviewed: October 3, 2020**

Ana is a Fantasist at an advanced amusement park named the Kingdom™ in Washington State. The Kingdom leads the world in bioengineered species. They have a program called the Formerly Extinct Species program that blends machinery and cells to create animals that have been extinct for years and can be found nowhere else on Earth. Ana's job as a Fantasist is to please the customers. Fantasists look like princesses and are very human-like due to their advanced programming. They always aim to please and never say no. Ana has six "sisters"—Kaia, Yumi, Eve, Zara, Pania (Nia), and Zel—and they are very happy. Ana has always been told that the outside world is very dangerous and poor, so she feels safe in the Kingdom and makes sure to stay in the park's boundaries. But when Nia steals someone's cell phone and then is taken away for a few months by the Supervisors, she comes back different. Ana can tell that something has changed with her sister, but can't find out what happened to Nia the months that she was away. Ana meets a maintenance worker named Owen Chen who tells her about a disease spreading through the hybrids that makes them act strangely. Owen is a kind and patient boy. His younger sister's favorite Fantasist was Ana, before she died in a car crash when Owen was driving the car. Ana finds that she really likes Owen. But she starts to experience a feeling when she's around him that she cannot explain, and she can only assume that it is love. She starts to purposely try to seek out Owen around the park. One day, when Nia is performing as a mermaid in Mermaid Lagoon, she takes a girl to ride with her on a whale, and she attempts to drown herself and the girl. Ana rescues the girl, but she starts to wonder if the Supervisors aren't telling her something about the outside world. Nia is shut down and replaced by a newer Fantasist named Nadia, who Ana dislikes. When Eve also attempts to commit suicide, and she is also shut down, Ana starts to feel like there is something wrong with her too. Owen is telling her things that show that the Supervisors have been lying to her. Ana starts spending more and more time away from her usual schedule, and she worries that she might have to be shut down soon too.

When Ana finds out that Owen was actually hired by the park as a “proctor” to monitor the Fantasists, she allegedly kills Owen with his pocketknife and throws his body into the incinerator underneath the Kingdom. Ana denies killing Owen, despite video evidence of what she did, and she is tried in court, as people try to find the truth about what she did and what caused her to do it. This book takes place in the 2090s. I know this because throughout the book the reader sees transcripts of Ana’s trial, some of which are dated to 2096.

***Did the plot keep you interested?***

Yes, the plot kept me interested. The book alternated between what happened before the alleged murder and transcripts from Ana’s trial, which were often left in cliffhangers. This kept the reader wanting to learn more about what happened and made the plot very interesting.

***Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?***

The pace of the book was pretty good. Short scenes from the two different time periods were given so the story progressed pretty quickly which caused the reader to not become bored while reading. I thought that the ending was a little rushed and the story felt unfinished to me after I finished reading.

***What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?***

I think this book would be appropriate for readers in grades 6 and up. The story is centered around a bloody killing which is described in detail during the book. One of the employees at the Kingdom sexually harasses Kaia. Two of the Fantasists attempt to commit suicide. There is no profanity.

***What type of reader would you recommend this book to?***

I would recommend this book to readers who like books with futuristic technology. I would also recommend this book to readers who like books that jump back and forth between time periods so the reader will have to try and figure out what happened as they get clues from the story.

***What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?***

I think it would be helpful for teens reading this book to know that this book showed some very real aspects of the world today. The sexual abuse of Kaia was an important part of the story to me because women in our society today have to endure similar experiences. Also, I think this book showed how major corporations usually end up winning court cases because they have better lawyers and more money. It also showed how corporations try to project an image of having high safety standards and a friendly work environment when in reality their foremost focus is always on how they can make the most profit.

I would rate this book *4 stars*. I really liked the way this book was set up and the idea of a robot falling in love even though it isn’t programmed to have that feeling is really cool. It was really interesting to read from Ana’s point of view on how she felt and to see how her view on the Supervisors and the park developed. I really enjoyed the mystery side of this book, trying to figure out why Ana killed Owen even though she seemed to really like him and enjoy being around him. The other Fantasists didn’t really have any character and weren’t interesting at all, which is why I didn’t rate this book 5 stars. Also, I didn’t like how this book ended. But other than that, I thought that this was a good-paced book with a suspenseful plot that is definitely worth reading.