



The River King

By Alice Hoffman

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From the best-selling author of **The Dovekeepers**, **The River King** confirms Alice Hoffman as "one of our quirkiest and most interesting novelists" (Jane Smiley, **USA Today**).

People tend to stay in their place in the town of Haddan. The students at the prestigious prep school don't mix with locals; even within the school, hierarchy rules, as freshman and faculty members find out where they fit in and what is expected of them. But when a body is found in the river behind the school, a local policeman will walk into this enclosed world and upset it entirely. A story of surface appearances and the truths submerged below.

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The River King By Alice Hoffman Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #625841 in Books
- Published on: 2001-07-01
- Released on: 2001-07-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.02" h x .88" w x 5.10" l, .63 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

There are two things any reader can count on when coming to Alice Hoffman: her prose and a remarkable empathy for those who live on the fringes of society. In her 13th novel, the author turns both to good account. Set in a tony private school located in a small New England town, *The River King* traces an intricate weave of intersecting lives over the course of a year. The Haddan School, founded in 1858, has long been the scene of tragedy and wonder: during its first year a tremendous storm flooded the grounds, and more than a century later "frogs can be found in the plumbing; linens and clothes stored in closets have a distinctly weedy odor, as if each article had been washed in river water and never thoroughly dried." Then there are the glorious roses planted by Annie Howe, a villager who married the headmaster and later hanged herself; these flowers have an unusual effect on sensitive girls. "When such girls walked past the brittle canes in the gardens behind St. Anne's, they felt something cold at the base of their spines, a bad case of pins and needles, as though someone were issuing a warning: be careful who you choose to love and who loves you in return."

A cogent warning indeed, for as in all of Hoffman's novels, the question of whom one chooses to love and who loves in return is the crux of the matter. *The River King* revolves around triangles. First there is Betsy Chase, a young photography teacher at the Haddan School who has gotten herself engaged--almost accidentally--to a fellow faculty member, even as she is inexorably drawn to Abel Grey, a town policeman. Then there are Carlin Leander, a scholarship student, and her best friend, Gus Pierce. While Carlin is able to fit in, even attracting the interest of the most popular boy on campus, Gus is a defiant outcast, a tall skinny kid in a long black overcoat "who viewed his own life as a prison sentence and experienced his existence much as a condemned man might." Carlin's romance with the charismatic, cruel Harry McKenna creates a rupture between her and Gus, and fuels a mean-spirited practical joke with horrific consequences. In the aftermath of tragedy, each character's heart, conscience, and courage is tested in unexpected ways.

Hoffman spins her web of love and heartbreak and transcendence with a sure hand, and in the process creates characters so palpably human in all their petty flaws and small instances of heroism that one almost expects them to step out of the book and into the room. Indeed, if there is a flaw in *The River King*, it is that Alice Hoffman doesn't always trust the magic inherent in her characters, relying a little too heavily at times on somewhat precious invocations of the otherworldly. But this is a minor defect in an otherwise satisfying novel, one that will keep the reader spellbound by its emotional complexity and compelling story. --*Alix Wilber*

From Publishers Weekly

Set in and around an exclusive private school in fictional Haddan, Mass., bestselling author Hoffman's (Practical Magic; Here on Earth) latest novel flows as swiftly and limpidly as the Haddan River, the town's mystical waterway. As one expects in a Hoffman novel, strange things have always happened in Haddan: a combination of Mother Nature gone awry and human nature following suit. In 1858, the year the school was completed, a devastating flood almost destroyed it and the town. The esteemed headmaster, Dr. Howe, married a pretty local girl who hung herself from the rafters "one mild evening in March." Local superstitions prove true more often than not, and twice in recent history a black, algae-laden rain has covered people and buildings with a dark sludge. An uneasy peace has always existed between the locals and the Haddan School, based on the latter's financial benefit to the community and the local authorities' willingness to look the other way when necessary to maintain the school's reputation. But when student August Pierce is found drowned in the Haddan River, detective Abel Grey is flooded with memories of his own teenage brother's suicide, and refuses to look away. Supporting characters are richly textured: new photography

instructor Betsy Chase feels unsafe in Haddan, yet somehow finds herself engaged to a mysterious young history professor Eric Herman; Carlin Leander, a poor, strikingly beautiful young girl, comes to Haddan to recreate herself and escape her neglectful mother, and becomes misfit August's only friend while dating the most popular boy on campus; Helen Davis, chair of the history department, is haunted by a long-ago affair she had with Dr. Howe, which she believes had something to do with his young wife's suicide. As ever, Hoffman mixes myth, magic and reality, addressing issues of town and gown, enchanting her readers with a many-layered morality tale and proving herself once again an inventive author with a distinctive touch. Literary Guild main selection, Doubleday Book Club featured alternate; foreign rights sold in the U.K., Germany, Norway, Denmark; major ad/promo; 14-city author tour. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From School Library Journal

YA-Haddan School is an elite prep school located in a small town in Massachusetts. One of its dorms is haunted by the ghost of Annie Howe, who killed herself after discovering that her husband, a past headmaster, was an adulterer. Many years pass before two new students, Carlin Leander and August Pierce, both socially and intellectually independent from the school's cliques, meet and fall in love. The other students plot revenge: August is too much the individual and Carlin too good for him. Pierce is murdered and it takes all of police officer Abel Gray's talent and persistence to bring justice. He is helped by the photography teacher, Betsy Chase, and he falls in love with her. Their courtship becomes another part of this complicated plot. Hoffman's characters have strongly defined personalities, and their relationships are complex, built upon multiple events from each individual's past and present. August is a gangly, thin young man attempting to find his true self and endure the taunts of others. His spirit becomes so strong that even as a ghost he shows up in Betsy's photographs. Hoffman's writing evokes gloriously poetic images and stirs emotional responses as she wields her style of magical realism, and the story captures the magic in living and the power of love. Young adults familiar with Hoffman's other books will enjoy this as will fans of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Laura Esquivel's work.

Pam Johnson, Fairfax County Public Library, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alberta Townsend:

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Sheila Robinson:

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