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Tim Westover

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Water spirits, moon maidens, haunted pianos, headless revenants, and an invincible terrapin that lives under the mountains. None of these distract James Holtzclaw from his employer's mission: to turn the fading gold-rush town of Auraria, GA, into a first-class resort and drown its fortunes below a man-made lake. But when Auraria's peculiar people and problematic ghosts collide with his own rival ambitions, Holtzclaw must decide what he will save and what will be washed away. Taking its inspiration from a real Georgia ghost town, Auraria is steeped in the folklore of the Southern Appalachians, where the tensions of natural, supernatural and artificial are still alive.

Auraria Details

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Author : Tim Westover

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From Reader Review Auraria for online ebook

Steph says

Within the first few pages of reading Auraria, I knew that I had found something special. What a delightful surprise Auraria turned out to be! An early critic of the novel compared it to "Through the Looking Glass" and, like it's predecessor, Auraria holds a distinct and unique magical quality, both in its story and its writing.

The plot weaves the story of one young man's struggle between the desire for progress, prosperity and proving oneself with the mysticism and beauty of nature and the simplicity to be found in it, so often forsaken for loftier, vain aspirations and only later to be discovered and recognized for its worth. It blends in fascinating accounts of Appalachian folklore with lovable and memorable characters.

I don't know that there has ever been a book like Auraria. Tim Westover has created something truly remarkable. Like Lewis Carroll's and Garcia-Marquez's work, Auraria is meant to be read by generations to come.

P.S. This was a Goodreads "FirstRead". Thank you Publishers!

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

This book was definitely different than I expected. It's sort of hard to categorize it. The story is definitely unique. I could see this story appealing to a wide variety of readers. As a historical fiction lover, I really liked the historical elements. The story takes place in the late 1800s. It was interesting to see what things were like then. There is also a really interesting fantasy element to it, mostly having to do with the characters, which I will get into later.

Auraria is in the middle of nowhere Georgia. It's not all that notable except for the people or rather beings that make their home there. I loved all of the different beings in this book. Westover does a great job with making them feel really real. That's definitely a talent! I love when authors are able to turn the fantastic into something familiar. It's sort of magical realism in a way. My favorite character was the Princess of the lake. She is just a really cool and very well written character.

The downside of this book to me really had to do with the main character, Holtzclaw. There is all of this fantastic stuff going on around him and he's just not that exciting on his own. He's definitely a good guy and is trying to do right by his employer, Shadburn, and by the people of the town but he struck me as a little bit flat. On the upside, he did help to make the more unique characters stand out a little bit more.

Bottom line: This book is great for those who like a little fantastic with their literary.

Cats of Ulthar says

A delightfully winsome and cozy historical fantasy, set in Northern Georgia; an alternate history of a factual locale, a near-ghost town which, like so many, was founded on the potential boom of a gold rush. Auraria, in this book, is not what one might expect to find, however; instead, it is something more akin to Faeryland: singing trees, fish that live in mist, and much, much, more.

Staid Mr. James Holtzclaw, right-hand man for a land acquisitions firm-a man who values order and symmetry-is about to experience his perception of reality undergoing a kaleidoscopic change. Holtzclaw plans to travel to Auraria to buy up all the land possible, for his employer's unstated purposes; but folks in Auraria are much more clever than he has any right to expect.

Really, Holtzclaw should have paid much closer attention to the mythical and bizarre figures on the gold coins his employer handed him, to use for payment to the landowners of Auraria and environs. And he should have listened to what folks told him about Auraria...

Collyn says

It's Gatsby...but not. Women with voices "like money" and flickering green lights at the ends of docks, and yet it's not a love story or in any way derivative. It's about what money makes of us, so in a way, Auraria is a lot like Gatsby, but with mysticism and rural Georgia.

Benjamin says

I am very impressed with this book, it was so masterfully written. After reading Auraria, I feel like I've actually been in the towns, mountains, and valleys. The characters are so vivid, by the end of the story, I felt like I knew everybody in town. Perhaps my favorite part was how Mr. Westover mixed myth with realism, he never went overboard with the folklore. In this sense it reminded me of another of my favorite books, American Gods by Neil Gaiman. Reading this book was a pleasure, and I look forward to seeing what other books Mr. Westover publishes in the future!

Michelle says

I very much enjoyed this book! It's a lovely piece of magical realism that made me happy throughout the entire book. Highly recommended.

Maggie says

This is such an imaginative story and filled with the most unusual spirits. I really enjoyed reading about this magical place and the locals, spirits included. One reviewer compared Auraria to the magical world of Wonderland. I can agree. Once you begin reading, the unusual becomes common much as Alice's adventures did. The fact that a boy can catch a fish out of a mist seems not only possible but normal. Talking to ghosts and giant turtles and singing trees is common place in Auraria. The building of a dam to build a resort hotel

and turn the venture into a profitable business deal was secondary for me. My primary love for this story was the fantasy and the imaginative magical happenings. Mountain folklore and real happenings mix well in this novel. This book will be enjoyed by those who love a good fantasy mixed with a touch of romance.

Hope says

I won a copy through the Goodreads' Firstreads program.

Fantasy collides with reality in this refreshing novel by Tim Westover. AURORIA is set in the mountainous valleys of Georgia, in a town tucked away from prying eyes. Moon maidens, spirits, and wonders abide throughout the countryside.

When aspiring businessman James Holtzclaw journeys to Auroria on business at his employer Shadburn's behest, he finds himself immersed in a culture unlike any before. A sleepy little ghost town should be an easy triumph, but there is more nestling among the waters than meets the eye. The story follows Holtzclaw as he discovers a variety of treasure, local folk, and obstacles.

I found this story enchanting and dream-like. The first few chapters don't reel you in, but if you wade past them - what a catch. Westover has such mastery over storytelling and the English language that I will want to go back and read this every once in a while simply for its beauty.

The characters are rich and vibrant, with so much truth behind the human condition. The storyline crescendos with action then gives way to moments of peace or sheer whimsy. Reminiscent of books like BIG FISH, the tall tales and magic cater to those of us who seek adventure.

I highly recommend this, and wish there was more on which to indulge. I would give this more stars if I could. Happy reading!

Joy Davis says

Auraria is an unusual mixture of fact, fantasy, magic, and mayhem...all set in a town in GA called Auraria. It is a compelling story and a delightful read!

Laurie says

'Auraria' is a fantasy story set in a real town and based on many of the local folklore and superstitions. Auraria, Georgia had a very brief gold rush in the mid-1800s; then most of the people left again. But some hung on, running pharmacies and bars and hotels. They farmed and were turkey drovers and, no matter what their regular work was, most of them sought gold. Holtzclaw has been sent there by his employer, Shadburn, a land developer who, it turns out, grew up in Auraria, although Holtzclaw is not aware of this fact at first. Holtzclaw, it turns out, does not know a lot of things about his employer or the town of Auraria when he first gets there.

Sent to procure certain parcels of land from the locals, Holtzclaw finds things to be not quite normal from the

minute he sets foot in Auraria. A boy fishes in mist rather than water. A watery princess appears and disappears. A phantom piano player amuses the patrons of a tavern. There is a singing tree, and a giant tortoise that talks. The townspeople regard this all as perfectly normal, rather like dwellers in Charles de Lint's Newford regard fairies in the city, and so Holtzclaw does, too. That's part of what I love about the story: that the supernatural is so accepted and normal in this place, and that a newcomer can do so, too. There are multiple plots taking place during the story; a lot of different people have plans of their own about Shadburn's development, which involves building a damn and turning the valley into a lake.

It's a tale of human greed and folly, and blindness to what is real and beautiful. It's beautifully written; I wouldn't change a single word. Despite the plot of land developer despoiling nature, the book is not a simplistic tale of evil greed vs nature & good folks; it's more complicated than that, as life tends to be. The book has been compared to "Through the Looking Glass", but I disagree. While fantastic things happen, it all hangs together with internal logic in a way that Carroll's work doesn't. I was sorry when I came to the end of this story.

Tammy says

This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

They say "don't judge a book by its cover," and sometimes I agree with that and sometimes I don't. In the case of *Auraria*, however, I'm begging you to not judge it by the cover. When I was first asked to review Tim Westover's latest, I was left a little flat by its nondescript gray tones, and I couldn't imagine what this book was supposed to be about. But the story caught me completely off guard, and I'm here to tell you *Auraria* is a book worth reading, and I am recommending it without hesitation.

Filled with folktales and magical imagery, *Auraria* is the tale of two men, Shadburn and Holtzclaw, who try to turn the small, mountainous town of Auraria, Georgia into a world-class vacation resort. The first sentence of the book sets the tone for what's to come:

"Holtzclaw hadn't heard of Auraria until his employer sent him to destroy it."

Holtzclaw is given the task of buying up all the land parcels in Auraria so that his employer Shadburn can launch his plan. But when he arrives and starts getting to know the townsfolk, he discovers a wild and unpredictable place full of ghosts, singing trees, and moon maidens that bathe in the springs of Auraria in order to wash the gold off their skin. At first Holtzclaw is skeptical of the piano-playing ghosts and fish that jump out of the mist, but the longer he stays in Auraria, the more he becomes enchanted by the magical forces at play. Most of the land owners he approaches sell their property willingly enough after seeing the pile of money and gold coins Holtzclaw pulls out of his bag, and before long Shadburn joins Holtzclaw in Auraria to begin putting his plan into action: building a huge dam to stop the waters that flow throughout the town to create an immense lake, which will literally bury Auraria underwater.

The pace of the story is like a leisurely stroll down a mountain path. Westover takes his time painting a picture of the strange town, and his masterful descriptions of Auraria and its inhabitants evoke a folktale feeling. The themes of water and gold weave their way throughout the story. When Holtzclaw first arrives in town, he meets Princess Trahlyta, a mysterious girl who appears whenever Holtzclaw is near the water. She pops up again and again in the story and serves as a mentor and a muse for Holtzclaw as he becomes

embroiled in the goings-on of the strange community. And Auraria, like its name, is full of gold, but only those who are lucky will ever find it in vast amounts. Flakes of gold, or “colors,” are everywhere, and the residents of Auraria even wear hats that double as gold pans. But as the residents are told to move to higher ground before the lake rises, Shadburn reveals a darker purpose for flooding the valley: he wants to literally bury the gold underwater and recreate Auraria as something other than a gold town.

As Shadburn’s vision is finally realized and people begin to flock to the newly built Queen of the Mountain hotel and Lake Trahlyta, the ill-built dam begins to crumble and the townsfolk’s ever-increasing dreams of gold spark a frenzy of gold hunting that signals the end of Shadburn’s dream. For the town of Auraria, and its gold, refuse to stay buried, and Princess Trahlyta is determined to put things back the way they were.

Westover’s imagery is wonderful. When Holtzclaw goes to the cemetery to try to convince the ghosts to abandon their graves, he finds them unwilling to leave: “The dead clung to their coffins like survivors of a shipwreck.” And at the Old Rock Falls tavern he meets Abigail, whose dusty bottles of spirits evoke a magical world: “At the bottom, sediment in suspension was swirled upwards by Abigail’s handling then drifted downwards again like a lazy ghost.”

Auraria contains far too many marvels to list here. I was reminded of both Lewis Carroll and Neil Gaiman, for both the playfully absurd characters and Westover’s ability to make the reader fall in love with a town full of magic and ghosts, despite that absurdity. The author weaves a spell that will leave you believing in ghostly piano players and story-telling terrapins, all the way to the book’s perfect and satisfying end.

Many thanks to QW Publishers, for supplying a review copy.

Emily says

I requested this book from LibraryThing's Early Reviewer program because the description, of a place in Georgia where supernatural creatures abound, intrigued me. I was excited to learn that I had won it. When I got the book, however, I saw on the back cover that it had been compared to *Alice in Wonderland* and I was much less enthused. I really, really did not like *Alice* or *Through the Looking Glass* (please don't stone me!). Fortunately, though, I really did like this book.

I identified heavily with Holtzclaw, who is charged by his increasingly distracted employer to purchase land in Auraria and then build upon it a grand hotel. As the wondrous happenings kept piling up, Holtzclaw tended to take them in stride and respond respectfully and pleasantly, without freaking out or disbelieving as a lot of fantasy protagonists who are not originally from the outlandish place they find themselves. I found it amusing that Holtzclaw had more trouble with the supposedly "regular" people: contractors, out-of-town guests, etc, than he did with the ghosts, giant turtle, eccentric townspeople, and baa-ing fruits.

The writing was descriptive and captivating, I hardly wanted to put it down. Apparently, this is the author's first novel in English, but you wouldn't be able to tell.

One small nit-pick: as I was reading, I dismissed many typographical, spelling and grammar errors thinking this was an ARC. Turns out it isn't. Uh-oh.

On the whole a very entertaining and rewarding book. You could even read it with/to your kids; although it isn't written expressly for children, there wasn't a single bit of objectionable content. It's probably less racy than the *Wonderland* books, but with a much more intriguing plotline. I kind of wish I could relocate to Auraria myself. It seems there would never be a dull moment!

Angie Lisle says

The story begins with Holtsclaw leaving behind the civilized city to travel to Auraria, a once-booming gold mining town turned ghost town, located in Georgia's rural mountains. His boss, Shadwell, has assigned him the task of purchasing all the land in town - by whatever means necessary.

Holtsclaw cares only for money; he dreams of being a big business tycoon like his boss Shadwell. But the business in Auraria doesn't go as Holtsclaw planned, namely because the local folklore is still alive and magic doesn't respond as mortals do. With help from a quirky cast of characters, Holtsclaw realizes that life offers something much more magical than money or gold.

Much of the folklore is based on early Colonial interpretations of Cherokee myths, showing how the Cherokee left their marks on the land, even after the Trail of Tears. This theme is reinforced by Westover's use of the actual historical events that followed the Trail of Tears: the gold rushes of colonial NC and GA, the tourist trade in Appalachia, and a new era of industrialization. The reader can continue this theme by comparing and contrasting the Industrial Era and today's computer era. In a unique way, the story shows how time, and people, continue to leave marks on a place. The well of local legends is never depleted, but continuously renewed.

I received a free uncorrected proof copy of this book from goodreads first reads. There were a few typos/grammatical errors but Tim Westover assures me that these have been fixed in the final version. This is the author's first novel written in English; this book feels like it was written by someone born and raised in Appalachia.

Katy says

Book Info: Genre: Magical Realism Reading Level: Adult

Disclosure: I received a free eGalley eBook edition of this text from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review

Synopsis: Water spirits, moon maidens, haunted pianos, headless revenants, and an invincible terrapin that lives under the mountains. None of these distract James Holtzclaw from his employer's mission: to turn the fading gold-rush town of Auraria, GA, into a first-class resort and drown its fortunes below a man-made lake. But when Auraria's peculiar people and problematic ghosts collide with his own rival ambitions, Holtzclaw must decide what he will save and what will be washed away.

Taking its inspiration from a real Georgia ghost town, "*Auraria*: is steeped in the folklore of the Southern Appalachians, where the tensions of natural, supernatural and artificial are still alive.

My Thoughts: I live in Georgia, but haven't really been into the north Georgia mountains. I was charmed by the fantastic happenings that Holtzclaw experiences in and around the community of Auraria. I've become interested in learning more about the lore and legends of this area as a result of reading this book. Since I have absolutely no knowledge, I can't comment on whether the creatures and ghosts used in the book are based upon real legends and lore, but the legends and such he uses/creates for this book are very fun.

I would be hard-pressed to choose a favorite among the many characters – living, dead, and supernatural – that people this excellent story. The residents of Auraria are varied and eccentric, and watching Holtzclaw – the consummate city gentleman – as he tried to provide an “appropriate” reaction to the more-often-than-not crazy events around him was highly entertaining; I spent a great deal of time giggling while reading this story. It reminded me, in a lot of ways, of the old tall tales we used to read and hear when I was in grade school, such as Pecos Bill and the like.

The end of the book is devoted to an explanation of some of the real-life places and events that served as inspiration for this story, although it does not address the supernatural elements such as the plat-eye, the wonder fish, the moon maidens and the like, on which I plan to do some research when I can shave out the time. All in all, if you enjoy tall tales, legends, stories of the strange and wonderful, and the mysterious, you should enjoy this very engaging and enjoyable book. Highly recommended.

April Steenburgh says

Holtzclaw is a respectable man, trying to conduct respectable business and purchase properties in the valley of Auraria for his employer Shadburn. He does not know what Shadburn wants the land for, but he has seen the man's magic touch when it comes to turning purchases into profit. Unfortunately, Auraria is not a laid back lady ready to give up her land and citizens easily. It is an unruly valley, filled with fish that can be fished out of thick mist instead of water, moon maidens, ghosts, an ethereal princess, and gold. The entire valley is haunted by gold, the potential for the next big strike. Holtzclaw will need every trick in his book to convince landowners to sell, all the while trying to decide whether to hold onto what he knows is real and sane or to fall into the wonder that is Auraria.

Auraria is a bit of historical whimsy, facts folded so neatly into folklore that it is impossible to pry one from the other. I loved the almost off hand manner in which elements of the fantastic were described to the reader—they were presented as a fact of life for Auraria, nothing remarkable. And as a reader, that air became infectious. Even as Holtzclaw became accepting of ghosts and moderately sentient fruit, the reader is drawn along with him into the brilliant madness that is Auraria. It is a wonderful meld of history with folk culture, ghost stories, and tales told grandparent to grandchild on cold nights before a warm fire.

The story itself is a thoughtful move through conflicts of mundane and mystical, of belief and what drives us to do the things we do on a daily basis. It is about loyalty and love and the roots we have to our hometowns. For the historically minded, it is an original look at the tourism industry that drove resorts to pop up across the country like weeds. I spent much of my childhood in the Adirondacks, where my family has its roots, so reading Auraria was almost like visiting old neighbors. We didn't have the drive for gold, but we had some of the same quirky characters and were in an area obsessed with attracting tourists.

Whether you are a fantasy reader, a fan of historical fiction, or just looking for something new and brilliantly unique to read, give Auraria a shot.
