



Through the Portal

Riley J. Dennis , Justin Dennis

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When Jem and Oliver accidentally fall through a portal to another world just before their first year of high school, they quickly discover that all is not well here. The first person they meet, a creepy old man named Atychis, almost gets them killed by a ferocious, fire-breathing dragon. They're only narrowly saved when Sierra, a shy farm girl from a nearby town, uses illegal magic to help them escape. Allowed to stay with her family while they try to figure out a way back home, Jem and Oliver begin to learn of magic and the Regime that is oppressing it.

It isn't until the Regime kills a woman that the three kids realize they have to do something to stop the Regime from taking over completely. After being framed for a crime they didn't commit and banished from the town, Jem, Oliver, and Sierra take off on an adventure across this strange world in an attempt to defeat the Regime. New creatures and new kinds of magic are around every corner, but so are dangers that could have them wishing they were back safe at home.

Through the Portal is approximately 104,000 words and is the first in a trilogy.

One of the unique characteristics within Through the Portal is the use of sylph, a physical manifestation of magic that allows the user to manipulate it however they need while exerting minimal energy. Sylph makes transportation available through sylphcycles and sylphquads, and is just one of the exciting new concepts explored in this magical and complex world.

Trigger Warning: There are discussions of child abuse in this novel.

Through the Portal Details

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From Reader Review Through the Portal for online ebook

Chandra Vice says

I think this was a really good story that could definitely have benefited from a good proofreader. There were times I'd be jarred out of the story because, for example, clothes was used in place of closed. There were also a few times the conversations seemed to end in a strangely abrupt fashion that didn't really flow. Still, the story itself rose above all that.

I like some of the parallels drawn to real world issues. For example, one of the animal species in the book has no gender; any of them can reproduce if they so choose and the pronoun used for them is "it". I thought that was great.

I also love that the main female character was written as her own person, with her own personality and power, as opposed to just being the prize for the male hero. Too often women are written that way and I hate it; it's so refreshing to see a great female character who is her own woman.

I'm hoping the next two books had a better proofreader than this one - I'm such a nut about proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Regardless, I want to know how it ends, so I'll be reading them either way.

Rants and Bants says

I'm afraid to read anything from this author, considering how he's a huge bigot, specifically towards men, white people, thin people, etc. But so long as those views aren't shoved into this book, MAYBE I can enjoy it.

Beverly McClure says

THROUGH THE PORTAL (Review)

Justin Dennis

Ebook courtesy of the author

Some kids get teased a lot at school. Some kids defend those that are teased. Friendship is a beautiful thing. Everyone needs a friend they can depend on.

In Justin Dennis's debut novel, *Through the Portal*, we meet Jem Surwae and Oliver Pautelle. Jem is poor and often the victim of the bullies at school. He isn't looking forward to entering high school next year. Oliver lives in a mansion and takes up for Jem.

On the last day of school, at 1 AM, the boys decide to go scuba diving. When they discover a hole in the bottom of the lake, their whole lives change and they're soon on an adventure that takes them through a portal to another world. A 4-foot tall man, a giant bear, and Red Dragons are just the beginning. The boys meet sisters, Sierra and Rimaya, who use magic even though the Regime has outlawed magic for the people.

Jem and Oliver want to help fight the Regime before they take control and kill everyone opposed to them, but they soon find themselves in big trouble. You'll have to read the book to find out how, or if, they succeed in their goals.

Likeable characters and interesting encounters with unusual creatures in a fantasy world make for a fast read. At times the wrong words were used, such as "but" instead of "butt," "past" for "passed," and "where" for "wear" for example that distracted me. (This is the English teacher in me, I suppose.) Given that, the author has written a story that will appeal to fantasy lovers who like characters with spunk. This is the first book in a trilogy, so join in the fun and follow Jem and Oliver on their travels.

3 1/2 stars

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Tai says

Through the Portal was a cute story but I had some issues with it. Overall the editing mistakes were minimal and didn't take away from my reading experience. I found this book had original concepts I haven't come across before which was refreshing. I loved the concept of dragonets and how magic behaved in this world. I did have issues with the character development though. In the beginning as the main characters (Oliver and Jem and later Sierra and Maya) were developing and I was learning what makes them tick I did enjoy them as characters that was until they started behaving in ways I felt was out of character as the author had portrayed them thus far. Don't get me wrong I understand when characters do things I find frustrating or annoying but when they behavior/action comes from left field and I can't picture the character behaving that way I get pulled out of the story and that throws a kink in my reading experience which I find highly annoying. This happened several times within this book for me (I won't give examples as I do my best not to put spoilers in my reviews). Also I would have like more explanation to why things were happening like why did the Regime targeted the foursome? I know this is just the 1st book of the series so some of my question could possibly (hopefully) be answered in later books. However because I didn't have a lot of buy-in to Oliver's and Jem's characters and thus their adventure into this new magical world I will not be continuing this series to find out what happens next. I didn't connect with the characters as their behavior and actions didn't always ring true with me so my journey with into the magical world Jem and Oliver found themselves in has come to an end. Overall Rating 2.5 stars.

Lisa says

Really good. Downloaded the second in the series.

Stateless says

Had to abandon this one. Three things that really irritated me:

1) two kids not even at high school go scuba diving at night in what is described as a dirty lake. One of the kids is poor but there is a description of a holiday that the other kid's wealthy family pays for him to come along. Is that where the poor kid learns scuba, or do they teach it at the primary school. Or in this crappy

lake, the rich kid's family pay for scuba lessons.

2) At the bottom of the lake, the rich kid picks up a tire rim and throws it "through the water like a frisbee" and in the dark water sees his "disappointed face" just before. Are you kidding! - bit dark to see the kids face unless the torch is pointed directly at him, and throwing anything like a frisbee at the bottom of a lake - for a 12 yr old.

3) as others have noted - no fear factor or anything - oh well, we are in a different world, that's cool. Let's have an adventure - one that I will not join you for.

Plus why does Jem call Oliver - Olive - sorry betraying my age, I just think of Olive Oyl, Popeye's love. Surely no one calls an Oliver, Olive - or maybe they do in the US?

Marc Secchia says

Badly needs proofreading. Downloaded Sept 2013 - according to the author's comment on Amazon in March 2013, this was after a professional proofread ... and we have:

"Hey," burst Oliver - Oliver burst? That must have been ugly.

A massive bear-looking creature - some other creature was looking at a bear?

The teacher scrounged his eyebrows - I wonder where he scrounged them from? Scrunched if anything.

The MC manages to kick off a latter - I suppose we mean 'ladder' here. Twice.

LOTS OF USE OF CAPITALS TO MAKE PEOPLE SHOUT

Those are just a few examples. I would not have paid a single dollar for this proofread, and neither I suspect would anyone else. I got as far as the end of chapter 2 and gave up. Maybe someone else would enjoy it more.

Charlie says

I have mixed feelings about this book. What do I mean by that?

This was a difficult book for me to get through. Don't get me wrong – it's a wonderful and great story. This book was a very stick-it-to-the-man, defy-the-system type, which little ol' scrappy me likes, but it was just too slow at the beginning, and about mid-way through it started slacking off again, and then again toward the end. I would fall asleep many nights with my Kindle in my hands, trying to get through a few more pages. The chapters were extraordinarily long for a piece of fiction. Perhaps that contributed to this feeling of "I'm never going to finish this book!"

Now, with that said: this is a book that could be made into the next big blockbuster. I would actually look forward to seeing this story play out on the big screen.

Oliver is a youth from a world of privilege. His parents have money enough, he has a younger sibling that adores him. His family has got it going on. Oliver is strong-willed and outspoken. Bold.

Jem is a troubled boy from the other side of the tracks. His parents died in a skydiving incident when he was a babe, and he has been raised by his ailing and blind grandmother ever since. He is very poor and knows that it wouldn't matter if he disappeared: his grandmother wouldn't even notice. :(Jem is that cowering kid in the corner, the exact opposite of Oliver.

Growing up, kids weeded out and picked on Jem because of his background. Oliver stood up for him, and they became fast friends. Oliver's family would take Jem with them on trips, and he became an extension of their family.

This fact, the two main characters being foils of one another, immediately made me imagine all kinds of conflict to play out in this book. Fortunately, nothing compared with what I imagined, and their friendship remained intact.

I don't know what type of time frame this book covers – it's not very specific – and that's something I was interested to know. Oliver and Jem fall through a portal at the bottom of Lake Sammamich (near Seattle) and wash ashore in a new world: Callisto. They are found by Atychis, a former Elder of the Argo region. Atychis is certifiable, and readers truly find out just how much so at the end of the book. They also have a run-in with the Red Dragon.

Jem and Oliver also meet Sierra and her older sister Rimaya, who's dad is a stringent Regime follower. The Regime, under the power of Veroci, has little by little taken over almost all of Callisto and outlawed magic. And that's where Jem, Oliver, Sierra, and Rimaya get into trouble.

The Terello family has graciously offered their home to Jem and Oliver, who help out on the farm. The boys are trying to come to grips with this new world, and what exactly is going on. They go to the local cafe to have some fizzies, and BAM! They are on "trial" for a major crime they didn't commit. They see just how far the Regime will go to maintain control, and they flee.

Growing up in Argo, Sierra has been told all her life of legends: the legend of the Red Dragon, the Phoenix, the world of Kelados, the legend of 1000 Curses. The Regime has structured the world so that citizens remain in the region they were born into. There is no crossing the borders, for they have magnificently implemented the Legend of 1000 Curses: you cross the regional border into another region, you are cursed with 1000 curses, one of which is to grow a third leg. Obviously, Oliver and Jem see right through this ploy.

The three continue on throughout the world of Callisto, which is divided into six regions, pursued by Regime guards, all while trying to develop their magical skills. They come upon a scene that is very familiar to Oliver and Jem: a kid, Farouche, getting picked on by a gang of kids. Farouche turns out to be quiet a little inventor, and follows them in secret. The entire journey, people are constantly making unremarkable comments about Jem's eyes being blue. It was starting to drive me crazy, because readers don't find out why until the last quarter of the book.

Along the way, they have to make some serious choices about where they belong. They come face-to-face with Veroci himself after being betrayed by a second Elder, and end up in a land uninhabited by Regime outposts. They come to live a comfortable and safe life in the region of Luria, with an Elder who is honest, and hell-bent on defeating the Regime, but secretive. But the Red Dragon also lurks in the skies of Luria.

Jem and Sierra are a unique pair; she will stick by his side no matter what, even through her fears. Through an unfortunate set of events, Jem becomes convinced that Veroci is hoarding an army of Regime guards in the North Island, a place that is almost inhospitable, even though everyone else remains unconvinced.

The two also learn of a portal that goes to Kelados, and of course go looking for it, and are attacked by the Red Dragon...but Jem notices that the dragon has a rider. They are rescued and nursed back to health, but discover that Jem has a very unique quality about him. Scientists and doctors try again and again unsuccessfully to get him to exhibit the talents of his new quality. They determine he cannot bring these talents to fruition, but Sierra knows they will. She jumps off the roof to test her theory, which proves correct. After this discovery, they set off for North Island...and encounter the Red Dragon and its rider.

I wish I could talk about the ending, but I can't. My blabbermouth would give it away, but I will say that it is a fantastic ending! I will say this: Jem shares with Sierra that his parents' bodies were never found, and I have a feeling they will show up in one of the sequential books.

I was impressed with the transformation of Jem, in particular, in this book. He starts off as only what I can imagine as the Coward of the County, and grows and develops beyond his previous limits. He sheds this outer skin, because before it seemed as if he was riding on Oliver's coat tails. It would have been an interesting story if Oliver had stayed in Callisto, to see how things would have turned out.

Heather says

Through the Portal by Justin Dennis is the first book in a fantasy trilogy for young adults. The story opens with Jem and Oliver, best friends who are attending summer school. Jem is smart, shy, poor, and gets teased a lot. Oliver is popular, rich, and has a wild streak. Together the two of them go off on crazy adventures that Oliver dreams up. One night they sneak off and go scuba diving in the lake only to be sucked through a portal into another world.

The other world is anything but ordinary. In the first hour they are there the boys are chased and almost killed by a fire breathing dragon. They are only saved by a farm girl named Sierra who was nearby and used her magic to save them. Oliver and Jem soon realize that in addition to the magic and fire breathing dragons, they've landed in a world that is on the brink of war.

Sierra tells the boys about the nasty Veroci Regime that has been taking away The Souls from the six regions of her world. The Souls are what powers the magic of the people and the Regime is taking them in order to limit the magic of the people and strengthen their own magic. Jem, Oliver, and Sierra want to join the revolution but in order to do so they have to make it to one of the far away regions while at the same time avoiding both the fire breathing dragon and the Regime.

I found the first half of the book to be slow moving and fairly unbelievable, even for a fantasy novel. It was hard to imagine that two young teenage boys would barely have a second thought about their families as they are thrown into a world parallel to Earth. While I enjoyed getting the background on the characters, I found them to be behaving in ways that didn't follow their personalities. There were also several spelling, grammatical, and punctuation errors that detracted from the story.

The second half of the book was much better. It was fast paced with a lot of action. Jem and Sierra meet up with many different characters and begin strengthening their magic in order to defeat both the dragon and the Regime. The book ends with the defeat of one of these things but not the other which leaves an opening into the second book in this trilogy.

In all I thought the book was average and I probably will not read the other two books in the trilogy.

However, I do think that middle school and high school children would really enjoy the adventures of Jem in this book and that they would continue reading the trilogy. This book is definitely geared towards teenagers.

Cege Smith says

The one thing that I want to clarify right from the get go is that this is Jem's story through and through. Although his best friend Oliver is an important supporting character, *Through the Portal* is all about Jem.

When we first meet Jem, he's a quiet, smart, put-upon young fellow who is living his life in the shadow of his wealthy, gregarious, impulsive best friend Oliver. And it's Oliver's hijinks that get them both accidentally sucked through a portal into a parallel world to Earth called Callisto. Once there, the boys quickly learn that Callisto has been slowly falling under the rule of the Veroci Regime and that isn't a good thing.

All people in Callisto are able to use magic (but only if a magic source is available to them-which is part of Veroci's evil plot to control Callisto.) As Jem and Oliver become more at home in Callisto, they decide that they want to join the rumored rebellion and fight against the Veroci Regime.

Jem is joined by a young farm girl, Sierra, who has her own reasons for wanting to get away from where she has grown up. After an unfortunate incident forces their hand, Jem, Oliver, and Sierra set off to find the rebels. This adventure takes them through many of the regions of Callisto, where they learn more about this strange world they've fallen into, and Jem becomes more and more wedded to his new life.

Through the Portal is the first book in a planned trilogy by the author, and introduces us to the main characters who will likely be integral parts of the future books while laying the groundwork for what looks to be an epic battle between the Callisto rebels and the Veroci Regime.

I know from my own writing that telling a story here on Earth can be difficult enough- creating a whole new world with its topography, inhabitants, native creatures, etc. can be mind-boggling. I felt like the author handled this well and did a nice job of giving us the important details without going overboard.

The action throughout the story is well-paced. Jem visits almost every region in Callisto, and each one has its own unique culture. He and his friends have to do some fast thinking to avoid getting caught by the Regime, but at the same time they are just kids trying to figure out their next move. So they need help along the way, and sometimes their forward progress required some time standing still to learn some valuable lessons.

We also have a fledging romantic subplot brewing between Jem and Sierra. It's evident throughout the book that they are drawn to each other, but they have to deal with their own individual growing pains. The author handles this delicately and really offers up the promise of more to come without being overt about it.

My main critique of the story is that the plot wasn't what I expected it to be. From the description, you might hazard a guess that this was a going to be a "coming-of-age, best friends" kind of story where we see the growth of not only Jem and Oliver individually, but of the bond of their friendship. That wasn't the case at all. Oliver is relegated fairly early on to a supporting character, and Jem takes the forefront for the remainder of the book. That doesn't deter from this book having a solid plot, but it did distract me for a period of time.

The second thing that threw me off a bit was that although I think the author intended in some places for us to see Jem as becoming more assertive in his thoughts/actions, he came across instead as immature and whiny. (Of course, he is a teenager so that lends credibility to the character.)

There are some minor spelling/grammatical issues throughout but nothing that detracts from the storyline.

The book ends on a high note. Jem and Sierra have just fought a major battle and won, and finally found their way to the Callisto rebels. But it's clear that this is just the beginning and the author has a lot more in store for us, so I will read the next installment.

Reviewer note: I was provided a complimentary copy of this ebook for review.

Matt_E says

Really good book. Got it for free from the kindle store after trying to find a new fantasy series. I know it's aimed towards teens but it was still enough to keep me interested as it has a good story with some very interesting and original concepts I did rush to the kindle store to buy the second book as soon as I had finished this one and am a few chapters into it and it was equally as good. As for the previous reviewer commenting issues with grammar other issues but I only noticed one myself and it was in no way jarring or detrimental to the flow of the story (and am normally quite picky with things like that. The electric versions of a lot of Terry Pratchett's books are pretty bad for that).

JeanBookNerd says

Through The Portal by Justin Dennis is a brilliant start to a fantasy trilogy. Dennis' debut will surely become an instant favorite for fans of that genre. It has the potential to become very big with young readers. The story is what makes fantasy books very enjoyable.

Dennis vividly created a masterpiece with a great plot that contained many twists and turns. He introduces two teenage boys, Oliver and Jem, which are the most entertaining characters and easily likable. There are so many duos out there that consists of one who is outgoing and the other more reserved and quiet. However, Dennis' writing style makes their personalities burst with color and character.

Dennis guides the teenage boys into an out-of-this-world adventure where troubles and monsters seem to be at every turn. The portal they go through will introduce a land full of magic, beast, and dragons. The stuff you would expect from this genre is all here but Dennis sheds a new light that makes his concept very original. The realm inside the portal is beautifully detailed. Dennis has literally absorbed everything that people love in fantasy books into a sponge and squeezed it all out into Through The Portal. And I'm sure he'll keep the same process for the next installments.

3.5 Book Nerd Review

Sheila says

Rich-kid Oliver is as quick to help a stranger as he is to accidentally harm a friend in *Through the Portal*, by Justin Dennis. Oliver's a typical teen perhaps but more thoughtless than those I've known best, and in the end he's not the hero of this tale. His friend, poor-kid Jem, is clever, eager to please, and easily led, but that might change. Both boys are sucked through a portal as at the bottom of a lake near Seattle and the story begins.

While I found the characters somewhat childishly annoying in their Seattle world, this novel really takes off when they enter Callisto. While still thoughtlessly idealistic ("Where I come from, individuality is cherished," says the boy who's been teased for being different), both boys soon know they have a lot to learn.

The new world is nicely imagined, with lots of intriguing details to carry the story (including a dragon), and some clever analogies with modern America. The Regime attempts to control all magic, adults attempt to protect those in their care, and Jem, together with his new friend Sierra, tries to save the world without adequate backup. Some mysteries remain unresolved at story's end, but Jem's learning to take a stand, Oliver's learning responsibility, and the adults are learning that teens may have something to offer after all.

Occasional errors in grammar and word choice do slow the story sometimes and some of the explanations are a little too easy, but *Through the Portal* by Justin Dennis promises to be the start of an interesting teen trilogy with plenty of action, intriguingly scientific magic, and, of course, dragons.

Disclosure: I received a free copy of this novel from the author in exchange for an honest review.

A Book Vacation says

To see my full review:

<http://wp.me/p1jhaj-410>

This novel's premise of traveling through a portal through the bottom of a lake is absolutely ingenious. It really impressed me because it's such a unique idea that really worked well in this story. I am always impressed by the imagination of others, mainly because I have none of my own, and after the fact I always wish I had thought of it myself. In this case, Dennis has done a great job creating the backdrop for his novel and drawing the reader in. As our heroes travel through the portal, they are taken to a very different world all together, one with magic, dragons, and an intense dictatorship intent on ruling their world.

While I really enjoyed the ingenuity of this novel, I didn't necessarily connect with the characters as much as I'd have liked to, and I feel that is because they are a bit juvenile for me. However, I believe that a MG and YA aged readers who enjoyed fantasy and sci-fi will really enjoy this novel as it's a true escape from our own world.

Teena Evans says

I found this a little bit hard to read... The language was quite simplistic and I felt like the story was lacking a bit for me.

It seemed to have some exciting moments but then took ages to build momentum again.

I also found it unrealistic right at the start when two boys seem to stumble in to another world but seem totally ok with it. How do they immediately know they're not on earth? From what is described to us, they could still be. They just seem to immediately know they aren't, so I felt that the surrounding area needed a bit more other-worldly description.
