

YA Book Review

DAUGHTER OF THE DEEP: RICK RIORDAN DIVES INTO SCIENCE FICTION

John Franklin

Pittsburg State University

Science fiction fans will be delighted to discover that Rick Riordan has turned his formidable tale-telling talent to their world, initiating a new series of adventures based on Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and *The Mysterious Island*.

Fans of the prolific Riordan will recognize his recipe: a plucky protagonist, competition between two schools, a fast-moving plot, and an imaginative setting simultaneously comfortable and intriguing.

Our protagonist is Ana, descended from Verne's Captain Nemo, himself a rebellious Asian-Indian prince disenchanted with imperialist, culture-destroying nations bent on colonizing lands with exploitable resources.

Orphaned when her parents die at sea, Ana is a freshman at Harding-Pencroft Academy (H-P), an ocean-centric school where her older brother Dev is an upperclassman.

Opposed to H-P (the reverberations with Harry Potter are tongue-in-cheek intentional) is its rival school: the Land Institute. Each school was founded by characters from Verne's novel a century-and-a-half or so ago. Turns out the characters are real, as are the inventions that Nemo and his crew used on their global journey. The competitors are locked in deadly conflict to recreate or discover—and then control—Nemo's marvels. H-P's goals are good for the world. Land's? Not so much.

The series opens with a sea voyage that is a rite of passage for Ana and her fellow freshmen. Long-time readers of Riordan will recognize and predict plot points as he skillfully employs foreshadowing to engage us episodically through his saga.

The setting is likewise comfortably familiar as H-P's freshmen class is divided into four houses: Dolphin, Shark, Cephalopod and Orca, with each emphasizing specific skills. As at Potter's Hogwarts, each house has a prefect.

This 2021 publication will no doubt appeal to those middle schoolers (and us older fans) who have devoured Riordan's previous offerings of Percy Jackson, Apollo, et al.

The book and its sequels could easily find a place alongside and within STEM and film classes that transport students through the permeable interface separating science and fiction; imagination and possibility; our past, our present and our future. The author maintains his commendable sensitivity to and awareness of diversity, including humans and marine species.

If challenges arise, then teachers can simply offer Verne's original classics as alternative texts. My guess? Students will seek them on their own.

Role-model characters, thematic conflict, fast-paced plot, a setting both familiar and exotic—these literary elements along with his continuing themes of tolerance and acceptance combine to make *Daughter of the Deep* my new favorite Rick Riordan novel.

Author Biography

John Franklin (BA Rice, MA Miami of Ohio, PhD Florida; certified to teach English and economics) began his career at Jones High School in Houston. During that time, he combined his love for literature with a love of travel, spending 12-week summers biking or backpacking to visit the settings of the drama, fiction and poetry he loved to teach: Scotland for *Macbeth*; London for Dickens; Canterbury for Chaucer; and, the Lake District for Wordsworth. One Fourth of July he ventured further abroad, discovering himself atop the Acropolis in Athens, thinking, “Here I am at the birthplace of democracy on the birthday of the greatest democracy that has ever existed.” He has spent his life since then appreciating and sharing his good fortune. John Franklin (pronoun he) is a Professor of English and Director of English Education at Pittsburg State University in Southeast Kansas where he teaches Literature for Middle and Secondary Schools. He can be reached at jfranklin@pittstate.edu

