

Pitch for “Storm’s Embrace”, a NaNoWriMo novel by Esther van der Wal, which made it to the 2nd round of the 2010 Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award

“Storm’s Embrace” is a contemporary coming-of-age novel with different layers. On the surface, it’s about making friends in a new environment, yet it incorporates plenty of interesting and serious themes below this first level.

One of the main themes is autism, which is never labeled as such, but can be derived off the main character’s brother’s behavior. This character is inspired by Mark Haddon’s “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time”.

Another important topic is coping with loss, portrayed through the deceased father of the family. Different characters each have their own ways of dealing with this issue, according to their personality. The autistic brother has a special means of coping: he wants to bring his father back to life by finding a cure for the cancer that killed him in a specific breed of frogs, which are his passion. In this touching manner, we see the incapability of an autistic person in fully understanding death, but also the boy’s remarkable intelligence, hidden behind his daily difficulties.

The plot gently touches upon the theme of gender identity confusion when the main character starts to have romantic feelings for a girl in her theatre group. Her doubts and worries are written in clean language, so the story is still suitable for a younger and possibly more conservative audience. Christianity is also used as a subtheme in an open, non-moralizing way.

The story is built up out of 66 short chapters. Quotes from song lyrics are used to characterize each chapter. Every third chapter is a letter the main character writes to a fairy-type creature that appears in her dreams. These letters add a light supernatural element to the story.

Last but not least, a big touch of humor pours through the text, making it lighthearted and fun to read.