



# The Door in the Forest

*Roderick Townley*

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## **The Door in the Forest** Roderick Townley

At the mid point of three towns, in the center of three streams, in the heart of a forest, lies a mysterious island. Encircled by quicksand and sewn shut by vines, it is impenetrable to all but the poisonous snakes patrolling its waters. But Daniel is determined to get there, along with his friend Emily.

Emily is a bit mysterious herself. A girl who seems to know more than she can say, whose mother was taken away by government troops, and whose eccentric grandmother reads the future in her bubble bath.

Enter the soldiers. Their menacing commander is terribly interested in sleepy little Everwood. Is he searching for something? A treasure map? The island? The girl?

Roderick Townley spins a magical tale of lies and truths, of secrets kept and secrets revealed.

Sooner or later, we all must step through the door in the forest.

## **The Door in the Forest Details**

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Author : Roderick Townley

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## From Reader Review The Door in the Forest for online ebook

### CompassBookRatings says

Overall Review: The Door in the Forest by Roderick Townley opens with a bewitching description of a curious and alluring island, promising the kind of adventure that delights children ages 9-12. Interestingly, while Townley clearly delineates the time as 1923, he is vague regarding the actual location of the story and leaves unexplained several elements he introduces, such as the “Uncertainties”. Although troubling to older readers, this will not concern the targeted age group because those details are secondary to the adventure. The straight-forward level of peril, pacing, character development, and conflict resolution are spot on for younger readers. Written in three parts, Part III finishes strongly with one surprise and a few deft touches. A favorite element was the snakes with heads in the image of their victims. With co-protagonists, Daniel and Emily, this book is equally accessible to boys and girls, and who wouldn’t want to journey to a magical island? Overall Rating is 3.5 out of 5 stars.

#### Content Review

VIOLENCE: a few mild instances

PROFANITY: a few mild instances

SEXUAL CONTENT: none

MATURE THEMES: none

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP: 9+

Violence consists of characters perishing in quicksand, by gunfire, and by poisonous snakes. There is also shooting, reported deaths, some tank gunfire, a riot and uprising. Non-graphic descriptions of the events are provided. The use of mild, religious profanities was noted eight times. A derogatory name is used twice in regards to the antagonist. Technically while not profanity, it did seem harsh and out of character for a book firmly aimed at the 9-12 age bracket, especially when the term was used by the young, female protagonist. No sexual content noted. No mature themes, although the death of a character’s parent is referred to. This book is a clean read for ages 9+.

This review was written by Cindy M.  
A Squeaky clean Reads Reviewer

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### Andrea Zander says

An engaging story and interesting characters, although it could have had so much more depth. Several loose ends were left, and there's a bit of deus ex machina going on. But I read it quickly and enjoyed it. I didn't mind not getting too many details about the Uncertainties and wars, since the vague setting kept it from having a cultural identity the way a real-world setting would have. This let the author make up something that doesn't feel wholly derived from a story we already know. Danny's inability to lie was an important plot point that felt like it petered out at the end, as did a few other things. I could easily see sequels to this,

perhaps exploring the world more.

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## **Kes says**

Children's fiction - very sweet book that children might enjoy but not for me.

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## **Brenda says**

Though I only gave this 3 stars - it is certainly a book that is staying with me and making me wonder. Can't wait to hear what kids have to say!

Here's what I wrote for the blog:

A small town, unique neighbors, superstitious mysteries (possibly magic?), surprise arrivals and impending war meet in *A Door In the Forest*. These things mix together to bring up questions about the importance of truth – how deep does it go, how long does it last?

In the middle of the river is a lush, emerald green island. Some say it's enchanted. All say it is beautiful, though it seems that no one can get there. First you have to push through thorn bushes to reach the river. Then you have to find a way beyond the quicksand and if you do get to the water's edge, you have to make sure you're not bitten by the poisonous, white-headed water snakes. Summer is here so there is more time for Daniel and Wes to notice things at the store and around town: the heron on the shore, the "Uncertainties" continuing in the city, that refugees seem more common and Emily.

Silent, and left behind at the Crowley's store, it is Daniel who runs out to the manse to tell her of her granddaughter's arrival. Bridey Byrdsong might be a witch, or she might just be an eccentric old woman, Daniel doesn't know for sure, but he likes her all right. Daniel doesn't have many friends. It's not that people don't like him. They just don't trust him. Daniel can't tell a lie. It makes him physically ill to even think about it. Sometimes he desperately wishes he could, or at least not tell the whole truth, but he can't. He's left out a lot because he can't be trusted to keep a secret. Bridey is one person that doesn't seem to mind. She likes Daniel well enough too.

Almost as soon as Emily arrives Captain Sloper and the soldiers arrive. They are going to test their new tank in the fields. They move into the homes and begin to take over while they wait for reinforcements to join them. Things start missing from homes. The best food is eaten. The most comfortable beds are taken and every place is searched. Captain Sloper goes everywhere with Daniel because he is sure to hear the whole truth with him there.

While Daniel can't lie he suspects that Captain Sloper is not what he claims. The coincidence of the soldiers' arrival with Emily is too strong. What do the soldiers really want? Are they fighting a noble cause? What about the map, the pearl necklace, the secret symbols and signs... Some secrets are meant to share, while others are meant to keep. Read *A Door in the Forest* to discover how truth and secrets mix together. What would you tell?

I wish I knew more about the "uncertainties." And as always I wonder about the need for power and the meanness that seems to arise when the only way to gain power is through fear.

## **Fionnula Enright says**

I couldn't get into it the characters were just there they had no depth they weren't developed at all really the idea that ten year old Wesley is such a little kid and twelve year old Daniel is so annoyed by him none of the characters seemed their age Wesley seemed like he he was four and Daniel and Emily seemed like they were fifteen sixteen they also just had things. There like Mel and then it didn't explain why he can't lie because am I supposed to believe it's just his conscience? And the weapon part was just dumb they also had no reason for Marten to be there it was just a book I read it and had no feeling about it at all so yeah two stars

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## **Sky Thibedeau says**

Daniel has an unusual problem, he cannot lie. He definitely tries but gets ill before he can. This causes him all sorts of trials and embarrassments. Daniel lives in Everwood a small rural village whose remoteness has spared the village from the terrors of the 'Uncertainties' which sound like the anarchies some countries faced after WWI. Everwood itself is touched by enchantment. There is an island which is separated from the village by a river full of poisonous snakes. Any boat that attempts to cross to the island begins to fall apart and the unlucky soul finds themselves sucked down into quicksand or set upon by snakes.

Daniel is mysteriously drawn to the island and dreams of one day passing over to see what there could be waiting for him there.

Suddenly the Uncertainties come to Everwood. Refugees from the Cities begin to pass through. A man comes through to deliver a girl Emily to her Grandmother. Daniel and his brother Wes are amazed to find this is the weird Bridley Birdsong. The Birdsong family being known for the strange happenings at their home over the years.

Soon government troops arrive looking for Emily. The Captain finding that Daniel cannot lie tries to use him to find suspected treason in Everwood and who is hiding Emily. With Birdie's help, Emily, Daniel, and Wes try to find the path to the Door in the Forest that leads to the enchanted island where the means for saving Everwood may lie.

I found this to be a nice story for all ages. The snakes are a little scary and so is the Captain who is probably the biggest snake of all. It is a fun story full of fantasy and adventure.

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## **Lisa Nocita says**

The uncertainties have reached beyond the city to the sleepy burg of Everwood. Emily is deposited with her aunt, Bridey Byrdson, rumored to be the benevolent if crazy town witch, when her mother is detained by soldiers in the city for revolutionary activities. Daniel, fourteen, and his younger brother Wesley befriend Emily but their fledgling friendship is imperiled when Captain Sloper and his soldiers show up and occupy the village. The captain is quite unhinged and has rather devious plans for the town. He seems to be searching for something and is unwilling to abandon his quest no matter the cost. In the midst of it all is a mysterious island, ringed with protective charms that make it impenetrable. When Bridey disappears, it's up to Emily and the boys to find her and save the town. That's the basic plot. The time and place are unclear and

as are The Uncertainties. I feel like someone will point out that this is a clever analogy for some historical moment and I will slap my head in resigned disbelief that I didn't figure it out for myself. Because without that revelation, despite a fondness for the characters, the story is lacking. It has a *Narnia* feel to it in parts but never quite pulls all together. The otherworldly magic of the island seems sweet and fantastical but irrelevant and disjointed.

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### Susan says

Much different than I expected, and not just your run-of-the-mill kids on a quest for magic book. Daniel has been cursed for as long as he remembers with the inability to ever tell a lie. Usually this gets him in trouble, but his unique ability surprisingly allows him in the good graces of a government officer stationed in his town. While Captain Sloper takes advantage of Daniel's truthfulness for his own purposes, Daniel unexpectedly finds himself in a position to help his occupied town and possibly learn more about the mysterious and magical island that lies nearby.

This book does not mess around. Not only is the magical island protected by a series of Lost-worthy dangers (quicksand, magic serpents that seem to wear the faces of the people they've eaten along the way, etc.) but the soldiers are flat-out menacing, capable of torture and even murder. Not a book for the faint of heart, and much darker than I would have expected just by picking it up. Don't expect a happy-go-lucky magic romp here, but for a magic quest with some pretty serious issues at stake, this may fit the bill.

I could maybe see this for fans of the Emerald Atlas, The 13 Treasures/Curses books.

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### Marsha says

Mr. Townley's novel has a touch of C.S. Lewis gravitas to it. A secretive island can be reached but only with effort and puzzling out of strange clues. It is threatened by a powerful man who doesn't understand its significance and is growing half mad with his desperation to prove his usefulness by seeking out imaginary traitors.

The children who find themselves there discover a strange land that doesn't obey ordinary rules but contains the form of dead loved ones and the splendor of an untouched world, one that seems to harken back to primordial ages. The air is fresher and the trees are large and extinct animals roam freely and without fear of the human travelers.

Mr. Townley deftly weaves the awesome nature of this impossible island with the grim realities of an invading platoon led by a homicidal maniac. The townfolk are furious at the presence of Captain Sloper. Daniel, a boy who can't tell a lie (making him very unpopular with his school chums) finds Captain Sloper initially rather genial...until the cracks start to show. It takes time to figure out the captain's motivation and, when we do, we are terrified at the threat he poses.

Captain Sloper is one of the most personable villains you'll ever read. He's what Lord Voldemort might have been if Tom Marvolo Riddle had focused more on seducing and charming people rather than reaching obsessively for immortality. He's got an agenda, one that's more of a mania, and it overwhelms him, driving him to ever more desperate and terrible acts as the novel progresses. If the battle between good and evil is only as worthwhile as its villain, Captain Sloper is one of the best additions to the roster.

This is a sobering fantasy novel, with old-fashioned charm and old-world menace.

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### **Falina says**

A simple but interesting book. You can enjoy it on the surface level but there's plenty of room to read deeper if desired.

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### **Hilary says**

"Some people claimed it was enchanted; others swore it was cursed; but, really, it hardly mattered what you thought because you couldn't get to it."

Daniel and his family live near a mysterious island. This island is impossible to reach, as the island itself seems to jealously guard its secrets with vines, quicksand, and snakes. No one has ever set foot there. While most people are content to leave the island to itself, Daniel is not. He knows he would willingly spend his whole life trying to figure out how to reach such a mysterious place. However, to achieve this dream, it will take a war, a witch (or is she?), and a girl named Emily whose past may be the only key to accessing the island that Daniel will ever find. Now, mix this cast of intriguing characters together with an evil captain who is intent on getting to the island first, and you are ready for an adventure you will not soon forget! The Door in the Forest seems to me to always ask these questions: "How much would you risk, who would you be willing to trust, and how long could you hold out during a dangerous time to attain the impossible thing you have always wanted with your whole heart?"

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### **Chris says**

Not quite like anything else I've read, this book. It has an intentionally vague, historical setting, with an intentionally vague, ominous menace. It has magic of the subtle, almost magical-realism variety. It has mysteries and lies and secrets. And it has characters with grit and compassion, faults and limitations, fears and dreams, and bravery when it counts.

The captain pursed his lips, making his mustache bristle. "So," he said, "you are one of those nice people who like to look at the beautiful thing and not shoot it."

It was still hard to speak, but, "Yes,"

"I too like to look at the beautiful thing." He flashed a bandit smile, revealing a black space where a dogtooth had been. "Unless I can eat it. Then watch out!" He chuckled at his own wit. "By the way, to let you know, my men will be staying here a few more days. The tents have been sufficient till now, but others will be coming, so we'll be putting them up in farmhouses."

And that's how Daniel and Emily learn that soldiers will be taking over their houses for an indefinite short stay. The soldiers that everyone in their rural community hates, because they bring conflict and violence where people want to simply live their lives. Emily warns Daniel that Captain Sloper can't be trusted--that he recently arrested her mother in the city, which is why she fled to Everwood--and that they should avoid notice.

Unfortunately, neither one is able. Daniel, for reasons no one knows, is unable to lie. When the captain finds out, he adopts Daniel as adviser and informant in getting to know the townspeople, whom he suspects are involved in the rebellion. Emily's grandmother has always been the town eccentric, but Emily is gradually learning there is more to her odd ways than anyone knows. And it has something to do with the mysterious, impenetrable island on the river, the one Daniel has always dreamed of visiting. The one Captain Sloper becomes convinced hides secrets. The one, they say, that has a magical door that leads to . . . somewhere else.

At first glance this story seems like it might be idyllic and meandering. Then the first secret shows up, then the next and the next, and it quickly becomes gripping and suspenseful. Add in some evocative, lovely description and effective dialogue, the protagonists who surprise themselves and the unpredictable antagonist, and, of course, the mysterious magic, and this ends up a moving, highly satisfying tale.

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### **Michelle Isenhoff says**

The best words I can think of to describe *The Door in the Forest*, by Roderick Townley, are “unique” and “vague.” Unique because Townley takes everyday themes like death, war and rebellion and weaves around them a tale unlike anything I’ve ever read before. With a little magic, the focus suddenly leaves the commonplace and shifts to the surreal, the mystical, the little-understood but oh-so-important island guarded by the Byrdson family. Making very effective use a repeating curtain metaphor, Townley explores topics just beyond our range of factual knowledge, like death, superstition, time travel and secrets.

I’d say vague because, though Townley spins out a wonderfully engaging tale, one that dishes out information slowly and tantalizingly, I still felt some confusion even at the end of the book. Like, what was the war about anyway? And where does the story take place? It references World War One as having ended four years previously, yet soldiers remain active, refugees flood from the city and the Uncertainties (a term for armed conflict, I think) continue in parts of this country. But what country? This bizarre combination of history and make believe left me feeling a bit unsettled. Yet at the same time, this vagueness becomes the curtain metaphor.

I love Emily Byrdson, an unreadable, mystical figure herself, and her grandmother who reads the future in soap bubbles. Two brothers, Danny, the boy who cannot lie, and Wes join with Emily and work together to reach the island. They return determined to save it from the soldiers intent on destroying it.

I totally enjoyed Mr. Townley’s cunning descriptions, word pictures and comparisons. Again and again I found myself thinking, that’s such a perfect way to say it. For example: “The sky was still blue overhead, but the trees deeply shadowed, as if they knew more about night than the rest of us.” Precise and appropriate. His language, however, isn’t always so exemplary. Several mild profanities punctuate statements, making them bolder, more emotional. But they could have been left out. At this age, they should have been left out.

I hardly can describe this book further. My mind still feels a little cobwebby from trying to figure out what I just read. I carry away the vagueness and uncertainty of its pages, yet I can firmly say I enjoyed my journey through Mr. Townley’s unparalleled imagination.

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### **Faith Fishcrazy says**

Well... my siblings would have enjoyed this book, had it not contained cursing and bad words(i.e. da\*n, bast\*rd). That kinda shocked me, seeing as this looks a little more kid friendly than it is. Also, this woman gets shot by a firing squad in some detail, again not really kid friendly. It was imaginative, but the reason for the war, who was fighting, why they were fighting, and even the time period and setting of the book were never explained.

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## Treasure says

Daniel, a fourteen year old boy who becomes ill if he tries to lie, lives in the farm town of Everwood in 1923, amidst the mysterious time only referred to as "The Uncertainties". With some clear connections to the Great Depression and World War military occupations, this slightly alternate universe will still be very familiar to readers. Along comes Emily, a mysterious, presumably mute thirteen year old girl who has connections to the witchlike Byrdsong family, and she and Daniel form a friendship. Almost immediately, the town is occupied by a rough army led by the paranoid, crazy Sloper. Daniel and Emily's obsession with the impenetrable, dangerous island soon catches Sloper's attention, and the adventure begins.

Full of secrets, truths, lies, and magic, this realistic fantasy adventure will appeal to those who love A Wrinkle in Time. Once the initial plot has been set up, be prepared to clear your afternoon calendar, as you will not be able to put the book down until you know the secrets of the island, the truth about the Byrdsong family, and whether or not the citizens of Everwood are innocent or doing precisely what paranoid Sloper thinks they are up to.

(Reviewed for Puget Sound Council)

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