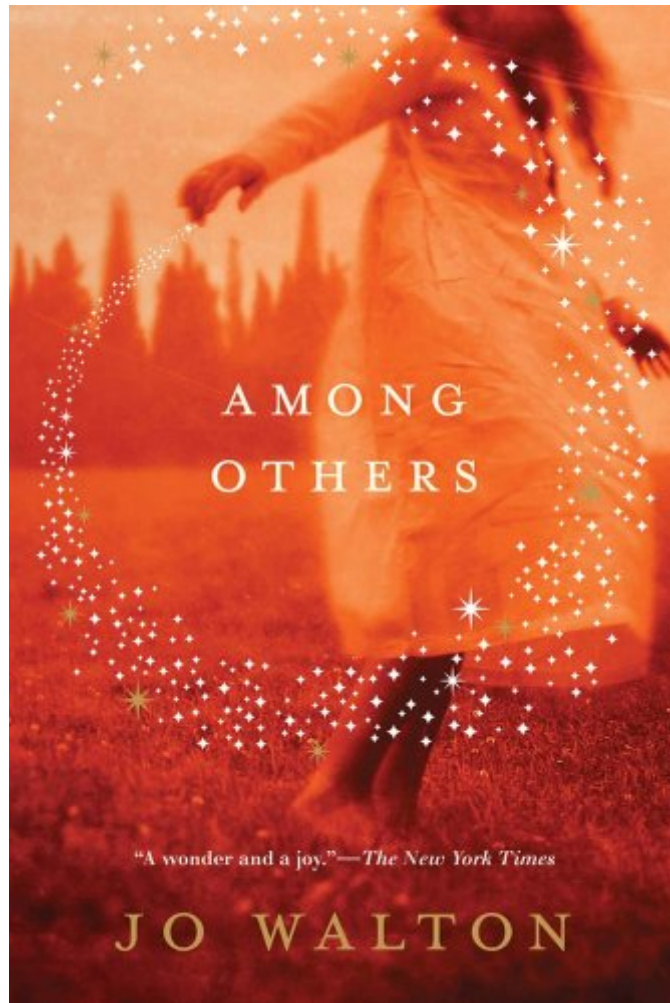


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Among Others (Hugo Award Winner - Best Novel)



Synopsis

Winner of the 2011 Nebula Award for Best Novel
Winner of the 2012 Hugo Award for Best Novel
Startling, unusual, and yet irresistibly readable, *Among Others* is at once the compelling story of a young woman struggling to escape a troubled childhood, a brilliant diary of first encounters with the great novels of modern fantasy and SF, and a spellbinding tale of escape from ancient enchantment. Raised by a half-mad mother who dabbled in magic, Morwenna Phelps found refuge in two worlds. As a child growing up in Wales, she played among the spirits who made their homes in industrial ruins. But her mind found freedom and promise in the science fiction novels that were her closest companions. Then her mother tried to bend the spirits to dark ends, and Mori was forced to confront her in a magical battle that left her crippled--and her twin sister dead. Fleeing to her father whom she barely knew, Mori was sent to boarding school in England--a place all but devoid of true magic. There, outcast and alone, she tempted fate by doing magic herself, in an attempt to find a circle of like-minded friends. But her magic also drew the attention of her mother, bringing about a reckoning that could no longer be put off... Combining elements of autobiography with flights of imagination in the manner of novels like Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude*, this is potentially a breakout book for an author whose genius has already been hailed by peers like Kelly Link, Sarah Weinman, and Ursula K. Le Guin. One of *School Library Journal's* Best Adult Books 4 Teens titles of 2011 One of *io9's* best Science Fiction & Fantasy books of the year 2011
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Customer Reviews

Jo Walton is a gifted writer and storyteller. So expectations were high for this book. In the "Thanks and Notes" section, she references how hard it is for her to write what she knows about. Interviews elsewhere reveal that this novel revisits her own past and transmutes her actual mother's mental illness into the practice of witchcraft. One can feel her struggle coming to terms with her past in this book, which is beautiful and heartfelt but has very little action; it's further marred by an ending that feels too manufactured -- as if she wrote an outcome in fiction she wished had happened in real life. Her description of fairies -- their powers, their speech, their actions and appearance -- is unique in that it captures the feral quality of entities of earth and nature not particularly interested in human wants and desires. But other aspects of "Among Others" are somewhat lacking. It's hard to know if Walton wants us to see Mori, the heroine of the tale, as an unreliable narrator; Mori often doubts herself and uses the excuse of "magic" as a means of rationalizing others' behaviors (her aunts won't let her cook in their home and want her to pierce her ears, members of a book club she joins mid-year friend her willingly while her schoolmates scorn her) and seems to distance herself from others as a matter of course. One thing Walton captures is the intensity (and inanity) of young girls' diaries; her many details make the diary feel real but it can also be tedious to read in parts. Although I am also an avid reader and know many of the books she references, this novel may feel like an inside joke that excludes non-SF readers for those who aren't familiar with the works mentioned.

This is a stunningly wonderful book. I have never read anything that so perfectly captures the experience of being fifteen, a science fiction reader just discovering some of the greats of the field (not to mention fandom!), the new kid in school who doesn't quite fit in, the young woman just starting to reach for adulthood, and not sure where she fits in a family where no one except her imperfectly known father seems to share her interests and concerns. Of course, Morwenna's problems are in a whole different league from my own at her age. Morwenna's twin sister was killed in a car accident that left Morwenna crippled. That accident was their witch mother's retaliation for their successful thwarting of her spell intended to make her a Dark Queen. Now Morwenna is

dependent on the father she's never met. On the one hand, Morwenna and her father Daniel bond over their love of science fiction. On the other hand, her aunts, his three sisters, decide that she belongs at Arlinghurst, the same boarding school they attended, so that's where she goes. It's a tough transition for her, a crippled girl among enthusiastic athletes, a Welsh girl amongst mostly upper middle class English girls, an enthusiastic reader amongst students who think reading is only for studying. But she's smart, and determined, and doesn't really see any better alternatives, so she finds ways to cope. And as she struggles to find her own place, and her own friends, and her own path, she discovers that the threat from her mother is not over. Together with all the normal adolescent challenges, Morwenna also does battle with her mother's hostility and ambitions, the ethics of magic, and the desire and opportunity to be reunited with her sister.

Among Others by Jo Walton, is a book long on promise, but short on delivery. Shortlisted for the Hugo and receiving high praise, perhaps left me with expectations too high. The basic premise is excellent. 70's schoolgirl who has family issues, highlighted by a crappy mother (who doesn't) AND talks to fairies. We're left waiting for the magic and the story arc to mix in a fairly violent way. OH how we wish we had magic to help solve our daily issues, yet for Jo Walton the moral implications of use can be tricky. This is the strong point of the book, as far as the fantasy aspect. There is a great 'system' of magic in use. A combination of druidism and fairy magic that is simple, effective and, most importantly, believable. The book is really a coming of age story of a teen-age girl, yes she can do magic and yes she can speak to fairies, but that is much background and has little to do with what plot there is. While Mor is shipped off to boarding school, there is no Harry Potter moments here. She is just a kid shipped off to boarding school, reflecting vague attempts to fend off her mother's attacks. Here as in many other places in the novel, we are given a hazy idea of what is happening, but without any great detail or description. The best part of the book is in the late trend of homaging a genre - like in the films Hugo or The Artist. Jo Walton here gives us a who's who of Sci-Fi, Fantasy via Mor's speed reading capabilities. For me these were the high points, as I was able to wax nostalgic over my reading history. While I may use this as reference for the future, it did not capture me in the story. Perusing the reviews, I found what I expected to find, a majority of reviews from women.

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