

On the road with a hero

Gabriola writer's compelling tale traces a savvy island teen's adventure in a post-apocalyptic world

Sixteen-year-old Molly McClure, the main character of *Restoring Harmony*, had me intrigued and engaged from the minute I read the back cover blurb. And it only got better. This novel takes place in the not-too-distant future (2041), post-smallish-apocalypse (dubbed “the Collapse”), when governments the world over assumed control of all oil supplies but are unable to maintain a stable society. Transportation is spotty, technology intractable, food precious, trust troublesome.



Gabriola writer Joëlle Anthony's debut novel features a teenager who lives with her family on a small B.C. island during a time of crisis in the not-too-distant future.

Molly lives a fairly self sufficient life with her family on an island in B.C. When a crisis demands she travel to extended family in Oregon, right away it's clear Molly, while understandably frightened, is stare-down-your-fear brave and clever enough to stay safe on this dicey journey to reach her grandparents.

Molly's survival skills are myriad: She can read all kinds of non-verbal signals (and infer intelligently), grow food and, playing her beloved fiddle named *Jewels*, earn money as a busker. She uses all these skills to survive and to help others in a barren, destabilized world. Molly listens to her inner voice — but never lets it drown out a whisper from her compassionate heart.

Even as this distaff fiddle-playing Mad Max negotiates a glass-strewn path in her bare feet, she meets a young man who makes her shy with liking him. She's attracted, but questions his motives. While she doesn't swoon and completely relinquish control, she trusts him when it most matters — and he proves deserving of her faith.

Along the way, she encounters (and outwits) people in “the Organization” the mob-like structure that has filled society’s leadership void. She uses guile to contact her worried parents back home and emotional logic to persuade her bitterness-tinged grandfather to get over himself.

This is a true hero’s journey tale on several levels; the peril increases after Molly has persuaded her grandparents (and a surprising entourage they’ve accumulated) to return with her to Canada.

With a few delightfully unexpected plot payoffs, the story of the trip comes to a satisfying conclusion; I can’t be any more specific without possibly ruining the read.

This kind of post-apocalyptic road story can be flat and off-putting, but author Joëlle Anthony assuredly walks a narrative knifeedge. She makes the danger real and suspenseful, but never so frightening that the reader suffers nightmares or wants to turn away.

When you slow it down, it’s dystopian fiction for young adults, with an overlay of organized crime paranoia, but the story moves so quickly, all you can do is keep turning the pages to find out what happens next.

The huge success of this narrative revolves around one savvy 16-year-old who has to give up something she loves to rescue someone in her care: It’s a true test of adulthood — and she aces it. *Restoring Harmony* is Anthony’s debut novel. Like her main character, the author lives on an island in B.C. — Gabriola. She has another book forthcoming, titled *The Right & The Real*. It features an older heroine of 17; I look forward to reading it. Anthony’s books are pitched as fiction for young adults, but I wish there were more fiction written for every adult audience segment that is as satisfying a read as was *Restoring Harmony*.

