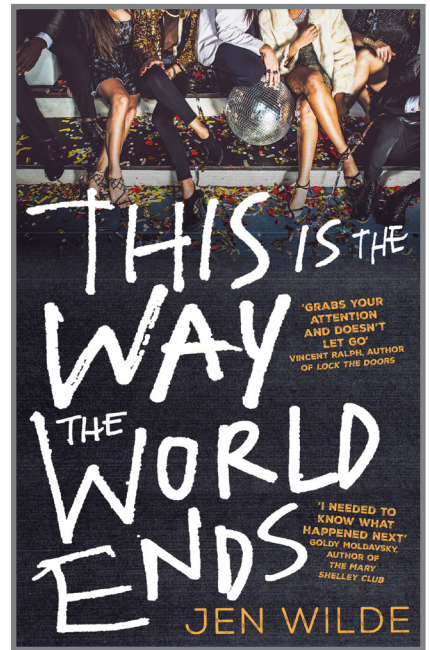


This is the Way the World Ends



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Language, Sexual References, Alcohol References, Violence)

SYNOPSIS

As an autistic scholarship student at the prestigious Webber Academy in New York City, Waverly is used to masking to fit in—in more ways than one. While her classmates are the children of the one percent, Waverly is getting by on tutoring gigs and the generosity of the school’s charming dean. So when her tutoring student and resident ‘it girl’ asks Waverly to attend the school’s annual Masquerade disguised as her, Waverly jumps at the chance—especially once she finds out that Ash, the dean’s daughter and her secret ex-girlfriend, will be there.

The Masquerade is everything Waverly dreamed of, complete with extravagant gowns, wealthy parents writing cheques, and flowing champagne. Most importantly, there’s Ash. All Waverly wants to do is shed her mask and be with her, but the evening takes a sinister turn when Waverly stumbles into a secret meeting between the dean and the school’s top donors—and witnesses a brutal murder.

Waverly’s fairytale has turned into a nightmare, and she, Ash, and her friends must navigate through a dizzying maze of freight elevators and secret passageways if they’re going to survive the night.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Wilde (she/they) is the queer, disabled author of *Queens of Geek*, *The Brightsiders* and *Going Off Script*. They write unapologetically queer stories about unlikely heroes, awkward romantics and chosen families. Jen’s books have been praised in *Teen Vogue*, *Buzzfeed*, *Autostraddle*, *Vulture* and *Bustle*. Their debut, *Queens Of Geek*, made the 2018 Rainbow Book List and the Amelia Bloomer List. Originally from Melbourne, Australia, Jen lives in Brooklyn, NY, with her wife, where she collects books, candles and foster cats. When she isn’t writing, Jen spends her time shouting about queer books on TikTok.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think the image on the cover is showing?
 - Who do you think this book might be about, and why do you think this?
 - What types of people do you think will feature in this story?
 - What events do you think might happen in this story? Look closely at the artwork and title and hypothesise as to what might happen based on what you can see.

- Now read the back cover of the novel, and consider:
 - What genre do you think this novel is?
 - Who do you think is the intended audience of this novel?
 - What does this information change about your hypotheses from earlier in the discussion?
- After reading the novel, as a class, look at the cover artwork again, and revisit your original hypotheses. As a class discuss how accurate or inaccurate they were, and see what information you can find in the artwork that would have given you a clue to the contents of the novel if you had paid attention to it earlier.
- After reading the first chapter, discuss where and when this novel is set, and what you have learnt so far about the main character.
- Choose one of the secondary characters in the novel, and retell one scene at the ball from their point of view. Include their attitude towards others, feelings about the event, and outline their motivations clearly.
- In pairs, create a character outline for one of the key characters in the novel (other than Waverly). Include in your outline:
 - A description of their relationship with Waverly
 - How they see Waverly
 - How Waverly views them.

Then, as a class, create a character outline for Waverley. Print out all the individual character outlines, including Waverly's, and arrange the secondary characters in a circle around Waverly to create the start of a character interaction map. Note on your map any important relationships between the different characters. Individually write a more detailed description of the relationship between Waverly and one of the secondary characters, sharing your understanding of how their interactions help progress the action of the novel and influence the final outcome. Use at least three pieces of evidence from the text to support your assertions.

- In small groups, discuss the character of Waverly. What do you think is the most salient aspect of her character and why? As a group, try to come to a consensus, and formulate clear arguments to support your position. As a class, share your different opinions, including your supportive arguments, and discuss the differing viewpoints you have come to, and how holding them might influence your experience of the novel.
- Look at a map of New York, and try to locate as many of the ordinary sights from Waverly's life as you can, based on the locations mentioned in the novel.
- Who is AOC, and what does Waverly being pleased to have her as her 'local rep' (p 36) tell us about Waverly and her political views?
- What is the difference between having auditory processing that is 'not the best' (p 47), and having a hearing impairment? How would having an auditory processing disorder affect a person's daily life and interactions?
- Both Waverly and Ash are passionate about removing the barriers to quality medical care for women and minorities (p 64). Waverly's own mother was undiagnosed for over ten years, during which time she could have been accessing potentially life-changing medication for her condition. As a class, discuss the role that structural racism and gender bias plays in the ongoing misdiagnosis and dismissal of legitimate medical needs for women and people of colour. Think about why this happens, what contributes to it on a systemic level, how individual bias on the part of both patient and treating professional can affect timely access to quality medical care and accurate diagnosis, and why it is an ongoing issue of concern globally irrespective of local healthcare system. Include in your discussion the fact that women's healthcare is also affected by centuries of male-centric medical research, and that women's health is chronically under-researched. In small groups choose a single aspect of this issue to research further, and use your findings to create an informative pamphlet or slideshow sharing what you have learnt.
- Discuss the symbolism of Waverly being trapped behind a one way mirror, able to see what is happening, but powerless to communicate or to help Pari (p 104). In your discussion, consider:
 - The parallels between this situation, and the difficulty in communicating that people with ASD often struggle with.
 - The themes of wealth and power that appear throughout the book, and Waverly's position relative to her classmates.
 - The difference between perceived powerlessness, and actual inability to affect change and influence events.

- Waverly's pivotal role in the events of the evening in contrast to her feelings at this specific moment.
- In the novel, the world is hit with a giant solar flare that causes massive destruction, and which Webber and his friends have known would occur for over a decade. In reality, is it feasible that an AI could accurately predict a solar flare that far in advance, and with enough accuracy that a fundraiser ball could be planned for the exact date? As a class discuss this basic premise of the apocalyptic trigger as it is used in the novel, and consider the similarities and areas of difference from the actual real-world scientific understanding of solar weather and how it can affect human society. Individually or in small groups research the following:
 - Solar weather, how it is monitored and by whom, and who can access the monitoring data.
 - Solar flares.
 - Coronal Mass Ejections, how they are formed, how they are predicted, how far they travel, how much of the planet they can potentially impact in a single event and what that impact would be.
 - The Carrington Event, its effects at the time, and its potential effects on society and technological infrastructure were a similar event to happen today.

After completing your research, as a class discuss and collate your findings. Individually, write a brief piece outlining the key moments where the effects of the solar flare in the novel match the potential effects of a CME.

- In small groups, discuss the narrative constraints that might have affected the author's decision to have her characters affected by a 'solar flare' rather than by a 'CME'. Be sure to consider the impact of predicted reader comprehension on this type of decision.
- The predictive AI is named Cassandra. Who was Cassandra in greek mythology, and what does someone naming a predictive AI after her tell us about their hopes and expectations surrounding the AI?
- Choose one of the characters other than Waverly, and outline the various ways in which they, and their decisions, were pivotal to the final outcome of the novel. Include evidence from the text to support your assertions.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

RAE CARLYLE