

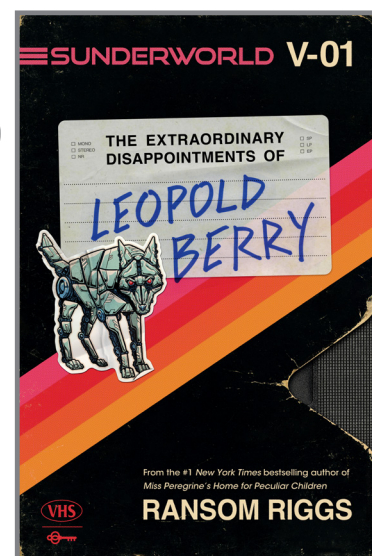
The Extraordinary Disappointments of Leopold Berry (Sunderworld Vol 1)

AUTHOR
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Violence, Drug and Alcohol References, Language)



SYNOPSIS

Seventeen-year-old Leopold Berry is seeing weird things around Los Angeles. A man who pops a tooth into a parking meter. A glowing trapdoor in a parking lot. A half-mechanical raccoon with its tail on fire that just won't leave him alone. Every hallucinatory moment seems plucked from a cheesy 1990s fantasy TV show called *Max's Adventures in Sunderworld*—and that's because they are.

Not a good sign.

In the blurry weeks after his mother's death, a young Leopold discovered VHS tapes of its one and only season in a box headed for the trash—and soon became obsessed. Losing himself in Sunder was the best way to avoid two things: grieving his mother and being a chronic disappointment to his overbearing father. But when the strange visions return—at the worst possible time on the worst possible day—Leopold turns to his best friend, Emmet, for help. Together, they discover that Sunder is much more than just an old TV show, and that Los Angeles is far stranger than they ever imagined. And soon, he'll realise that not only is Sunderworld real, but it's in grave danger.

Certain he's finally been chosen for greatness, Leopold risks everything to claim his destiny, save the world of his childhood dreams, and prove once and for all that he's not the disappointment his father believes him to be. But when everything goes terribly, horribly, excruciatingly wrong, Leopold's disappointments prove to be more extraordinary than he ever could have imagined.

How do you battle darkness when no-one believes in you—not even yourself?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ransom Riggs is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the *Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children* novels. Riggs was born on a farm in Maryland and grew up in southern Florida. He studied literature at Kenyon College and film at the University of Southern California. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, bestselling author Tahereh Mafi, and their family.

STUDY NOTES

Cover

- Look closely at the elements on the cover and guess what piece of technology from the 1990s is depicted. What elements helped you guess the technology?

- How did the fonts used contribute to the overall effect?
- Why might there be a sticker of a robotic canine on the cover?
- Does the title of the novel, *The Extraordinary Disappointments of Leopold Berry*, remind you of a previous book by this author?

Chapter One

- How might you describe Leopold and Richter's relationship?
- If you only had three words to describe Leopold, what would they be? What part of the chapter suggested those words to you?
 - Now try the same thing for Richter.
- Why might Leopold's aptitude results particularly frustrate Richter?
- Leopold and Richter are unusual names for characters in a YA novel. Why do you think Ransom Riggs might have chosen those names?
- If the purpose of a first chapter is to 'hook' the reader and make them want to continue reading, do you think Ransom Riggs has succeeded? Why/why not?

Setting

- Imagine that the novel was set in another large city in the USA, such as Chicago or New York. Would your reading experience have been similar, or was there something about Los Angeles that made the setting perfect for a story about a fantasy world?
- Can you name some commonalities between the home of filmmaking, Hollywood, and Sunder Hill?

Literary Theory

- Briefly explain the concept of 'The Hero's Journey'. (A pattern of narrative identified by the American scholar Joseph Campbell, that appears in drama, storytelling, myth, religious ritual and psychological development.) How closely does Leopold's journey in the story match this concept?

Character Arc

- 'Leopold, swallowing against a knot of emotion, turned and kept walking. It was a surprising relief to discover that, having been stripped wholly of his dignity, he was left only with fire.' (p 210). A character arc is when a character begins as one sort of person, and during the course of a story, transforms into a different sort of person in response to changing developments. What is the significance of this scene to Leopold's character arc?
- Think about Richter's character arc. Does he undergo a transformation in the story? At what point or points did you start to reconsider if Leopold might have misunderstood him?

Portals

- The book's author, Ransom Riggs, says that he has always been drawn to portal fantasies in fiction. 'They feel like invitations to optimistic worlds where, ultimately, joy is possible, if only you can find the key. We're living through some very heavy, very dark times—we have been for a while—and this story is meant to be an escape—and a respite from darkness.' One of the earliest portal fantasies was Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Name some other novels or films where characters step from the 'real', and often difficult, world to another. Do you agree with Ransom Riggs that Sunder Hill is an 'optimistic' world?
- One trope for portal literature is the need for a token of some sort to travel to the other world. Can you come up with other tropes that appear in *The Extraordinary Disappointments of Leopold Berry*?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- An elevator pitch is a brief (no more than 30 seconds) description of a story that encapsulates all the great things about it. Imagine you want to sell the rights to *The Extraordinary Disappointments of Leopold Berry* to a potential movie producer. You have 30 seconds to convince them of why the book would make a great movie. Go!
 - Your elevator pitch succeeded, and the film is now in pre-production. Imagine you are the casting agent and come up with the perfect actors for the roles of Leopold, Richter, Emmett, Isobel and Norm. Can you explain why you chose those particular actors?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
CAROLYN WALSH