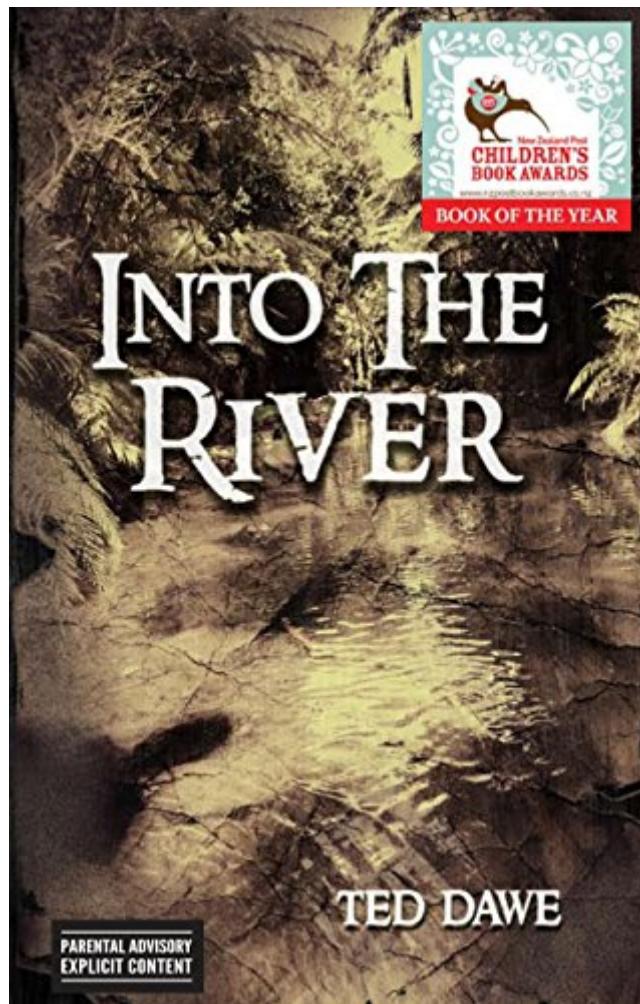


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# Into The River



## **Synopsis**

A gripping, gritty and award-winning coming-of-age novel for young adult readers. When Te Arepa Santos is dragged into the river by a giant eel, something happens that will change the course of his whole life. The boy who struggles to the bank is not the same one who plunged in, moments earlier. He has brushed against the spirit world, and there is a price to be paid; an *utu* (revenge) to be exacted. Years later, far from the protection of whanau (family) and ancestral land, he finds new enemies. This time, with no one to save him, there is a decision to be made: he can wait on the bank, or leap forward into the river. At the 2013 NZ Post Childrens Book Awards *Into the River* was judged the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year. It also won the Young Adult Fiction category of the awards. An engaging coming-of-age novel, it follows its main protagonist from his childhood in small-town rural New Zealand to an elite Auckland boarding school, where he must forge his own way - including battling with his cultural identity. This prequel to Ted Dawe's award-winning novel *Thunder Road* is gritty, provocative, at times shocking, but always real and true. The awards' chief judge Bernard Beckett described a character "caught between two worlds ... the explicit content was presented as the danger of people being left adrift by society. And within that context, hard-hitting material is crucial; it is what makes the book authentic, real and important." The Deputy Chief Censor of Film and Literature ruled that the book is not offensive: 'The book deals with some stronger content. There are sexual relationships between teenagers, encounters with possible child sexual exploitation, the use of illegal drugs and other criminal activities, violent assault, and a moderate level of highly offensive language. These are well contextualised within an exciting fast moving narrative that has as its protagonist, a young teenage Maori boy from a rural community who is finding his way through the strange uncomfortable environment of a boys' boarding school and unfamiliar social mores. The story captures the raw and real extremes of adolescence in teenage boys along with their yearnings and obsessions. The book is notable for being one of the first in the New Zealand which specifically targets teenage boys and younger men - a genre that does not have great representation. The genre character is therefore significant. The content immerses the reader in action, wit, and intrigue, as well as a level of social realism, all likely to engage teen and young adult readers and with particular appeal for older boys and young men.'

## **Book Information**

File Size: 703 KB

Print Length: 404 pages

Publisher: RHNZ Children's ebooks (October 18, 2013)

Publication Date: October 18, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00FKE3XUU

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #554,311 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #79

in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > LGBT Issues #169

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Literature & Fiction > Social & Family Issues > Bullying #396 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Literature & Fiction > School & Education

## **Customer Reviews**

The first few chapters grabbed and held my attention. I thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of the setting and the richness of the characters in these first few characters. When the man character moves away from home to the school in Auckland the whole book changed - and I guess that's the essence of the story. The boy's character is robbed of his family and home. It's not a happily ever after story but the entire story felt real and while it's not necessarily a feel-good experience I strongly recommend it.

As soon as I heard on CNN that this book was banned in public libraries in New Zealand, I ordered it. What advanced, liberal democratic country these days bans book? All it does is provide invaluable free publicity. "Into the River" is a quintessential coming of age story; describing the wonder of boyhood in a community that still has roots in shamanistic traditions. The boy's paradise is shattered when he goes off to school in the city and discovers the huge contradictions that society forces upon its youth in the name of education. Apparently, the book is banned due to its language and content, but there is nothing here that most youth don't encounter in some way or another, especially in an urban school setting. Indeed, I would think having these experiences articulated in such a good story would be therapeutic and educational for youths who face similar situations. And a good story it

is. It kept my attention and was very believable, even though I have no first hand experience of the Maori experience. That said, I had some problems with the book. There are a lot of Maori terms which probably brings the story home to those who know the terminology, but for those of not in the know it took time to look up all the new words. Also, all the adults in this book--except for the ones in the Maori community--come across as one dimensional and exclusively negative. The tender relationship between Devon and Steph is the heart of the story, and I found myself wishing that in spite of the literary necessity of their traumatic and forced separation, that the two had found a way to continue their journey together. But, the ending is such that it calls for a sequel, and I hope the author indulges us with more tales of Te Arepa and his on going relationship with himself, Steph and the world around them.

This is quality literature aimed directly at the teenage market and a book that might well be read by adults. It will be instructive, especially for those adults who choose to ignore teens or believe their perceptions of the world should be enforced on teens. The story is set in New Zealand and yes, it contains some sexual material in terms of implying male masturbation and sexual intercourse between two young teenagers in a social setting. It is neither prurient nor sensationalist, treats the rhythms of life in a natural and normal manner and these events that have drawn such attention to the book are simply part of the side story - not a feature. This book has obvious literary qualities, is contemporary and should take its place as a study text in English literature classes. The facility to analyse both the writing, the story construction, the language and the nuancing of the author is superb and will add to the formal education of young people. It is relevant, at least to New Zealand, and quite probably to the English speaking parts of the world, bringing Maori culture and issues into some sort of perspective through the eyes of a young teenager. I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

I was very disappointed by this book. It had a brilliant beginning with the main character, Te Arepa, doing things a typical boy living in a rural setting would do. Once the story moved to the 'City' it seemed to disintegrate. Te Arepa's name is changed to a westernized 'Devon' at a boarding school right out of a Charles Dickens book. With all the abuse scandals in schools around the world I can't see the amount of violence against children as is depicted in the book being allowed to exist in a thoroughly modern New Zealand. The atmosphere at the school just doesn't gel with the modern world. Te Arepa or Devon as he is now called starts the story as a boy of about eleven years old. He goes home at the end of his first year at boarding school and has a sexual encounter. No mention is

made of his transition into puberty, his first wet dream or even his first sexual experience masturbating - the reader is just taken straight to this sexual liaison during his school holidays. for me Ted Dawe's handling of Willie, Steph and Briggs characters verges on homophobic and in today's modern world that is unacceptable. At the end of his second year he's expelled from school and is now this bad-ass character. Sorry, I get that there are kids who turn bad, I get that some boys have sexual experiences very early in life but for me this story didn't gel, it just didn't seem real. The sexual encounters were gratuitous and didn't contribute anything to the story. Nor did the implied homosexuality o the three characters I discussed earlier. However, not everything is bad. I found Ted Dawe's style of writing extremely easy to read but feel a glossary at the end of the book explaining the different Maori terms would have made understanding Maori culture easier for someone like me, a foreigner, easier. Ted handled the death of one of the books characters extremely well and in a most unexpected way - reflecting how unexpected death can be in reality. I personally would not recommend this book to anyone under the age of 16 without parental guidance being available to deal with the sex and implied homosexuality of a couple of characters and the bullying, The book however, is worth reading in spite of my own personal disappointment.

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