

[Mobile book] The Nether: A Play

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Jennifer Haley

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Jennifer Haley : The Nether: A Play before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Nether: A Play:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Like a Nesting Doll, A Morality Play with Many Layers. By Japonaliya SPOILERS!!!! This is a short play. About 75-80 minutes run time, and maybe an hour to read the play in book form. The plot is well known so I will just make some observations. The main theme is similar to other plots that precede it, specifically the "thought police" of Orwell's 1984. The question being, in a virtual world, does one's actions become "real" in the sense that the avatars are perceived as real? Haley explores this moral dilemma using 2 provoking criteria, the murder and molesting of a prepubescent child who is only a computer generated being in the realm of the

"Hideaway," a CG constructed being in the "Nether" or internet. The Hideaway is a virtual world set in Victorian or turn of the last century era. Using the most vile and universally detested immoral acts, that being child sexual abuse, Haley tries to convey that a simple knee jerk reaction is not always the true answer. There are 5 principle characters in the play, but in the end (giveaway) there really is only 3) Sims, the creator of the Hideaway and it's God, Iris, the prepubescent child prostitute, Morris the police interrogator, Doyle, a constant visitor to the Hideaway and a college prof. with a family, and Woodnut, another visitor to the Hideaway. But just as virtual reality is not what it seems, no matter how real it feels (and it's creator, tells us it IS about feelings not acts) you will find out later that the characters themselves are not who they portray themselves to be. At first the dilemma Haley presents, does morality and punishment extend to our imaginations if indistinguishable from true reality, and can it be prosecuted as a crime? This is all fine and dandy when the opposing sides have a clear (or almost) clear view of the circumstances, whether it is wrong and punishable to do anything that one wants to do if it is only the Hideaway and not the "in world"? BUT...as the play ends, we are given a "twist", and one that is not only more thought provoking, but one that literally turns what we think about the events at hand on its heels! As the play goes along, we have Sims who creates the Hideaway as a place where one can act out any fantasy no matter how immoral, because it isn't "real" Morris, the interrogator has the position (I believe) that if one thinks that it is real, and technology makes it so (think holodeck on the Enterprise) and what one does even in cyberspace, is wrong and can be punished for it. I cannot help but think of our present day moral questions about real child pornography versus simulated, child porn that isn't real such as Japanese "Lolicon" or cartoons depicting sexualized children which IS illegal in many places, even though just drawings. But we must remember that Haley is not using Iris the child prostitute as a gimmick. She explores the darkest recesses of humanity in the terms of a virtual abused child. Oddly, Iris herself is not at all unhappy. She is not, in her own mind abused in any way. The twist ending somewhat clarifies that, but provides more food for thought as well. SPOILERS!! It turns out that Sims is the only true character, and it is his libertarian philosophy that drives the Hideaway. Woodnut is in reality, the avatar of Inspector Morris, who is trying to get evidence of "crimes" being committed against Iris, only to himself succumb to her child-like precocious charms. The big surprise of course is Doyle...for he is actually Iris herself. Since you can be whoever you want to be in the Hideaway realm, Doyle chooses to be a seductive little girl. This now explains why there were many Irises, and why they were "banned" to boarding school in the Nether. Sims knew that Iris was mostly men who chose to become a child, and even experience death and sex. Though not said in the play, I wonder if every time Iris is "killed" and resurrects, if she becomes just another vessel or avatar for the next "Doyle"? One of the rules of the Nether is that one cannot fall in love or let Iris become emotionally attached. Sims tries to prevent his own falling in love with Iris precisely because he knows Iris is really not a child, but an adult male (in most cases) and "sends" her off to boarding school, where another Iris or child avatar with a clean emotional slate takes her place. The undercurrent of homosexuality is now in question which further distorts the narrative as we have been led to believe. And let's not forget the flip side. Morris is a woman police interrogator in the "in world", but her avatar is that of a man (Woodnut) a man who is seduced by a little girl who is really a man, and Woodcut is actually a woman! So, is it an adult male who is "seduced" by a child prostitute, or is it an adult woman who is seduced by an adult male? Haley seems to enjoy complicating the issues so that there are no easy answers. Finally, Sims, with his punishment of being banned forever from the Nether and his Hideaway, finally confronts his "love" for Iris which he could never bring himself to accept before...but was it love for a little girl, or another male adult? Haley does not elaborate. Finally, when confronted with whether it is child abuse to "molest" a computer generated little girl, we now have to consider what if the little girl was not a little girl at all, but a computer generated child body inhabited by a grown man's mind? Is the "computer being still a child when it is in reality a grown man? Is it the attraction by an adult to a child's body that we detest so much, or is it the fact of the child's mind being exposed to the abuse? Consider in reality the moral quandary of a condition like Tanner's Syndrome, where a person does not go through puberty, but develops normally mentally, compared to a person who is an adult in body but has the mind of a child? The law states that chronological age is the only factor that has legal standing assuming the person of "child-mind" does not fall into the threshold of gross mental deficiency. So, is a man attracted to prepubescence evil if he has relations with a child's body but with an adult mind, or is he equally immoral to have relations with an adult body who has the mind of a child? The Nether does not give us answers, only more questions. Technology will always pose a conundrum for legal scholars, and society when it tries to create moral boundaries. This is the crux of the book, and as an instrument of producing thought provoking dilemmas to the complexities of the "real" world, as well as the ones we create...it does its job well. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I Wish I'd Seen This, but Glad I Got to Read It By bigheadedI have many of what I call "theater regrets," shows I should have gone to see but missed. The Nether was on that list before I read it, because Frank Wood starred in it, and again after I read it because Jennifer Haley wrote an amazing play. The Nether addresses one of the great ethical questions of VR: do morals and ethics matter in an artificial world? This question is already a big topic of discussion with regard to violence in video games. But Ms. Haley takes those discussions deeper down into the darkest temptations and actions of humans, and questions the ethics of having consensual adults do whatever they want to each other, regardless of how we feel about these actions in the real world. Is the Nether (the VR world) a place where we can fully explore free will, or should we adhere to the

laws of reality in the Nether? If we have total free will in the Nether, would those who love the darkness ever want to leave? And how do our actions in the Nether affect our lives in the real world? The play raises more questions than answers, but these are very real questions that will eventually need to be discussed as we live more and more of our lives online. And before you think it's a play about tech issues, it's really just a play about people, about those who engage in these actions both as perpetrators and "victims", as well as those who seek to stop questionable behavior. We get glimpses of the characters in both the real world and the Nether, each world revealing new things about every character. It is a fascinating journey and an interesting but exhausting intellectual exercise. Ms. Haley is a very strong playwright, fully utilizing my favorite playwright tool: telling us only what we need to know until we need to know more. I rarely gasp when I read, but I found myself comically gasping loudly and often because the twists and reveals of this play are brilliant and, though I find it odd to use this word, beautiful. When I was done, I was unsure of whether I loved the characters or not, but I cared deeply about them. And I cared about how I felt about them. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Insightful By Peter J. Orvetti Haley's short play is an insightful look into what happens when lives go online, and when we can be whomever we choose in a secret place. The technology imagined here is not that far away, but rather than dealing with "Matrix"-esque issues of what "real" means, Haley focuses on what it means for an individual when there are no moral or societal prohibitions on behavior, and on how real emotions can arise in simulated realms.

The Nether, a daring examination of moral responsibility in virtual worlds, opens with a familiar interrogation scene given a technological twist. As Detective Morris, an online investigator, questions Mr. Sims about his activities in a role-playing realm so realistic it could be life, she finds herself on slippery ethical ground. Sims argues for the freedom to explore even the most deviant corners of our imagination. Morris holds that we cannot flesh out our malign fantasies without consequence. Their clash of wills leads to a consequence neither could have imagined. Suspenseful, ingeniously constructed, and fiercely intelligent, Haley's play forces us to confront deeply disturbing questions about the boundaries of reality.

"Like the hard-core radical voyeurs in Jennifer Haley's terrific sci-fi play 'The Nether,' you won't want to leave the Hideaway." —Variety