

"This gorgeous, lyrical read will sweep you away." —JESSICA VERDAY, bestselling author of THE HOLLOW trilogy

touching
the
surface



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Kimberly Sabatini

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Touching the Surface Kimberly Sabatini

Experience the afterlife in this lyrical, paranormal debut novel that will send your heart soaring.

When Elliot finds herself dead for the third time, she knows she must have messed up, big-time. She doesn't remember how she landed in the afterlife again, but she knows this is her last chance to get things right. Elliot just wants to move on, but first she will be forced to face her past and delve into the painful memories she'd rather keep buried. Memories of people she's hurt, people she's betrayed and people she's killed.

As she pieces together the secrets and mistakes of her past, Elliot must find a way to earn the forgiveness of the person she's hurt most, and reveal the truth about herself to the two boys she loves, even if it means losing them both forever.

Touching the Surface Details

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From Reader Review Touching the Surface for online ebook

blondie ? says

Can't wait for this one! I have such a thing for dark and snarky guys :)

Elizabeth M says

This book was incredible! I loved it! Congratulations Kim on getting published! I am so glad to finally have gotten to read this, since my sister stole it from me... LOL. I loved nearly every aspect of the novel, from the writing to the setting- I mean, who couldn't be interested by the Obmil?- to the CHARACTERS to the plot as a whole. I actually wasn't sure how much I liked Elliot at first, and I definitely wasn't sure about puppy-dog Oliver, but as the book progressed I grew to love and understand both of these characters. The story drew me in from the first page. The way the afterlife (the "Obmil") is portrayed in this novel is so unusual and fascinating! The idea that you can travel with certain souls throughout different lives and then must "dive" into your memories and seek a greater understanding of life was so intriguing. I loved the way that the plot unfolded, gently but rapidly at the same time, and how every piece of the plot fit perfectly into place, which is certainly difficult to accomplish. I loved the bird symbolism everywhere... the eagles, the paper cranes, the feather Elliot wore around her neck. AND THE SONG PARALLELISM I mean how can you not love parallelism? Maybe I'm weird. But I adore parallelism, I feel like it makes the reader nostalgic and can bring about a number of emotions in the reader.

Anyway, these are all of the disorganized thoughts I have at the moment, spoiler-free for the most part. I am definitely going to be recommending (demanding my friends read) this book to all of my friends. What a great book! Congrats again, Kim. I hope that you continue to be a successful writer in the future. :D

One more thing. You're not supposed to judge a book by its cover, but the cover is gorgeous and fits the book so well. Plus, it matches my room. LOL

Alison says

I normally don't read paranormal type books, but I knew I had to read a book written by Kim Sabatini. The book was beautifully written. It took me awhile to understand the whole afterlife part, since I normally don't read those types of books, but after I got the understanding of it, I was absorbed by it. Excellent book Kim!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Can't wait to read another.

Tamara Stone says

A beautifully told story about the importance of forgiveness and self-discovery.

Lili says

Ladies and gentlemen, buckle up because this is going to be one long review. Why, you may ask, is this going to be an exceptionally long review? Well, the answer is actually quite simple. This book made me feel so many different emotions. I loved it, then I hated it, then I loved it even more, but I went back to hating it. It's so wonderfully complex that I didn't know what to feel. And it took an insane amount of deliberation for me to decide on a rating that I think it rightfully deserves. But to write a normal length review explaining my journey with this novel would not suffice. It would not help to detail why I came to love it so much despite the rocky path we traveled together. And, in the end, I think a more detailed review will help make you understand why this book is such a hidden gem in young adult literature. I was not expecting it to hit me just as hard as it did.

The novel started off with Elliot emerging in the Ombil. The Ombil is a type of limbo--har, har, see the spelling?--where souls go when they haven't quite figured out how to grow from their experiences and where to continue on in life. So, pretty much, the book starts immediately after Elliot dies for the third time, but we don't know how she died. And it's not like some weird resurrection thing where she dies, this is more or less a cycle of reincarnation. When you complete your journey in the Ombil and learn how you can improve yourself and learn from the mistakes of your past life, you go and you're reincarnated into a life, and when you die in that life you head back to the Ombil where you have to work to regain your memories again to learn once more, but the people most important to you in the Ombil will always be known to you upon your return. You learn about yourself in a process called Delving where you open up your memories to the people around you in order to remember your past repressed life and learn from your mistakes. Complicated, but really easy to pick up on and certainly a unique and fascinating concept. It's made all the more better by the fact that this is the first afterlife book I have ever come across that excluded religion entirely. There was a conversation questioning the existence of Heaven and Hell, but there was not one religious reference, and I loved that. I praise Sabatini for giving us not only a really unique interpretation of the afterlife, but one that does not use such a novel as a way to force religion down ones throat. Such a thing is my biggest worry whenever I delve into a novel pertaining to the afterlife, and this is one of the many reasons that I think this book stands out.

But, back to the point, my biggest issue with the beginning of this story was that I really didn't like any of the characters, especially Elliot. Elliot was extremely self-serving and selfish. I have no other way to describe it. Someone tells her she needs space because Elliott is really controlling and it's all about her, only for Elliott to go off and rant about something inconsequential but it has to be super important because it's Elliott's belief. Oh, and at least twice in the novel, she literally said "Grrrrr." I can't comment about that. Yeah, she's one of those. But as the book progressed, it became obvious to me that such characterization was entirely intentional. The purpose of this novel is to accept ones flaws and ones past mistakes and to grow with them. She wasn't mean to be likable in the beginning because she has yet to grow and as she grew, I really began to like her. This aspect of the story was meant to illustrate the point that if people let their flaws flourish, it makes them ugly. Elliott's disregard for others, her controlling nature, and her desire to always fish for pity and sympathies painted a really ugly portrait in the very beginning of the novel, but by the end of the book we went from seeing a ton of red dots across our vision to a beautiful storyline that had our hearts beating fast.

It did not help that the beginning of the novel was basically controlled by extreme emotions. These people just died. Trevor died minutes after Elliott did and he hated her upon his immediate arrival. These two went at it in the way that kindergarteners trapped in seventeen year old bodies only could. And it was slightly annoying because I felt there was no justification for any of it. It was all ruled by immediate emotional

connections. And then, as I thought about it, I realized that these people just died. All they can do is operate off of first impressions and gut feelings. If these people had strong connections in their past lives, then they're going to feel strong connections in their afterlife's. However, the line between love and hate is thin when one can remember absolutely nothing about their past--so those two passionate emotions can be skewed and misinterpreted because of how powerful they are. Once I had this epiphany and realized that the emotional outbursts were attributed to unknown connections from the past being re-forged, I became really curious. But prior to that epiphany, I found myself gritting my teeth once or twice. In truth, I think that what the beginning of this novel is lacking is more of a back-plot. They died, I know, and I think that's a great place to start off, but I think more or less a back-plot to forging relationships in the Obmil and how the past can haunt you there instead of a variety of explanations about the Obmil itself would have been more interesting for me as a reader in the beginning of the novel. It would have given me a sense of clarity and an easier launching point for this story.

But, as I said before in my quick character analysis of Elliott, the story was very easy to adapt to once all the irrationality was thrown out of the window and bonds began to be forged correctly. Luckily, it did not take long for such a thing to happen, but if you ask me it took long enough. For example, I began liking Trevor long before I began liking our main character, Elliott. I'll go as far to say that I love Trevor's complexity and huge heart and just like Elliott because her emotions are still a bit too easily provoked for me. Trevor's one of the love interests in the story. He knew that he was connected to Elliott because they entered the Obmil so close to each other. They're both third-timers trying to get their lives in check. While he is admittedly frustrating, he's very charming as well. I found it easy to warm up to him for reasons that are still unknown to me. We'll put it this way, while he can flip from serious and angry to light and serene within a nanosecond, he always went back to his humble roots. He provided some form of comic relief via the sayings that would appear on his t-shirts, often there to antagonize Elliott, and this sort of playful-bullying made me like him even more. He reminds me greatly of the way I would interact with my male friends. Except, well, he's a love interest and I wouldn't kiss any of my guy friends. Ever.

With that in mind, I also want to point something out. From the synopsis above, I was under the impression that this story may have a love triangle in it. And everyone reading this knows how much I struggle with those unless they're done right. I'm happy to report that there isn't really a love triangle. There's a complicated web of love that allows us to explore familial love, friendly love, brotherly love, and true love. And while Elliott struggles to decipher this plethora of relationships and clearly identify the emotions that come hand-in-hand with each new form of love, there is only one true love. And while their story is definitely unconventional, I was rooting for these two so hard. So, so hard. Sabatini found a way to capture my attention and hold it until the very last page when the first hints of this romance began to crop up. While deliciously complicated and unique, it fits the complexity of both respective characters perfectly. The exploration of new forms of love was a nice touch, in my opinion.

The fact that there's symbolism everywhere in this novel was rather superb as well. Magnificent, really, the amount of symbolism that can be found with birds. I can't say I will ever look at an eagle or a crane (even one made out of paper) as if it was just a bird ever again. These two creatures symbolize so much more than I would have originally imagined, and they're used in ways to dictate ideals about life to us that can continue on into the real world once we leave the Obmil that Sabatini created with us in mind.

But what truly made this novel was so worthwhile is that it makes you think. You are constantly questioning things about the afterlife, about love, about living, about making mistakes. Literally, everything you can possibly think of questioning that'll leave you staring up at your ceiling contemplating life and your very existence into the late hours of the night are in this novel. They're obvious, they're hidden, but they're there. And they sneak up on you so quickly that you're easily overwhelmed with the expertise necessary to pull it

all together. I never expected this novel to make me feel as much as it did, and while it did not drag tears out of me, it sure as hell made me feel. Sorrow, victory, redemption, anger, disappointment, loneliness, happiness, and most of all, it taught me that there's always hope for everyone. It made me realize that everyone, no matter how lowly they think of themselves, deserves to have hope.

With that being said, I have to say that I loved this novel. Once I began to like the characters because they got past the overemotional stage of death, I really started kicking myself for all of my feelings from the beginning. I went from wondering how I was going to write this review positively to realizing that I have to explain the torturous emotional process this book took me on to properly show how much the redemption of these characters eventually meant to me--including my misguided thoughts around the odd behavioral patterns in the beginning of the novel. While I'll openly admit it was not my favorite part, I will also admit that I understand the behaviors necessity now. For those of you wanting to read this, I'd recommend going in with an open attitude to emotional people instead of having them turn you off the way I did. If you do, this could seriously turn out to be a five star book for you.

I strongly urge many to check this out. If you like books that make you think and question a lot of things, read this book. If you like unique interpretations of the afterlife that aren't that religious, read this book. If you like a romance that is quirky and strange, but beautifully written and emotional, read this book. And if you like to be taken on an unbelievable journey of self-discovery, read this book. However, know that there is mentions of suicide and the occasional cuss word in here.

This book is just...so, so worth it.

Jamison says

I like this book because I think the author thought it out very well and it has a good story behind it. I like how the book flowed. It wasn't confusing at all. I really liked the concept of how you could create things in mid-air. My favorite character was the main character, Elliot. I'm glad that she wasn't too dramatic because I hate that. I really liked the origami cranes in the story and I also think that all of the characters were well thought out. I think that it's really cool that my mom made this book.

Erica says

Touching the Surface by Kimberly Sabatini was one of the most touching, beautiful books I have ever had the chance to read. It was marvelous in just about every way, and was a perfect debut from Kimberly Sabatini.

I loved Kimberly Sabatini's take on the afterlife. It was refreshing and new. Kimberly Sabatini managed to create this perfect balance in Touching the Surface - there were just the right amount of funny scenes to balance out the more serious, and it was such a treat to read. Kimberly Sabatini addresses so many issues in Touching the Surface - the idea of death and the afterlife, love, what the true meaning of friendship is and much more. I really loved the message she was sending.

Trevor's t-shirts were so funny. He had a different phrase on them in every scene ranging from things like "I reject your reality and substitute my own" to "I don't discriminate. I hate everyone". Touching the Surface

had some of the most adorable scenes I have read in a very long time. I seriously had to reread some of them, while I sat there smiling to myself.

Kimberly Sabatini's prose is gorgeous. I sat there staring at the words on the page in awe, and felt the urge to write down so many phrases as the entire book was so quotable.

The characters were all so diverse from one another, and I just loved them all. Oliver, Trevor, Elliot, Mel, the whole gang was just great. I loved watching them all grow throughout the book, as they worked to find their paths. Trevor and Elliot were so interesting - as they started out as slightly unlikable characters. By the end, I adored both of them so much, and was sad to see their story end. Freddie and Mel were my other favorite characters of the book. Something about them was just so warm and nice.

Touching the Surface is the kind of book I can press into everyone's hands, and regardless of their genre preference, know they will enjoy. While it has fantastical elements, it reads like a contemporary, and the characters create some of the most touching bonds of friendship throughout the course of the novel. Beautiful and enchanting, Touching the Surface by Kimberly Sabatini is a book that will charm its way into your life and you won't be able to put it down. I really cannot wait for another book from Kimberly Sabatini.

Also, can I please just say that Touching the Surface's cover is just about my favorite cover ever. It is so pretty AND I was so happy to discover it ties in really well with the book :)

Tanja (Tanychy) St. Delphi/James says

Review also posted at Ja ?itam, a ti?

While many books try to explain different mysteries of life, mostly my favorites are the ones that have the eventual setting but don't focus on it, but on characters. For that reason after reading it you realize that it doesn't matter where you end but how did you live.

Touching the Surface stars like that, when Elliot bursts from the lake into the surface of a well-known place to her. For the third time she is back to Obmil. You have no idea what is that? Doesn't matter, as it's a beauty of this story. It actually doesn't focus on explaining the afterlife to you but the author builds the world beautifully so that you discover everything piece by piece. In the meantime you are trying to understand Elliot. When you get to meet her for the first time your words to describe her would be selfish, brat and other not such lovely words, but by the end of the book you'll want to hold her and be there for her.

We all make mistakes, that's understandable, but the key is in forgiving and compassion, the things that the author captures remarkably. While being lost Elliot hurts one that she cares for the most and as she doesn't know her past she cannot understand her present. With two more characters, Oliver and Trevor, to add to her confusion Elliot is lost.

It's hard to point out what I like the most here - the beautiful writing, the uniqueness to the story, the characters and their development so that you'll love every single one of them by the end of the book, or the way the world builds around you easily for you to imagine it but at the same time your focus is always on the characters and the plot. There is also a nice balance between seriousness and entertainment. Everything here seems to be nicely balanced.

Ela says

Tee hee.

This book will be published on my birthday. I'm so lame, cracking up about things that don't matter....

Gina says

TOUCHING THE SURFACE by Kimberly Sabatini (Simon Pulse - 9/4/12)

I am the lucky first from the Class of 2k12 debut writers group to read this beautifully written, highly anticipated ARC of Kimberly Sabatini's TOUCHING THE SURFACE, about a teenage girl named Elliot's death and her experience in the afterlife. Anyone's death gives us cause to think about life, but the death of a teenager is especially tragic. I got this ARC in the mail a week ago, one day after I learned of the sudden death of an eleven year old girl in our town. This child left so many questions that we'll never know the answers to, questions that were heavy in my mind when I started reading TOUCHING THE SURFACE.

Kimberly Sabatini has created a rich, thoughtful afterlife setting where souls are sent to delve through their past memories to find answers to questions we all struggle with ... relationships, inner turmoil, 'what ifs' – all the obstacles to our own happiness and what's worse for some, how our decisions, actions and mistakes affect the lives of others. In Sabatini's afterlife, a soul gets three chances to get it right, but then what? Conventional wisdom would dictate that they are immediately shuffled off to heaven or hell, but what does that mean? Elliot has a lot to learn about souls she's incarnated with and decisions she's made, both in her past lives and here in the afterlife, and there are plenty of obstacles in her way, including Trevor, Oliver and best friend Julia. Such heavy themes are balanced by Sabatini's incandescent voice – it's obvious to me that so much love and thought went into this book, and the message she brings to readers is truly a gift! Keep your tissues handy!! This is the song I've had on loop all week, and it would make a perfect theme song for TOUCHING THE SURFACE. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdN5Gy...>

Jessie Harrell says

Wow - talk about a book that makes you think. Elliot gets to look back on her life and suddenly all the selfish, thoughtless things she did are apparent. But they weren't when she was living them. Made me think about all the things we take for granted in life and how we can be selfish without even knowing we are doing it.

I really enjoyed how the story alternates between Elliot's life and afterlife. How we get to put the pieces back together right along with her. How we see her over-react and grow. And I loved that Elliot found a way to forgive herself (in both life and afterlife), because sometimes that's one of the hardest things to do in life. While the publisher may call this book paranormal, it reads far more like a contemporary novel. You've got a girl who has been through a horrific life experience, but has just begun to find her way again, when she dies.

Although it's Otherworldly in the sense that Elliot is now in an awesome version of the afterlife, there are no ghost or creepy-crawlies here. You get reflection and introspection; growth and love.

Bottom line: I loved this book.

Disclosure: Kimberly is one of my writing friends and was kind enough to include me in the acknowledgments in the back. That doesn't mean I'm biased, however. We met at a conference and I was immediately drawn to her writing then. I knew she would create a masterpiece of a novel way back then and she certainly has.

A.C. Gaughen says

There are books that I enjoy profoundly as an adult, and then there are books that give me this yawning ache in my chest because I wish, I wish they had been around when I was a teenager, and hurting, and lonely, and thinking about all these questions of life, love, death, forgiveness, and this strange notion of forgiving yourself.

TOUCHING THE SURFACE is both of those books. I loved it--a lush fantasy (seems like the wrong word for it, but still) world of ever changing dimensions, Elliot finds herself in the Obmil, the physical space of the afterlife. She has to rediscover her past life, and find a way to heal herself and learn her lesson before she moves on.

Throw in Trevor, troubled hottie with an undeniable connection to Elliot--and the mystery of dying moments after her--and the ride becomes breathless, and romantic, and AWESOME. I loved "delving", which is like watching--WITH the character--as they experience TV episodes of their past life. How cool--to be able to unveil secrets to the character and the reader at the same time!

The writing was tight and fast paced, and had me hooked about 20 pages in. It's a beautiful, unique book.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

One of my very favorite subgenres of fiction deals with stories about the afterlife. I spend a rather indecent amount of time considering what life after death might consist of and my only completed work of fiction dealt with that topic. Touching the Surface has been on my radar because of its subject matter, its beautiful cover (which looks like the work of my friend Annie and fits the book perfectly), and the author's participation in the Apocalypsies. As ever when embarking upon a book with high hopes, I dreaded disappointment, but instead found a beautiful, quirky, emotional, clever, sweet, dark, magical read.

Sabatini's vision of the afterlife enthralled my imagination completely. She combines familiar concepts into something fresh and compelling. The concept of reincarnation has always called to me far more than most religious ideas, so I loved that Sabatini included that. She also put her own spin on it with the idea that, on a soul's third failure to reach some sort of enlightenment and whatever next step that brings, the soul's memories are wiped. This forces delving, a slow recapturing of the previous life's memories that allows for deeper reflection and analysis, removing preconceptions and errors kept in ordinary memory. Delving is also a group experience, not just a personal one, so that others can try to help the Third Timers figure out what has kept them from moving on.

Another fascinating element of this is the bodiless nature of the characters. They are all technically embodied throughout the book, but they have not always worn that body. In her first life, Elliot and her best friend Julia were twin brothers named Arty and Jim. The souls simply continue to wear the body and use the name of their last life until they reenter the stream to a new one. The souls can identify one another by their scent that remains constant from body to body. Though she occasionally comments on appearances, the personality obviously factors in much more in how others seem to her.

The other main delightful quirk about the afterlife is the ability to manifest the mind's landscape physically. Thoughts can be created, from a lake to a mountain to a book the soul wants to read. Within the Obmil, this afterlife, the body cannot be injured and seems to have so much power. Not gonna lie, I would want to stay there and would try to get my friends to stay too. Of course, when you have a bad day, you literally will be stuck in a storm cloud of your own devising, but that's a small price to pay for the perks.

Alright, now that I'm done fangirling over the world building, I should probably discuss the plot a bit, shouldn't I? At the outset, I was a bit concerned that the book was heading for a stereotypical romance plot line: a rift between two best friends, a beautiful boy she feels inextricably drawn to (Oliver), a hot, angry boy who also seems to be part of her past (Trevor), and a love square between the four. Thankfully, this got cleared up pretty quickly and the characters did what was right for them, rather than conforming to tropes. Though the emotions become intense alarmingly quickly, it helped set the scene and conveyed the confusion Elliot felt being confronted with people who remembered her that she could not yet recall.

Elliot is a great character. She doesn't kick butt. She's sometimes weak. She's selfish, and sometimes a bully. All of that makes her who she is, and, even at her worst, I still felt for her and got her motivations. She manages to feel utterly real, especially in her struggle to find a sense of self, and her blithe unawareness of how she can steamroll others. Elliot wants to move on, hates having come back as a Third Timer, but she fears delving into her memories. Obviously, death in one's teen years doesn't signify a happy story.

The book alternates between the fantasy landscape of Obmil and flashbacks to the characters' memories of their previous lives. This allows Sabatini to confront both gritty real life issues and psychological struggles. The flashbacks also explain why the characters feel the way they do about one another in the beginning, often for reasons even they don't know. This storytelling method adds a lot of tension to the tale and kept me flipping pages.

I dearly love Trevor. Oliver may be the nice one, though he shows some darker moods too (which I like), but I always have been drawn to the moody ones. Watching Trevor open up is delightful and he definitely puts hummingbirds in my stomach, let me tell you. What I love best is the way he changes the slogan on his t-shirt to match his emotions, generally with a smartass comment.

Ending books about the afterlife is generally pretty tricky, more so than with other genres perhaps. Sabatini's ending worked perfectly, I felt. I didn't anticipate quite the direction it would go in, and I really appreciated that. Nothing's wrapped up exactly, but it feels complete.

Kimberly Sabatini's debut blew me away and I know *Touching the Surface* is a book that I will be rereading. For a book with similar themes that does some wholly different things, check out *Level 2* by fellow Apocalypsie Lenore Appelhans.

Read more of my reviews at [A Reader of Fictions](#).

Liviania says

There's something particularly fascinating about books set in the afterlife. It's a purely unknowable world, yet at the same time one that might actually exist. In Kimberly Sabatini's afterlife - the Obmil - you get three chances to examine your past and complete your life's journey next time. Elliot Turner is a Third Timer and knows this is her last chance to get it right. It's time to go past the surface.

Elliot's journey to self-discovery is complicated by two things. One, her best friend (who she's shared every life with) has suddenly decided to stay away from her. Two, there are two guys with whom she feels an instant connection - one intense and broody, the other cheerful and loving. As it turns out, both boys were pivotal to Elliot's most recent life.

I found the beginning of **TOUCHING THE SURFACE** somewhat confusing. The characters Delve into their memories and the first several Delves were rather abrupt. The content of the Delves was supposed to be somewhat mysterious, considering Elliot doesn't entirely remember what happened, but it took me awhile to get into the rhythm of when she'd switch between past and present.

But once I got into **TOUCHING THE SURFACE**, I loved it. Sabatini sets up some predictable elements, but she managed to make them play out in an unpredictable way. I particularly enjoyed **TOUCHING THE SURFACE**'s treatment of love. Sabatini doesn't give short shrift to any of its forms. It can be romantic, platonic, familial, or friendly. And love in all its forms is important to living.

TOUCHING THE SURFACE is a terrific debut. Sabatini has shown that she can handle big ideas in an individual, human manner. I also liked the little glimpses into the journeys other people are making at the Obmil. This is Elliot's story, but she's in a world where everyone is struggling with their own story. It's an intriguing take on life after death. **TOUCHING THE SURFACE** might be a good novel to introduce contemporary fans to something more fantastical. It's also a good choice for speculative fiction fans tired of monsters and dystopias and looking for something a little quieter, if no less dramatic.

Michelle says

I'm pretty sure I just didn't get this book. It wasn't poorly written, it was an interesting concept, but I hated the main character and couldn't get around it, even when she figures things out. It didn't help that the phrase touching the surface is said several times in different ways. I wanted to put it down, but the glowing reviews made me think that it would just click at some point and i didnt want to give up so soon. I should have. Sorry, it just wasn't for me.
