

Minds on Fast Forward

A Meeting of Minds. Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman. Simon & Schuster, 1999. 1999 pp. US\$25.00 cloth. ISBN 0-689-81947-1. Ages 10-14.

This is the fourth book in a series showcasing Princess Lenora of Gepeth, who can imagine things into reality, and Coren of Andilla, who can hear what other people think. Sayley, the Gepeth resident most like Lenora, plays a big role. As in *More Minds*, Lenora and Coren have lost their powers, this time because they are in Winnipeg, where no one is in-tune enough to realize that s/he has the imagination to alter the world for the better.

One's enjoyment of this book likely hinges on whether or not one enjoys the melodrama format (or its more recent incarnations as cartoons, comic books, and computer games). This text comes complete with flat characters, a stock villain (or three), two *deus ex machina* solutions, and a hanging ending. The protagonists are in constant movement, running from capture almost every time one looks across the page. Like a storyline computer game, the trick is to figure out how the constructed world works in order to figure out how to escape.

The text tries hard to subvert gender norms. Still, these gender norms (and heteronormative expectations) cannot simply be subverted by making the princess strong and impulsive and the prince weak and caring. Indeed, I suspect, given the privileging of "masculine" traits in our society, Coren frequently will not receive a sympathetic reading. Further, the book's emphasis on kissing and marriage struck a peculiar note, especially as the two main characters sometimes seem no older than the 10-year-old Sayley.

The most interesting aspects of the book for me include the characterization of Winnipeg itself, where "it only snows eight months out of the year." The text is a dystopia, and thus a critique of various aspects of North American culture. Anyone who has lived in the Canadian prairies is familiar with their infamous and tasteless malls (here called "Portage Place" but looking an awful lot like my recollections of the dreaded WEM), and the send-up of consumer culture has very amusing moments. For instance, a clerk tries to sell Lenora "this week's Fitness Experts special[.] Each shoe has a built-in digital heart-rate monitor and scale, so whenever you want to know how you're doing, just look down at your feet and there you are!" A parody of sci-fi conventions attempts to satirize people's willingness to believe the unbelievable even while ignoring the world around them. The hugely popular children's author phenomenon, in the guise of a book signing at which Carol M. and Perry N. (*reductio ad absurdum* versions of the authors) are pilloried as self-serving, very washed out reflections of Lenora and Coren, is also a recurrent motif.

The text is highly metafictional, even poststructuralist, in its focus on the indeterminacy of authorial purchase and intent. The book throws out such questions as how do we know who "authors" our lives, and where do minds and knowledge begin and end. It is also exceedingly recursive, with some in-jokes most fully available only to those who have read the rest of the series.

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