

Chasing the Money: An Entertaining Sleight of Hand

Chasing The Money. Dennis Foon. Blizzard, 2000. 56 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-921368-93-3.

Dennis Foon is one of Canada's pre-eminent writers of theatre for young people, having penned such celebrated plays as *New Canadian Kid*, *Skin* and *Seesaw*. *Chasing the Money*, his latest creation, is a work that examines problems associated with compulsive gambling. Kip, the young protagonist of this piece, is a teenager who has discovered gambling and finds it thrilling. As he says early on in the play "I do it for the spice. Life's just life without the spice. Put a little money in and suddenly everything gets interesting." Conflict arises when he falls in love with a girl named Joey, the daughter of a professional Magician, King Hewitt. Joey knows all about the dangers of gambling because her father gambles regularly and loses big time.

What elevates this play above a simple lecture on the evils of gaming is its focus upon story. The play unfolds swiftly and the tone it sets catches the rhythms and zest of teenage life dead on. Gambling, for Kip, is a great adventure. The play wisely avoids undue sentimentality and instead embraces theatricality. As Joey's father is a magician, his magic act is utilized throughout the play as a metaphor for life. The effect is bracing. The relationship between Joey and her father is established and examined through the device of the classic pierce-the-box-with-swords magic act. A suicide is deftly captured when one of the characters slips into a box, and then disappears — never to be seen again. Scenes fire along quickly, and the theatricality of the play allows the audience to digest content quickly, preventing the play from becoming didactic.

The counterpoint to this is that the play sometimes moves so swiftly that one feels a little rushed. One wants to settle in and understand Kip a little better — but he is just encountering his greatest test when the play ends. Still, what Foon has sacrificed in a more intimate portrayal of his protagonist, he has more than made up for with clever storytelling in this entertaining and thoughtful exploration of gambling and young people.

Clem Martini is a professor of Drama at the University of Calgary and a playwright. Recent publications include *Illegal Entry* and *A Three Martini Lunch*, for which he was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award.

One Book or the Other

The Game. Teresa Toten. Red Deer, 2001. 208 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-232-9.

I found *The Game* very unsettling. The most unsettling thing about it is that I cannot decide whether my being unsettled is a good thing or a bad one.

What was unsettling was that, as I made my way through the novel, it read alternately like two different books. Depending on how I let myself think about it