

## MAKING WIZARDS WORK TOGETHER

**Wind Shifter.** Linda Smith. Thistle-down Press Ltd. 1995. 310 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-895449-42-1.

*Wind Shifter*, Linda Smith's first book-length publication, has many of the classic elements of a young adult fantasy novel — magic, a protagonist who finds herself alone and alienated, and a quest.

Our protagonist is the daughter of a famous wind wizard. She and a young man are his apprentices, but, as her mother had died a year prior, Kerstin had taken on the added responsibility of running the household. Like any young teenager, she enjoyed the adult role while resenting the time taken away from her study of magic. She is jealous of the young man's growing magical powers and of the time that he spends with her father.

Kerstin's father leaves, for the summer, on his own quest. In the meantime, Freya (their country) becomes victim to a horrendous drought. No other wizard is capable of shifting the wind to bring the rain. It is discovered that their centuries-old enemy, the Ugliks, are to blame for bringing the drought to Freya in order to conquer Kerstin's people. Finding herself unwanted, Kerstin decides to run away and, by making herself invisible, spy on the Ugliks to try to break their spell.

As in all fantasy quest novels, Kerstin's journey is long, lonely, and dangerous. Captured by the Ugliks, she is taken to their land and discovers that while they had indeed created the spell, they too have become victims of the changing climates. By living with the Uglessians (their proper name), Kerstin realises that, on both sides, the prejudices had kept the two peoples as bitter enemies for centuries. Ultimately, she manages to intercede with both groups and force *all* wizards to work together to reverse the spells.

Through the veil of a more than adequate fantasy/adventure novel, we watch this young adolescent rise above her childish petulance and become more adult and tolerant in her world view. She learns not only day-to-day problem-solving on her quest, but also that there is good and evil in all people. And, perhaps, most importantly, she learns that history tends to distort truths and that racial prejudices are often created by misinformation. Smith's thinly-veiled message of tolerance to all borders on preaching. This can be anathema to teenagers — they believe that they read for pleasure not to learn. Conspicuous moral messages and the stories that contain them — no matter how good — are usually rejected by them. Despite this slight tendency toward moralizing, the novel more than does the genre justice.

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