



The Silver Sphere: The Kin Chronicles

Michael Dadich

Evolved Publishing (Nov 19, 2012)

Softcover \$14.95 (274pp)

978-1-62253-601-6

This fresh twist on the quest fantasy novel is done with charm and humor.

In *The Silver Sphere*, Michael Dadich writes fantasy for a youthful audience in a literate, lively, and entertaining manner. Dadich's short quest novel makes for a satisfying read, paying homage to the familiar and offering something fresh.

While children going through a wardrobe, hole in the wall, puddle, or similar portal that takes them to a mythical world is pretty standard in the genre, Dadich puts a little spin on this old saw. His six American tenth-graders (and an adult male librarian) "level up"—to put it in role-playing game parlance—in age, physique, and prowess as they move from Earth to Azimuth, which a character there explains is a "different world and another time." Such a growth spurt is familiar to fantasy gamers.

This is a quest story where the girls and boys have to find the adult members of the Aulic Assembly (to which they are psychically and mystically bound through space and time) and the book's titular magic orb, in order to save this world from a great evil—Satan, or "Biskara" as he is known locally, and his main minion, Malefic. The latter character, who "slithers" rather than walks, likes to dress in spiked black armor—as depicted in one of the better of the numerous sketches that illustrate the novel.

Dadich keeps the story moving forward through a series of encounters with Minotaurs, Nightlanders, Disembowlers, Zumbaki, and other nasties, and he intersperses those fights with meetings with more lovable and kindhearted characters, including a talking lion (who differs from a similar creature of C. S. Lewis's making in that he has the body of a stallion). While, as some of the characters remark, this all appears to be happening at a Renaissance fair or in an Arthurian environment spiked with magic, it is all done with charm and a little humor.

The novel contains a short glossary to help readers who have difficulty telling a Throg from a Leshy or who forget which questing Earth child is linked with which Aulic Assembly adult. There are numerous (and nicely done) illustrations, as well as a map—although it is buried deep in the glossary rather than set up front where it can be easily accessed.

Dadich does try to bring a little of the modern world and its angst into the story but confines that to the first and last chapters—and those, like all other chapters in this novel, are very short. These bookends may appeal to some young readers, while others may be saddened or disturbed by the sort of real-world terrors from which they seek out fantasy to escape.

The Silver Sphere does not break new ground in the genre, but it plants healthy seeds in fertile ground, and there is a satisfaction in seeing its young characters grow and blossom as the story moves forward.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (July 12, 2013)

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