

Anni Moon and the Elemental Artifact

Melanie Abed

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This fun, otherworldly work of juvenile fiction celebrates friendship, loyalty, and listening to one's heart.

Melanie Abed's *Anni Moon and the Elemental Artifact*, illustrated by Hisham Abed, is a fast-paced, thrilling, otherworldly adventure story that celebrates friendship, loyalty, and listening to one's heart.

Anni Moon, almost thirteen, and her best friend, Lexi Waterstone, are treated like servants at Waterstone Academy since the mysterious disappearance of their guardians, who founded the residential school. As if arrogant adults, obnoxious classmates, and being stuck with the messiest chores aren't enough, it turns out Lexi is hiding a secret that will take the girls on a life-threatening mission to mysterious worlds whose very existence depends on their success.

The girls' adventures are enhanced by colorful, cinematographic descriptions that bring the story vividly alive. The characters' whimsical and imaginative names (Ms. Downsnout, Miss Sugar, Avis Crumplehorn) immediately bring not only images but also character traits to mind, without requiring lengthy descriptive text.

Although similar in feel to the popular Harry Potter stories and featuring characters who would surely find themselves equally at home at Hogwarts, Waterstone Academy's Chicago location and lack of wizardry help to distinguish it in the genre.

Hisham Abed's intriguing black-and-white illustrations gracefully enhance the text, providing gentle guidance and allowing readers to exercise their own imaginations. Creative vocabulary adds to the fun, as characters exclaim "for snozdoddles' sake!" or "moppins!" and call less-than-savory personages "scandaroons."

While generally fast-paced enough to keep readers eagerly turning its pages, the suspense dies down somewhat in the book's middle section, which finds Anni on Moon Zephyr, a location that exists in another dimension. Descriptions of her moving from place to place, combined with the on-and-off confinement of some of the characters, slow the action. The frequent reference to the "Funk" that surrounds humans and the ability of Elementals to detect the odor also seems overdone.

While the text is generally well written, a few sentences flow awkwardly because of word arrangements. Occasional misused words ("hers and Lexi's expulsion"), unnecessary hyphenation, and some misplaced punctuation can also be found.

Anni Moon and the Elemental Artifact is entertaining, suspenseful, and fun juvenile fiction. Abed's story highlights the importance of seeing challenges as opportunities to grow and make choices, to love, and to learn that "you must always listen to your heart, for it will always lead you home."

KRISTINE MORRIS (March 10, 2016)

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