

Can Dragons and Frogs Be Friends?

Trudi Carter

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Rounded characters communicating through letters convey strong messages on courage, peace, and gratitude.

Trudi Carter's debut, *Can Dragons and Frogs Be Friends?*, is an epistolary fantasy about reconciliation. Recounted through letters between Forest Squirrel and Beach Bird, the pleasant story reveals the long-standing divide between Throckmorton and his wife (dragons who survive by eating frogs) and the frogs of Deep Pond, who avoid them. When Throckmorton needs help saving his soon-to-be hatched child, a daring rescue spearheaded by Melville the frog results in peace. For early grade-school readers, this book offers clear lessons in gratitude.

At the heart of the plot lies the impending birth of a new dragon, who is expected to further threaten the frogs. Knowing that dragon eggs take three hundred years to hatch, the carefree frogs make little move to confront the dilemma. Forest Squirrel shares his concerns with Beach Bird, whose sage words are nearly always prophetic, until an unexpected turn of events transforms the main characters.

Arranged in two-page chapters—each featuring Forest Squirrel's letter, Beach Bird's response on the facing page, and amusing postscripts about their respective couriers, Owl and Pelican—the tale breezes through centuries. At one point, Forest Squirrel remarks, "It has been 200 years since I have written you." Presenting the dragons' sudden change of heart as a handed-down record rather than through the eyes of either the dragons or the frogs removes emotional immediacy yet suggests the truce was historic. Of the letters, the freshest ones detail the friends' lives in the Great Forest and Ocean Wave City, allowing them to become fuller characters instead of curious commentators. Less compelling letters stick to retelling events.

Minor details that keep the book from reaching a polished quality include the typography; the title page and chapter dividers mix competing fonts. Black-and-white reproductions of the book's color illustrations are included at the end as a thoughtful coloring book yet appear busy due to slightly pixilated outlines. Strict adherents to the belief that fantasy worlds should operate within their own believable rules and structures may note a few odd discrepancies, such as the mention that the letters were "rolled up like scrolls and tied with ribbons" and written "a long, long, time ago," which juxtapose with Beach Bird's seemingly contemporary mention that he had recently moved "next to the red lifeguard stand."

Can Dragons and Frogs Be Friends? turns the predator-prey relationship into an imaginative opportunity for shifting views and beginning anew. With secondary themes of courage, Dragon Mama's ferocity, and implied forgiveness for the past, the book yields rich potential for discussion.

KAREN RIGBY (May 8, 2014)

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