

Capable Monsters

Marlin M. Jenkins

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Marlin M. Jenkins invigorates a potent mythology with his collection *Capable Monsters*, which is grounded in the beloved Pokémon franchise and which uses its lines to navigate a queer, black life. With entries made original by the harsh personal experiences they relate, the work is complicated by a history of American violence that pierces through its poems' fantasies.

Whether they are evoking "conversations lasting / hundreds of years" or "the anniversary of Michael Brown's / death," the poems present darkness in thoughtful gradations. Showing monsters who reveal their underbellies despite their toughened exteriors and drawing astute parallels between Lapras and what it's like to be "the only Black person in the room," the book turns Pokémon into an eloquent crucible for sifting through memories, calculated defenses, and, in their haunting permutations, captivity and brokenness.

Sometimes melancholy Pokémon are a childhood lifeline, a stack of "cards with demons / jumping from their mouths;" they're also worthy of deeper contemplation. Here, a boy hopes to be like a Bulbasaur, with the power to "never be in hunger, always be in bloom." Pikachu's signature *pika pi* is a "lonely vocabulary," and Togekiss is so legendary as to be doubtful of having ever existed in a vicious, colonizing world. A poem on Squirtle, which starts with a list of received, bullying taunts, concludes with the heartbreaking determination to be resilient.

Amid these urgent, vulnerable ruminations, Pokémon retain their mystiques. Rising above hardship and never yielding to hardness, the poems are buoyed by hope as they refuse naiveté. Organic in their often sinuous lines, and composed with a wide vision that encompasses both the minutiae of the game and a contemporary landscape, *Capable Monsters* is a devotee's chapbook with crossover appeal.

KAREN RIGBY (March / April 2020)

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