

Corld

Julie Rupert

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Young people are often entranced by the wonders of texting and other technologies, which, taken too far, could be counterproductive to the intellectual and social development of teens. In her novel *Corld*, Julie Rupert takes this observational seed and grows an exciting and pointed tale from it.

In *Corld*, Cassie, a fourteen-year-old girl, and Tony, her sixteen-year-old brother, are sucked through a computer screen, followed by their mother, Bella. *Corld* is a world inside computers, a realm of ideas in which children are given the tools to pursue their interests uninterrupted, but at significant personal cost.

Rupert comes from a distinctly nontech background. She has been a registered nurse and midwife, farmer, and animal caretaker. In *Corld*, she tells an engrossing story and raises many provocative points about the role of technology in young lives.

Conversations in *Corld* can take the shape of Google searches, in which one person tries to finish another's sentence by guessing what their next words will be. Transportation is via an internet-style "link" system, where one site shifts characters to another site when they find a crossover of content or ideas. The main light source is emitted from the eyes of the main characters, like binocular flashlights; often, there are images and creatures lurking at the edges of their vision. Some of Rupert's scenes are forthright in their real-life observations—kids eat burgers and fries even though they don't feel hunger—but generally, these messages don't distract from Rupert's world-building. Or, in this case, *Corld*-building.

On the book's cover, Cassie and Tony appear slightly younger than their stated ages. In a way, Rupert's book can be seen as an effort to preserve the innocence of children, to make children aware of concepts like addiction in a context that might prove much more relevant to them than more traditional addictions to smoking or drugs.

Rupert's writing is fine, though differences between her native Australian English and American English could confuse US readers at times. Meager use of contractions sometimes makes the dialogue sound unnatural. But if readers have a significant problem with *Corld*, it might be that virtually all of the kids sucked into *Corld* are boys, which can be seen as realistic, simplistic, or both. As one character explains, "generally, the girls do not become so obsessed with one idea and the wonder of their own cleverness, so are not seduced so easily... They [the boys] rely on it [the idea] for their self-esteem and reason for being."

Some boys might take exception, others might readily agree. Either way, Rupert's novel stirs the pot while entertaining the reader. *Corld* might make a good choice for a teen book group to read and discuss. Rupert's imagination has brought a computer world to life; it's a story worth getting sucked into.

PETER DABBENE (August 13, 2012)

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