

FANTASY

Deep into the Heart of a Rose

G.T. Denny

Night Watch

978-0-615-45155-8

Four Stars (out of Five)

Author G. T. Denny has degrees in philosophy and law, two intellectual and logical pursuits, yet he has written a fantasy, *Deep into the Heart of a Rose*, for “all those who were children once.” Setting aside the sometimes comedic names of characters, there are concepts and situations in this book that will stir recognition in the minds of adult readers—archetypes such as the quest, the thwarted romance, the regret of the irredeemable sinner, and the presence of dark forces threatening to destroy the source of all light.

Edward T. Cozzlebottom wakes up one day and decides it is time to write a letter to his neighbor, Ezmerelda Wimbish. Although well aware of one another, they have never chosen to meet. The missive is intercepted by a demonic figure who mutters something to the effect that the letter must not be delivered. The next morning, Ezmerelda is gone. The only evidence of her hasty departure is the condition of her roses, the flowers she tends and cherishes: their heads are drooping in sadness.

Denny has created a charming imaginary world. As is often the case in fantasy fiction, it exists outside of reality but with touches of the real world—in this case, the world of the 1800s. No conveyances more modern than carriages are available; when Cozzlebottom and his friends set out to find Wimbish, they do so on foot, using donkeys for cartage. The book follows the adventures of Wimbish and Cozzlebottom through the Outlands, the dark Dorianic Wood, and the Bruste Mountains. The story centers on the universal struggle between light (Elder Mother Aurora) and dark (the Black Lodge).

The book has everything needed to make a ripping-good yarn, and Denny is to be congratulated. He exhibits his delight in language as he moves his characters through their paces. Denny lists John Lennon, Lewis Carroll, and Edgar Allan Poe among his literary heroes, and touches of all three of them are present in the book.

The title’s shortcoming could be the writer’s choice of audience. Denny has kept his book clean and peaceable, with little violence and just enough ickiness for older children to

enjoy. There is courtly love with no taint of sex in his imagined world.

Perhaps *Deep Into the Heart of a Rose* could have been darker and more adult-themed, in keeping with the expectations of the typical fantasy reader, but at least the story's philosophical depth will appeal to adults. It will be interesting to see if Denny continues in the same vein in the planned sequel, *Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal*.

Barbara Bamberger Scott