

**Dunnard's Pearl: What to do with the world when you can't get off.****Mike Williamson**

CreateSpace (Oct 20, 2013)

Softcover \$9.50 (246pp)

978-1-4839-2081-8

*Dry humor and a good message rocket this young adult sci-fi novel into orbit.*

*Dunnard's Pearl* is an interesting book full of humor and some very important ideas. The logic in the story has a dream-like quality—full of jumps and turns that do not always make sense—but is highly entertaining.

While waiting for the bus one day, James Justice finds himself unexpectedly transported to a strange new place. As he explores his surroundings, he runs into two of his classmates, Joanne Honeydaze, his secret crush, and Benjamin Deadwood, the class bully. The three reluctantly band together in an attempt to get home from what they discover to be a space station.

Getting home, however, will not be an easy task. The space station is governed by an arbitrary Administration that is selfishly taking all of the resources and providing little for those who grow and harvest the food. Additionally, the Administration is at war with the Engineers, the group responsible for maintaining the space station. The three schoolchildren must find a way to help the people save their world before they can get home.

Author Mike Williamson offers a strong lesson about morality and treating people with respect and dignity, which he sums up very succinctly: "Just because someone dumps on you, you can't just take any opportunity to dump back. There's no end to that...well...downward spiral."

Though this message is certainly a meaningful one for young people, at times the story is disjointed, and some events are not adequately explained. For instance, James knows exactly where the stolen computer used to run the space station has gone but how he figures this out is never explained.

Each of the major characters has some level of backstory: Ben is bullied by his dad, and James is more like his uncle than he is his own father. Despite this attention to detail, the characters are fairly flat on an emotional level. Their reactions do not always seem appropriate to the situations they find themselves in, such as when they are laughing over the availability of knives just after a man has died in front of them.

*Dunnard's Pearl* is clever and creative. The humor is dry and abundant, and the story is unique. The characters behave with a great deal of social responsibility and integrity, and the author is successful in imparting the lessons he wants to teach. The novel is thought provoking and fun to read.

CATHERINE THURESON (November 26, 2013)

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