

## Kingdom of the Silver Cat

**Thomas M. Carroll**

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*The Kingdom of the Silver Cat is an original, fantastical middle grade adventure that's woven with lessons about friendship and fear.*

Thomas M. Carroll's middle grade fantasy *The Kingdom of the Silver Cat* includes excitement, danger, and the unwavering hope of youth.

When the children of Annaberry, New York, board their rickety old bus, they aren't expecting anything extraordinary. They anticipate, instead, the usual bickering between former friends Annie and Rhea, the antics of Dylan, and Bobby's constant struggling—he hasn't been the same since his accident. But with a sudden flash of blue light, the children are transported to the magical world of Hevelin. Left without the guidance of any adults, the children band together and, with the help of magical allies, make their way to the only place that might offer them a way home: the Kingdom of the Silver Cat.

The story's action—ranging from Rhea fighting giant birds who are under the command of evil ruler Sidtarr, to sisters Mya and Emma racing towards safety on the backs of wolves—is swift, complemented by quieter moments of reflection and conversation, and its language is direct. A glossary in the back of the book introduces the lapar language terms of Hevelin, which are sparingly used.

Each of the fifteen children is a point of focus; they separate into groups to embark on adventures, across which their individual feelings and thoughts are complicated to track. Sarah and Timmy wrestle with whether to trust the mysterious farmer who offers them shelter; Mya and Emma waiver between awe and fear as they explore an abandoned city of giants; Josh faces the burden of keeping his friends safe as he leads the rest of the children toward the protection of the silver walls. To assist, an illustrated guide at the book's beginning includes space to take notes regarding each child and the powers they develop.

The cast is wide enough to encompass a variety of personalities and quirks, contributing to the recurring theme that every individual—no matter their disabilities or flaws—is valuable. Each of the children is given a magical power reflective of an inner strength or struggle: tiny Celia demonstrates a big heart, angry Rhea learns to burn differently, and sensible Josh discovers that true leadership does not require magic at all. Within the group, sibling bonds are shown to be strong; the importance of family is emphasized, despite related problems.

The book's bright and enchanting imagery includes mysterious orchards of shining fruit and colorfully clad fairies. The children's natural curiosity allows them to enjoy and accept each new wonder, although brilliant Corey does have a few questions about the science of the place. The main question that arises with any given event is never how something could happen, but what will be made of what comes. The children are faced with either coming together to set past rivalries aside, or falling into the clutches of power-hungry Sidtarr, who will stop at nothing to use their gifts.

The children's varying adventures do not tie together by the book's conclusion, resulting in four different endings

without the satisfaction of seeing a problem resolved. The children's determination to care for each other remains unwavering to the final page, despite their continuing challenges, and future adventure is implied.

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VIVIAN TURNBULL (April 26, 2020)

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