ForeWord Reviews
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JUVENILE FICTION

Matt Monroe and the Secret Society
Edward Torba
All Points Press
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Matt Monroe sees glowing red lights in the sky and creatures resembling Bigfoot running across the fields. And that's just the beginning of strange things that will happen to the fourteen-year-old who finds himself in a mystical world battling an evil elf to save the human race in *Matt Monroe and the Secret Society*.

Matt and his older brother, Josh, are examining their grandfather's old dental chest when Matt discovers a hidden compartment and finds a ring and two wooden tablets. On one of the tablets, "The Secret Society of Odontology" is burned into the top. They mention nothing to their parents, who previously brushed aside Matt's sightings of lights and furry beasts as vivid imaginings. Then one day, Dr. Monroe reveals why there are so many dentists in their town. He tells them about a secret society of dentists formed in 1859 to help the Chosen One—the person appointed to save the human race from the evil unleashed in 1857.

Matt, the likable protagonist, is an adventurous, inquisitive teenager and a sensitive, loyal friend who roughhouses with his brother, teases his mother lovingly, and chooses to diligently fulfill an ancestral mission. References to Matt's recent hospital visit because of dizziness and loss of energy give him vulnerability and make his journey all the more significant, though it isn't clear what caused those symptoms.

Edward Torba's other characters are revealed through their interaction with one another and through vivid physical descriptions, such as Dr. Agregeous Payne, the retired dentist whom the children fear: "His pasty-looking skin revealed his face's protruding bones, making him look like a sickly old soul."

Torba's captivating tale sends Matt and his close friends on a quest through a secret portal leading from the human world to a fantastical one of elves and mythical beasts, where they must defeat Darius, the evil twin of Damien, a good elf.

Matt gives his friends a somewhat flimsy reason for embarking on the quest. He says, "Just look at what's happening in the world; terrorism, wars, global warming. … The planet's

going crazy." Still, the story and plot twists are intriguing.

Fearing for the children's safety, the parents eventually follow them into the magical world, where they discover who has been aiding the children, and they uncover betrayal within their circle. The diverse range of characters adds to an alluring world that unites men and elves, while the action scenes between humans, beasts, and fire-breathing dragons are dynamic: "The dragon joined the fight. It dived low and grabbed one of the remaining beasts, crushing it to death."

The narrative would flow smoother with a final sweep of the work to make the identification of characters consistent rather than sometimes identifying them by variations of their full, first, or last name.

Themes of family, love, and good versus evil are highlighted in Matt's quest, while the descriptive narrative is imaginative and humorously incorporates the dental theme with a perky Tooth Fairy and locations such as the Root Canal Rapids and the cavern known as the Great Cavity.

Matt Monroe and the Secret Society is an enchanting and engrossing tale of good battling evil in a mystical world, and it is suitable for young teenage fans of light fantasy.

Maya Fleischmann