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Literary

Maverick Jetpants in the City of Quality
Bill Peters
Black Balloon Publishing
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The narrator in Bill Peters's first novel, *Maverick Jetpants in the City of Quality*, often suffers from a "Moth-In-Sink Feeling." This is a sensation that the book's online glossary (maverickjetpants.com/glossary) defines as "numbness in the face of tragedy," which can occur "during moments of genuine enjoyment that lead to one's sudden intense recognition of that enjoyment and how easily it could be sabotaged through worry."

The sentiment, not to mention the need for an online reference guide, is what this agile book is all about. Set in Rochester, New York, in 1999, Maverick follows narrator Nate, his once-best friend Necro, and their pals, Lip Cheese, Toby, and Wicked College John. Post high school, the boys still use their schooldays language and its capitalized gags. Instead of bedtime, it is "Powerdown." Bad neighborhoods? "Mattress-in-the-Street Districts." Nate's mother's boyfriend? "Fake Dad No. 3."

To Nate, this childhood language is everything: He still speaks (and thinks) it with daunting fluency (readers will start to adjust by page ten). Watching it dissolve and change as the friends seek jobs and places of their own is devastating to him. It is particularly Necro, with his sudden "A Home, A Cash" lifestyle, who distresses Nate. At one point, sensing that Necro is angry over a joke, he wants to drop everything and "follow Necro quietly through the streets for the rest of [his] life asking, over and over: But what do you mean? But what do you mean?"

Meanwhile, someone is setting fires all over the city. Suspecting Necro and wary of his recent change in behavior, Nate and his crew go on a mission to find out whether he is the arsonist. Adventures follow.

Maverick is both funny and poignant, tragic and trite: its somewhat alien language mimics both the bewildering landscape of adulthood and the cultural wasteland of a declining Rochester (home to the foundering Kodak Company). The people are just as bewildering, and just as intimately (if not lovingly) drawn. Of a clean-cut former friend Nate, thinks, "sweep the

floors, change your shirt: It's Garret Alfieri"; a girl's voice has "a chain-smoking and used-needle tone"; and he describes a friend's face as "sliding downward like an egg thrown against a window."

With all the elements of the best coming-of-age novels, *Maverick* offers a voice and a story that could connect with someone of just about any age, as long as they have the appreciation for nimble, far out, and witty repartee.

Leia Menlove