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Oy Pioneer!

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“Oy pioneer! Not everyone can be a feminist professorial pioneer involved with science fiction,” proclaims the protagonist, Dr. Sondra Lear, in this otherworldly satire.

Whether on a Fulbright scholarship in Europe or seemingly the only Jewish feminist in Virginia, Sondra blazes her way through life in true pioneer fashion. She is an academic, a post-modernist, a lecturing feminist theorist, a science fiction critic, and a constant matrimonial disappointment to her mother. With an irreverent enthusiasm she continuously endeavors to balance her scholarly pursuits with her personal relationships, facing the challenges and injustices of both the patriarchal-structured university system (“In order to be promoted to full professor, I would have to become a male Episcopalian,”) and her search for a mate.

Writing with an easy, stream-of-consciousness flair, the author obviously enjoyed herself thoroughly while crafting this book. She teaches at Montclair State University, and like her character is a feminist critic of science fiction, having authored many works on the subject.

This is a book that has nothing to do with details; its focus is on events, the likes of which are anything but mundane. When not staving off bladder infections or ruminating over the marital status of every man she sees, Sondra is ambitiously presenting lectures, attending conferences, and engaging in sexual exploits far beyond the average person’s imaginative capabilities. Reading it is like being in someone else’s hyperactive dream, where one is transported through a litany of settings and characters at a blurring warp speed, leaving the reader only mildly wishing for a good dose of Ritalin.

Even through the numerous and eventually tiresome references to ’70s sitcoms, the overall cleverness and humor of the work come forth. The abundance of characters is a bit staggering, but all in all adds to the momentum of the story. They include Ilya, a virile vampire; Veronique, an outspoken nymphomaniac; and the department heads of Blackhole State University, consisting of Fred Bob, Bubba Bob, Earl Bob, and Bob Bob. Barbara Bush makes a guest appearance as a fairy godmother and then there is Ed, the talking feminist horse.

Outside the realm of any reality, Dr. Sondra Lear’s uncommon world is presented so directly and matter-of-factly that it all begins to seem quite plausible. She sums up the essence of this book quite nicely by declaring, “I write about the fantastic, the supernatural.” Definitely, this is fiction at its extreme.
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