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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SCIENCE FICTION

Stanlin and Sylvia

Cynthia Hey
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Science fiction can fill a special role in the lives of teens, especially when independence is modeled by young heroes and heroines who don't rely on their parents to solve their problems. This attribute is inherent in Cynthia Hey's enchanting novel, *Stanlin and Sylvia*.

Sylvia, a young Earth girl, becomes the interest of a planet-traveling young alien named Stanlin. When Stanlin discovers, via a prediction device, that Sylvia and the rest of Earth's population are in danger, he teams up with her to prevent that bleak future from occurring.

Hey is a chiropractor and certified fitness trainer, and although this is her first novel, she demonstrates an impressive command of language and form. The chapters are crisp, and they entice the reader to continue without depending on contrived cliffhangers. The relationship between Stanlin and Sylvia is especially well done: sweet, respectful, and genuine, with a hint of longing for more.

The narrative includes an almost red-herring plot device that revolves around a toddler's kidnapping, a thread that at first seems incidental to the overarching doomed-world scenario. Though not all readers will appreciate the twist, Hey ties the story lines together in the end, carrying through the theme that little things—even the seemingly inconsequential efforts of one person (or one alien)—can make a big difference.

Hey's vision of life on Stanlin's home planet of Capton is similar to Sylvia's on Earth. Stanlin and his parents enjoy cups of hot keechin, an herbal stimulant beverage, in the morning. After serving Stanlin some Earth fruit, Sylvia reminds him, "Wait—you need to throw away your fruit pits." Stanlin replies that "On Capton, all our fruits and vegetables have edible cores…It's what I'm used to." As differences between cultures go, it's not much, and hardcore sci-fi readers might find this to be a flaw. It works effectively here, though, allowing Hey to focus on the most important aspect of Stanlin's planet—its technology.

Even the criminal behavior as described by Hey is well suited to a young-adult book. Resulting from a traumatic childhood, a brain injury, and a case of XYY syndrome that causes him to be super-aggressive, the villain's behavior is believable without requiring an overly involved treatise on the nature of evil. Religion, too, is handled deftly and with respect; it provides motivation for the disturbed villain but also bonds Stanlin and Sylvia, who find their two belief systems to be very similar.

Throughout the book, Stanlin, Sylvia, and several other characters serve as good role models for teens. Though the mixed-up chronology from chapter to chapter can be confusing at times, *Stanlin and Sylvia* is an excellent novel for young adults or anyone who enjoys entertaining science fiction.

PETER DABBENE (October 17, 2012)

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