

Starman Heart Stargirl: Book Three in the Sanctuary Series

S. C. Williams

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In *Starman Heart Stargirl*, the third installment of the Sanctuary series, S.C. Williams delves into the continued adventures of a human family whose members have some major run-ins with powerful nonhumans. In the process, Christina (mom) becomes Lavender the elf, Jacob (son) gains the ability to shift between gargoyle and human forms, and Marissa (daughter) turns into a fairy. Ben remains human, still loves his wife and children, and grows less certain that his family needs him.

Then there's Bob the cat, a gift from Lavender to her husband, Ben. Bob is more than a cat, though—one might call him a magical headhunter, in the business sense. He eventually reveals his mission: He wants Ben and his family to join his group, referred to as the Others, after having spied on them in his feline form. Exactly who the Others are and why they're separated from other magical folk isn't made clear.

Their encounters with magical forces leave each family member changed in some way. Christina saved a baby in danger by ceding her humanity to become a permanent elf. She cannot leave the elfin realm, so her family visits her. Feisty, smart, and independent Marissa kept her human name and is enjoying her fairy life despite its drawbacks (being a lot smaller, for one). Jacob's ability to become a gargoyle has made humanity optional for him; *Starman Heart Stargirl* details his growing preference for his magical form and the reasons he prefers it.

Ben remains human, and the radical changes in his family begin to wear down his easygoing demeanor at the opening of this novel. He ends up giving his wife and children an ultimatum that they answer in an unexpected way.

The most prominent part of the novel's structure is the subplot referenced by the title: part of a sidewalk at a college bears the inscription "Starman Heart Stargirl." The Professor (an otherwise unnamed character) gives his English class a challenge by asking them to find out as much as they can about the history of the inscription. This element is the basis for a subplot that holds the entire novel together.

The humor employed by Williams works very well and starts with the unnamed narrator on the first page: "Professors love to visit the inside of their heads." In another example, Marissa speaks her mind, though she needs to learn some tact: "No wonder the elves want your color... You look like Grandma's Christmas sweater—all sequins and flash."

Christina/Lavender is more dour than expected; she acts chronically depressed in many of her scenes and seems to regret her sacrifice of the previous volume. However, given that the other characters are lively and almost too nice, Lavender's demeanor acts as a counterweight and keeps the story from being overcome by verbal saccharine.

Coming into a series without having read the previous books can be a challenge; there needs to be just enough information from the earlier books to keep the reader from getting lost. Williams has done this masterfully. *Starman Heart Stargirl* is a fine read by a writer who could become a major name in the urban fantasy genre.

J. G. STINSON (February 12, 2013)

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