



The Curious Tale of Carter Nicholsworth

M. Fox

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Awkward and introverted, Carter Nicholsworth is certainly not counted among the popular crowd at his junior high school. He keeps to himself, spending "...far too much time standing in a secluded corner of insecurity, quietly examining the unremarkable condition of his sneakers." The fact that he has a bird named Nevermore residing in his unruly mop of red hair does nothing to enhance his social standing. One day, Carter's solitary existence takes an abrupt turn when he wakes from a nightmare into a strange world with two suns and odd creatures, and he begins an extraordinary journey of self-discovery.

Readers of *The Curious Tale of Carter Nicholsworth* will feel as though they are taking the journey with the bewildered, good-natured Carter, as he explores his bizarre new world, makes new friends, and embarks on a quest to overcome a particularly nasty villain. While the topic of good versus evil may be a common one, there is nothing hackneyed about author M. Fox's memorable characters and their unique voyage into danger as they try to set their world to rights. From an irascible, possum-like creature named A. Morun to a goat-like animal named Imalima, who has too many flippers and a heart of gold, readers are sure to be enthralled with the inhabitants of Aeiea.

The early pages of Fox's book recall *Alice in Wonderland*, a parallel the author acknowledges outright with what proves to be a distinctive sense of narrative humor. Those who choose to set the book aside due to the mistaken belief that they've read it all before will miss out on a fantastic and quite original adventure. Readers will quickly discover that Lewis Carroll's malevolent Queen of Hearts would easily be crushed by Fox's villain. The Grinder, who resides in a castle called Bludenbonz (pronounced "blood and bones," so named due to the building materials used) is thoroughly evil in very unique ways. Carter and his companions rely on their friendships, as well as their individual talents, in an attempt to defeat their seemingly invincible foe.

Fox has an unmistakable talent for vivid, imaginative, and effective storytelling. With consistent humor and conversational asides, he sets a tone of wonder and whimsy mixed with moments of poignancy. His descriptions of characters and settings are beautifully done, and his dialogue is natural and often humorous. The book is well-structured with a clear plot. Fox clearly took great care in both the writing and the production of his novel, and the book's website gives even greater insight into his meticulous attention to detail and quirky sense of humor.

The Curious Tale of Carter Nicholsworth is sure to engage readers. Carter's gradual transformation from an awkward outsider to a more confident young man with a new sense of belonging is handled with depth and sensitivity. The conclusion of the book is particularly well done, bringing the story full circle and leaving the door open for more adventures to come.

JEANNINE CHARTIER HANSCOM (December 20, 2011)

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