

The Joy of Sorcery

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Paul Dry Books (Jun 30, 2020)

Softcover \$18.95 (265pp)

978-1-58988-146-4

In Sten Nadolny's masterful *The Joy of Sorcery*, magic, love, and family illuminate a tragic time in world history.

Pahroc is the sorcerer son of a Paiute Indian man and a Berliner woman. In a series of letters to his young granddaughter Mathilda, Pahroc describes growing up as a sorcerer in twentieth-century, war-torn Germany. Now an old man, Pahroc writes in a charming, conversational style under the guise of teaching Mathilda how to be a sorceress herself.

In his first letter, Pahroc explains to Mathilda about "The Long Arm," an infant sorcerer's first skill. Other lessons include comical tips on how to change one's appearance, how to fly, and how to become invisible. Pahroc covers every topic with sly wit (on music: "No musician ever became great without annoying his neighbors."). His gentle lectures unfold against the backdrop of war, bringing history to vivid life.

The letters unfold chronologically; however, Pahroc's memory ranges wide as he grows into his power. Quirky, well-drawn characters inhabit a believable world that's rich with possibilities. Delightful descriptions of Pahroc's fellow sorcerers reveal his dangerous yet exhilarating life. Sorcerers in Europe, after all, are eccentric and unpredictable. Pahroc's teacher, Schlosseck, likes to turn into an alligator, and Pahroc's childhood rival, Schneidebein, foments trouble from within the German army. Pahroc's wife Emma is a satisfying source of love and stability.

This book should be savored. Each letter to Mathilda is a tasty buffet of wise, whimsical insights into the richness of human experiences. Pahroc's legacy of love for his family inspires zest for living, too. *The Joy of Sorcery* is a headlong dive into love and magic, told with humor and heart, that leaves one wishing for just one more letter from the sly old sorcerer Pahroc.

CAROL BOOTON (July / August 2020)

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