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The Power of Un

Nancy Etchemendy
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Have you ever wished that you could turn back time to undo a chain of events? If you could reverse the clock, which actions in the past twenty-four hours would set a different course?

Etchemendy, author of The Watchers of Space, Stranger from the Stars and The Crystal City has created a thought-provoking adventure featuring middle-schooler Gib Finney.

As Gib learns, everybody makes mistakes and “everybody needs a do-over sometimes.” He must determine which of his little “mistakes” in what seems like an ordinary day lead to a tragic accident involving his baby sister, Roxanne.

Gib and his friend, Ash, have planned to go to the carnival, but at the last minute are saddled with taking Roxy with them. Upset at the unwanted responsibility and at himself for allowing a classmate to take the blame for something he did earlier in school, Gib takes a walk in the woods. He meets a strange old man who has a gift for him—a small box with a keypad and colored buttons. The mysterious fellow tells Gib that the box has the properties of a computer’s “undo” button. The machine—called the Power of Un—will allow Gib to undo mistakes and start over. The old man leaves before Gib gets the details of the box’s operation. To make matters worse, Gib loses it on his way home before he leaves for the carnival.

Gib is torn between his responsibility for his pain-in-the-neck little sister and the lure of leaving her briefly while he tries the carnival’s most exciting ride with Ash. While he is up in the air and unable to stop her, Roxy chases a dog into the road and is struck by a vehicle. She ends up perhaps permanently comatose.

Gib frantically searches for the box the next morning, and when he finds the it, rolls time back. What must he undo to prevent Roxy’s accident from occurring?

The day is replayed two more times. Gib learns that different choices lead to different results.

Using the Power of Un, Gib learns powerful lessons about the consequences of actions. He philosophizes about life—especially after he realizes that the old man is really Gib, himself, in the future.

The characters are credible, and the premise of this suspenseful fantasy challenges readers to think—a refreshing combination.

LINDA SALISBURY (May / June 2000)

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