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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Sandra Sanchez Story

Larry Spiry
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Sports and space make odd bedfellows in Larry Spiry's debut novel, *The Sandra Sanchez Story*. Spiry is a soccer super-fan who has turned his fascination into a young-adult sports story with a serious twist: his star player may truly be from the stars.

Spiry whisks readers immediately into the high-stress world of women's college soccer of the future, recording nearly every move the Santa Clara Broncos make in their 2032 season. Their superstar is Sandra Sanchez, an amazing athlete with an even more amazing family history. Raised by a loving adoptive family, the adult Sandra has many questions about her mysterious biological parents: Who were they? Why did they abandon her in New Mexico as an infant? Where did they go? Not until she contracts an unknown illness does Sandra begin to unravel the otherworldly truth of her origins.

Either thread in Spiry's story has the potential to thrill. Soccer fans will devour the game statistics and play-by-play commentary that showcase the author's extensive knowledge of the game. Spiry even includes an imagined roster, schedule, and position diagram for the Broncos. Similarly, futurists and fantasists will love the enigmatic encounters in the New Mexico desert, and the shocking reasons behind Sandra's health crisis.

Unsurprisingly, the two stories never quite mesh. An audience interested in corner kicks, short passes, and penalties is not likely to have a lot of overlap with folks fascinated by UFOs and alien DNA. Spiry tries to tie the two together through Sandra Sanchez, who is both a beloved teammate and an intergalactic mystery, but he doesn't maintain the connection consistently. Characters are shallowly drawn, making their relationships feel tenuous and incomplete.

Instead, Spiry alternates between meticulously documented soccer games and awkwardly explained medical procedures, neither of which create much movement or tension. The games don't necessarily impact the rest of the story; it doesn't appear particularly crucial that the team win any one of the dozens of matches Spiry describes. Sandra's medical crises provide slightly more suspense, but their resolution is foreshadowed early on, and few surprises follow.

Readers may persevere through the disjointed storytelling to find out what ultimately happens to the angelic Sandra as she nears her last breath. Spiry does not leave it there, however, but hints that future volumes of the Starchild Chronicles may be forthcoming.

SHEILA M. TRASK (November 1, 2012)

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