

The Scrolls of Udanadar

S. Cameron Roach

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While perhaps not quite up to the five-star standard of George R.R. Martin and C.S. Lewis, and perhaps more akin to Disney's *A Kid in King Arthur's Court* than to Twain's original, S. Cameron Roach's *The Scrolls of Udanadar* is as charming and delightful as a fantasy novel can be without quite reaching that fifth star.

Much of what Roach presents here has been written before. A modern teenage boy dreams of knights and wizards and adventure, and poof, he is spirited off to a magical universe where he must go a-questing to battle evil, save the kingdom, and, just maybe, find true love. To Roach's credit, where lesser writers have gone slogging through this oft-trodden literary ground, Roach marches, nay, even dances. His prose is lively and fresh, and sprinkled with marshmallow stars and magical surprises—for yes, there is a leprechaun, or at least a character, one Thomas O'Thomas McQuinn, who may be one of the wee folk.

Roach has a gift for fun phrasing. When a wizard in the magic kingdom changes the young hero's name from Bartholomew to Arathogas because he finds the boy's name "strange," said hero replies: "and you think my real name is strange?" There is much that is strange yet also familiar in this world with buildings "of seeming Seussian design" and gruff men-at-arms whose "stubble ... would break any triple-bladed safety razor that attempted to cross that rough terrain of a face." That Roach can write is evident from the opening lines of the prologue: "THE SEEKING SOUL, the unquenchable yearning and wandering soul, is a restless soul. It is a beacon calling out for rescue, a ship with no port. For those with this malady, there is a cure, a place to wander away to for adventure and satisfy the hunger."

If Roach has a failing it is that so much of what he puts in his readers' hands has been put there before. The world to which the young hero is transported is driven by the *Star Wars*-ian Force-like power of the Ka'uun. He is apprenticed to an old master who, although a wizard, is as much Obi-Wan Kenobi as he is Merlin. There is a typical Dungeons & Dragons quest to find that one thing that will save all (in this case, the scrolls of the title)—a mission that can, of course, only be accomplished by a boy from another time and place, even though the world is lousy with noble knights.

While none of this is fresh material, Roach at least repackages it well. He weaves together strands from many stories, legends, and authors to make a garment that, if not unique, is at least comfortable and well fitting. A Mulligan stew though it may be, Roach's pot boils nicely, never overflows, and is served up with a delicate dash of seasoning that makes even this familiar dish seem a little special.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN (December 6, 2012)

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