

Where Magic Dwells

Andrea Archer

AuthorHouse UK (Jun 1, 2012)

Softcover \$18.24 (160pp)

978-1-4685-0479-8

Andrea Archer's novel *Where Magic Dwells* puts a refreshing twist on timeless fairy-tale conventions. Twenty-year-old Jason VanLord should be happy about his impending wedding to Princess Mia, but instead he feels trapped. After all, Mia is only marrying him because Jason's brother, whom she was slated to take for a husband, is dead, and the princess wants to cement political alliances. Young Jason, however, seeks adventure.

Accordingly, Jason, his knight Orrin, his archer Adel, and his wizard Ben, escape the arranged marriage in pursuit of a heroic quest. All too soon, they find themselves shifting shape, confronting hideous beasts, and working to save the fairies from certain doom. Although the fairies in this story are small creatures reminiscent of Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan*, these winged beings have much more pleasant personalities than the iconic Disney cartoon fairy, and much more power besides.

In a clever wrinkle, the male character Jason is the one forced into marriage instead of the princess, as is often the case. Even better, the protagonist manages to refuse submitting to his fate without being punished for disobedience. The plot also involves Jason and his friends seeking their fortune together instead of the traditional hero journeying alone. Consequently, readers get to witness the longtime friendships between Jason and his comrades. Archer begins with already-established friendships and continues to deepen these relationships throughout the story.

Jason and his crew represent likeable, well-rounded characters adhering to fairy-tale conventions while simultaneously making wisecracks about the ridiculousness of the situations they find themselves in. The book plays out like an action-comedy movie in which plot events unfold at a quick yet pleasing pace and characters still find the time to volley quips at each other. The characters' senses of humor distinguish them from players in traditional fairy tales who often take everything seriously and are unaware of the ludicrousness of some of their adventures.

While initially slow to start, the narrative eventually revs up, and each chapter ends with a cliffhanger that leaves the audience wanting to know more. In true fairy-tale fashion, couples are paired off at the end of the book, but Archer creates suspense by leaving in doubt who will get matched with whom.

Other than a slow-paced beginning, the only misstep in this debut novel is one typical of first-time authors: an overreliance on convenience and contrivance. However, these factors do not detract from the overall fact that *Where Magic Dwells* is a fun, imaginative, light-hearted yarn.

JILL ALLEN (November 14, 2012)

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