

A TEENAGE FANTASY

Dragon fall, Lee J. Hindle. Avon/Flare Books, 1984. 139 pp. \$3.25 paper. ISBN 0-380-88468-2.

This book won the first Avon/Flare Young Adult Novel Competition, held in 1983 for novels "written by teenagers about teenagers for teenagers." It is a fantasy, in which the inexplicable frighteningly intrudes into an otherwise realistic contemporary world, in this case a large North American city. Gabriel is a high school student who works part time in a small grocery store, attends rock concerts, and designs dragons for a toy company. These creatures come to life and pursue their creator with murderous intent in the climax of the novel.

As a first novel, this is a commendable achievement by eighteen-year-old Lee Hindle, who was born in Montreal and currently lives in Alberta. The hero's relationships with others are interestingly and amusingly drawn, especially his lively arguments with his sister, his friends, and "the kid" who tries unsuccessfully to steal from the grocery store, then vandalizes Gabriel's bicycle in revenge. Unfortunately they are not developed fully enough: the reader wants to find out more than is given, particularly about Gabriel's budding friendship with Kate, the girl he meets at the rock concert. Nor is the fantasy element well integrated. Do the dragons signify Gabriel's uncontrolled imagination? a manifestation of the threatening world about the adolescent? or merely a consequence of the concussion he suffers? They seem to be a projection of his fears, but fears of what? The unresolved uncertainty might have heightened suspense, but the dragons are not as frightening as they need to be, despite (or perhaps because of) Hindle's close attention to physical detail.

The final effect is fragmentation that frustrates the reader, who is moved from one scene to another just as his or her interest is aroused but not satisfied. The novel needs to be substantially longer so that the personal relationships can develop into a more meaningful and integrated pattern. The author has not been as well served by the editor as he might, though perhaps the terms of the competition require that the entry be published as submitted.

These and other weaknesses, such as the occasional inept authorial intrusions, are the mark of inexperience, however, and I hope that Hindle will persevere at his craft, learning to put the pieces together with greater skill. His picture of a teenager's world is marked by a welcome immediacy and wry humour that most readers should enjoy (my fourteen-year-old daughter did). The novel deserves to be in all libraries serving teenagers.

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