

### Diana Wieler's *Magic Nation*: Text as Life versus Text as Game

*Ran Van Magic Nation*. Diana Wieler. Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 229 pages. \$18.95, \$7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88899-317-X, 0-88899-316-1.

*Ran Van Magic Nation* is the conclusion to Wieler's trilogy about the quixotic Rhan Van. While Cervantes' hero is inspired by tales of chivalric gallantry, Wieler's Rhan visualizes the world according to the quasi-medieval lore of his favourite video games. He sees himself as "a knight, an employee of the Universe." In *Ran Van the Defender* and *Ran Van a Worthy Opponent*, Wieler complicates her hero's quest, forcing him to confront the ancient dilemma of Free Will and Destiny, of whether he is just "a bit of light on some celestial screen — the video game of the gods'." By the end of the second book, Rhan's quest is to "find out what it's for."

In *Ran Van Magic Nation*, Rhan is still trying to figure out "where he was supposed to fit in the world" and "who he was supposed to be." But he has unfortunately acquired paraphernalia that would exclude him from serving as a legitimate role model for Every Young Man's quest: he is now a super knight of the video board and comic book, capable of incredible speed, agility and strength, of clairvoyant visions and x-ray intuition. He wields the powerful two-handed sword of truth, the video camera, like a "wunderkind," and acquires a toy store chainmail gauntlet destined to fit him perfectly. At the end, he is happily ensconced in his "Magic Nation": "He had all that he needed — the sword, the armor, a kingdom and a princess."

But the process of Rhan Van's consummation into his Magic Nation, sealed with the sentimental heavenly benediction by Gran and Lee, is shabby narrative gimmickry, inconsistent with the palpable realism of Wieler's fictional world. When the bellicose, fast-driving, hard-drinking, heavy-smoking eighteen-year-old that is Rhan widens his life agenda with the fierce determination to "find out what's for," his story has the potential for an even deeper kind of excitement and suspense. Rhan does burn all the juvenilia of his Magic Nation early in the concluding volume of the trilogy, but this unfortunately does not anticipate a mature understanding of how fantasies and myths are to be reconciled with real life. Towards the end of Rhan's story, his fellow knight, Lee Dahl, is inducting him into pinball: "Pin ball is real. What happens, happens. You're not playing against somebody else's brain, their idea of what should happen. This is physics, It's real life. That's the challenge" (178). Neither Rhan nor Wieler pick up this challenge. They both duck back into the flashy insubstantiality of the video arcade.

### Diana Wieler's *Drive*: Willy Loman as "The Chocolate King"

*Drive*. Diana Wieler. Douglas & McIntyre, 1998. 245 pages. \$18.95, \$7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN-88899-347-1, 0-88899-348-X.

Diana Wieler's latest novel, *Drive*, is a return to the frank realism of *Bad Boy* and the dynamics of that interface between young developing psyches and