



Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Miss Percy's Guide to Dragons
Author	Quenby Olson
Date	March 2023
Stars	

In my review on Amazon & Goodreads, I used the title 'Jane Austin – with Dragons'. It was after I finished reading this book that I researched the enigma that is Quenby Olson. On her site she says about herself, *"I have a tendency to jump genres, my work spanning across young adult, historical, dystopian, romance, mystery, fantasy, and probably everything in between. I have no particular favorite that I love to read. If it's a good story, well-written, with characters and prose that draw me in, I'll be there."*

She's written various books that have a fantastical element to them. She's also written Georgian romances. She lives in Pennsylvania, USA. I mention all these facts to reference my opening comment. Quenby Olson nails Georgian Britain perfectly in this story. It really does have more than a passing similarity to Jane Austin. The humour is certainly there. I giggled constantly at the observations of polite English society. The satire is there too. Dramas are resolved over cups of tea, commentary on the unpredictability of the weather is there too. We also follow the development of a woman cowed by society. We see her confidence and character grow as events force her to take a stand to protect Fitz. (Great name!)

What impresses me most is how the author deals with the fantastical element of a baby dragon within this highly structured, repressive society. You're left believing it all, such is the credibility of the understanding of the period.

It's a brave story. By that I mean this – it takes courage to blend two such opposing genres. Yes it works but, for it to succeed, it needed the audience to appreciate the skill involved. After all, the Georgian romance involved lengthy, complex statements. Insights into character and their implications for society were everywhere. Self-doubt could incapacitate women and this needed to be explained regularly. We're not used to that, these days. Narratives are expected to be sleek, economical. The opposite in other words.

Reviews of this book show readers have appreciated this difference and run with it. Yet the risk must have been enormous. It serves to illustrate the point we all learn as writers. You write the story you want to write and ignore the market. This is all well and good. But to do so, by combining genres in this way? That takes courage.

Who would have thought a forty-year-old spinster in Georgian England could be the protagonist of a fantasy story? And that it would work so well. Quenby Olson is to be congratulated. Not just for writing a great story but for being so courageous too.