

A Sanctuary of the Group Mind

Review by Ginette Mayas

In the Truthful Place by Patty Lesser, the group is taken to a whole new level. Ten adolescents fall into a coma on their 13th birthday and awaken three days later with telepathic powers. But the ability to read minds develops over time into formidable mental abilities. Kat, Alex, Anne, Sami, Steve, Deepti, Marya, Jean-Claude, Terry and Nina are the coma kids, so named by one intrepid neurologist, Dr. Matthews.

Like the United Colors of Benetton ad campaign they come from different racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, and live in different states and provinces across the U.S. and in Canada. They find each other by essentially tuning in and mentally shouting out: “Hey is there anyone else out there like me?” One by one they respond until the group of 10 is established. They bond with each other like the X-Men and eventually form romantic pairs. Each person seems to have a talent or skill that can eventually be used to create a futuristic and utopic collective. But was their coma christening a fluke or did someone or something cause them to develop their telepathic powers? More importantly, why were they chosen? Only a sequel to the book will reveal the answers to these questions.

Reading minds presents its own set of challenges. One of the major challenges is how to distinguish their voices and the voices of their group from the cacophony of the masses. How do you find privacy when your group can read your mind and can access your dreams? As the children transition into adulthood and begin to master their telepathic and telekinetic abilities, they draw strength from an oasis constructed in their collective mind, a kind of sanctuary where there are no lies, no secrets, no judgments, no fear and no pain. That is the Truthful Place, a mental log cabin retreat, where the group can go to mentally recharge.

This is a terrific story, especially in the young adult fiction genre. The personalities of each of the members of the group is a wonderful treasure to be explored and savored. The novel is at its best when it plays with the tension between the individuality of the members and how they join mental forces to act as one collective mind to mount a defense. There are many problems with this book, but it is not enough to overwhelm the creative genius behind the story.

The author has stuck her proverbial finger in the wind, and has correctly surmised that it’s time to create positive stories about young adults with bold visions and powers. As the demographics in North America shift to include more ethnic and racial groups, there will be a greater demand to see more heroes and heroines that reflect the diverse populace. This book is a positive step in the right direction. Four Stars.