

Review:

Michael Eldred: *The Land of Matta*.

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Eldred's grand philosophical phantasy presents a mathematical journey unlike no other. Allegorical fictions align in an almost impermeable complexity comparable only to David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* but dressed in the quiriness of the best of classical childhood fables. Toying with reader expectations of genre and trope and balanced between joviality and sombre reflection, *The Land of Matta* demands a simultaneous appreciation of both satire and wide-eyed wonder as it propels the reader through a humorous exposé of modern scientific inquiry, promulgated by protagonists Phi and Psi whose monomyth mirrors the incarnation of quantum formulae more than it does existential passage.

Divided into two parts, *The Land of Matta* first recounts *In Quest of Mu*, the upward journey of Phi and Psi from their home Rutan to the land of Matta in a plot that pays homage to classical mythological archetypes of ascension reminiscent of Olympus and Sinai. In their search for Mu, an ancient philosophical refugee from Athens, the pair encounter a number of characters along their journey where each character represents the subtle workings of quantum mechanics sung to the theme of *movement*. Similar to classical stories of absurdist self-discovery reflective of the *Wizard of Oz* and *Alice and Wonderland*, Phi and Psi discover with each encounter those lessons most reflective of their own being's journey. Existential angst is met when the wanderers uncover the truth of their quest: that their mountain god has abandoned his perch in heaven, i.e. Matta, and moved on, pursuant his own philosophical quest towards the discovery of why it is that there is movement at all.

Book two, in a nod to quantum physics, courts disenchantment on *The Way Back to Anaxaton* when the final curtain is pulled back to reveal an Oz-like puppeteer arbitrarily controlling the scenes, and Phi and Psi discover that there is in fact no formulae to reality at all, but only random symbolism, reflective perhaps of the existential abyss of their own being, where only choice decoupled from destiny can define one's journey.

Eldred has constructed a multi-layered narrative in this work, best reflected in the book's subtitle: *a philosophical, quantum-mechanical phantasy*. Indeed, the tale of Phi and Psi is a narrative that joins an intricately fictionalized philosophical examination to the oft incomprehensible realm of quantum physics and explores the nature of *being* along the way. *The Land of Matta* is a grand sort of work, one that could easily be interpreted towards more than one end. Unexpectedly esoteric at times and packed with anagrams and hidden linguistic devices, this work is not for the faint-hearted. Ripe with scientific and philosophical complexity, some of it too subtle for the average reader to unpack, Eldred's venture into fiction presents a wonderfully original alternative to the usual academic "philosophical quantum-mechanical" investigation.