



Foiled

Jane Yolen , Mike Cavallaro (Illustrator)

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Aliera Carstairs just doesn't fit in.

She's invisible at high school.

She's *too* visible at the fencing gym.

Aliera's starting to wonder...where *does* she belong?

Foiled Details

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Download and Read Free Online Foiled Jane Yolen , Mike Cavallaro (Illustrator)

From Reader Review Foiled for online ebook

Calista says

Another smashing story from First Second. This is Aliera is a normal teen who is interested in fencing. She excels at fencing. She also spends time with her cousin who is wheel chair bound playing role playing games. She doesn't have many friends. A new boy arrives that every girl is trying to date and he ends up asking her on her first date.

During the date, we see this is not a normal story, but by the end of the story she is taken into a fantasy world she was role playing. The jewel on her weapon has something to do with all this.

She sees her world as grey and the artwork is mostly grey until the fantasy world shows up and she begins to see in color. I really enjoyed this little story and I can't wait to continue it. It is fun and I really like the character of Aliera.

Lars Guthrie says

I know Jane Yolen from 'The Devil's Arithmetic.' She's also the author of one of my favorite picture books, 'Owl Moon,' and the outstanding chapter book, 'Children of the Wolf.' She's quality.

I know First Second publishing, too. You can't go wrong with their collection of graphic novels. There are two spectacularly great ones, 'The Photographer' and 'Alan's War,' but I also really like quite a few of the other titles. Checking out their web site, I found out that their editorial director is Mark Siegel, who put together the lovely 'To Dance' with his wife Siena.

So I expected a lot from 'Foiled.' I wasn't disappointed.

It's the story of a totally real twelve-year-old girl, who despite a frank presentation of her foibles and failings, is just a totally cool kid who is also a fencer and wants a boyfriend, even though that's the last thing she'd admit (especially to herself). Because 'Foiled' is so much fun, I'll leave it at that, except to say that the part when it veers off into fantasy is placed in Grand Central Station, and Yolen's collaborator, Mike Cavallaro takes maximum advantage of that setting. He's great.

Cavallaro, First Second and Yolen team up for a winner of a kids' book.

Seth T. says

I've been toying with the idea of giving up reviewing things I'm not especially enthusiastic about. Certainly there's something deeply self-satisfying about venting all the bile accumulated through trudging amongst particularly gruesome examples of creative detritus. It's fun and it gives both critic and reader a chance to

laugh (if the reader agrees with the critic). But I'm growing less and less comfortable with the exercise as part of Good Ok Bad. After all, despite the site's title (which I maybe sorta regret a little now), my primary goal and interest is to evangelize people to the value and good to be found in the comics medium.

If I were to have a mission statement, it would lean heavily on the concept of helping people find comics, graphic novels, and manga that they will enjoy and find value in. Reviews of Bad books don't have anything to do with that mission. This is the large part, probably,¹ why such a slim percent of my reviews are One-Star Books.

Foiled and its sequel are not Bad books, but the problem is similar. They aren't books I would probably promote to many people. They are Okay—books with some good to recommend them but a number of issues that diluted my enjoyment of their contents. That's fine because not every book is going to be stellar and not every book is going to be one that appeals to my sense of what Good is. All the same, being lukewarm toward a book makes it hard to speak about with any kind of passion. I'm not recommending something, so my purpose is diminished. I'm not warning the reader away from something dreadful either. There's not even really anything to poke fun at. It's just a book series with a decent idea that doesn't measure up to my sense of what makes good storytelling.

And it started out so well too.

Foiled's first volume opens with some beautiful art direction. Mike Cavallaro's art can be exquisite at times. The title page features the book's principal, Aliera, in fencing gear. It could be a throwaway panel, but instead Cavallaro uses it to push a wonderful silent narrative of the girl. The perspective is low-angled and the reader encounters the protagonist for the first time as someone strong, well-guarded, and probably pretty talented.

The following pages, including the artfully prepared indicia, take the reader through Aliera's self-disarming ritual and we see the girl move from her place of power into an identity of comparative weakness. It's a good visual allegory for how Aliera's life works itself out and is accomplished silently, through art alone. While I know it would have been impossible to eloquently develop the story of *Foiled* had the book continued wordlessly, less words may have saved the book from the bulk of its missteps.

I had not heard of Jane Yolen or her work prior to reading *Foiled*. I read a couple of her titles off the rear cover to my wife (apparently Yolen has like 300 books under her belt) and she said, "Whoa. *Owl Moon*' famous. She's famous. It won a Caldecott." Those may not have been her exact words, but they rode along those lines. With that in mind, I'm not sure what happened. Maybe Yolen is just uncomfortable with the comics medium. Maybe she thought comics are the future and she should get on that ride but really doesn't respect the medium for what it can do. Maybe she's still super talented but is just writing in a slump. I can't possibly know the Why behind the reason these two books are so poorly written, but they are.

I'm aware that YA books are often written with teenage figures who speak not as teenagers but instead as teenagers imagine themselves to talk. So when Aliera narrates in a voice that feels wholly untrue to her demographic (the teen fencer demographic!), I try to shrug off the fact that it doesn't ring true to me. And I largely succeed!

Yolen seems to fall into one of the more common traps of first-person narration from some point in the future. Aliera, the narrator, knows how all this pans out. She makes reference to things we'll understand later

after all is revealed. But simultaneously, she narrates interjections and warnings to herself ("Protect your heart!"2) as if the things the reader is watching unfold are also being seen by Aliera for the first time as well. It's fumbling and distracting, but shouldn't hurt the reading too badly.

Foiled's writing shows its biggest struggle in that its dialogue and narrative are rather clipped and abrupt—to the point that it's often unclear why exactly things are being said. There's a disconnect between motive and verbal action. It happens throughout the first volume but perhaps the most glaring example is Aliera's treatment of Avery in volume 2. The first book concludes with Aliera frustratingly telling Avery to go be in the light, so he takes off and we suspect they'll have more interactions later. The second book begins with a little time lapse and with no major events having taken place in the interim. Yet from the outset of volume 2, Aliera loathes Avery, refers to him as a betrayer, and basically wants nothing to do with him. He's done nothing new to merit this shift—and if Aliera felt this way previously, it would have been helpful to see that attitude develop in the prior book.

There are a host of minor details that could have been better treated to remove narrative dissonance. Aliera, it is non-overtly revealed, has cone monochromacy (or something identical). That's total colour-blindness in which the subject possesses rods but only a single kind of cone, rather than the three types that humans are normally born with. Those with cone monochromacy can detect a range of about a hundred colours instead of the million that the average human can. It's an exceedingly rare condition. I had to look it up to see if it really existed. Even a single offhand remark from Aliera saying that she had a rare condition associated with her vision would have kept me in the story instead of breaking my involvement.

Likewise, I had trouble decided exactly when in the school year this story begins. Aliera makes it sound like Avery is the new kid, even though all the girls really really want him and it sort of feels like he's at least been around for a while. But then she walks into a class and the teacher asks for her name so he can assign her a lab partner. This makes it sound like the first day of school or maybe the new semester. Some mention of which would have been a comfortable way to bring the reader in to what's up with a Biology teacher who doesn't know who his students are but immediately launches the class into frog dissection. Maybe there's not an explanation for that, though. I don't know.

And a more petty grievance: Aliera is baffled that Avery, a sixteen-year-old, hasn't read *Moby Dick*. I'm nearly forty and if you tell me you've read *Moby Dick*, I will register a small amount of happy surprise. I can count on three fingers the number of people I know for sure have read *Moby Dick* (and one of them is Fone Bone). That anyone should be shocked that another person (let alone a teenager) shouldn't have read Melville's book bears incredulity. It may have been at this point that any possibility that Aliera could have been a stand-in for a teen was severed. I could no longer believe.

Now if you're still with me, you're likely wondering why on earth I wouldn't be rating *Foiled* as a One-Star book. Your hypothetical curiosity is fair and merited. I wasn't exactly kind in the preceding because, Yes, *Foiled*'s writing is bad. It's awkward and distracting and fails to maintain logical flow amongst its parts. It feels clichéd and overwrought at times. And though I'm tempted to write it off as being written to a younger, lesser crowd,³ I think that a YA audience deserves good writing even as much as I believe I do.

So yeah, while the writing's pretty gruesome, *Foiled* is not all writing. As mentioned at the start, Mike Cavallaro does a good job with his illustrations. His art is cartoony and lively and I enjoyed the way he

brought me into Aliera's world of fencing. I know way more about fencing now than I did a month ago—due merely to his illustrations of Aliera's competition gear.

Generally, though, even good art is not enough to save a bad book. *The Manara Library* (vol. 1) is not saved by the fact that Milo Manara is a tremendous illustrator. *Batwoman: Elegy* is not saved by the fact that JH Williams is a tremendous illustrator. So it's likewise not Callavara that ultimately saves *Foiled* for me. Instead, it's merely that at the end of the day, I want to know what happens to Aliera, Avery, and Caroline after the conclusion to volume 2. Call it Stockholm Syndrome if you like, but I really want to know. Even if only enough to check the plot synopsis on Wikipedia after the series wraps.

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad.]

Footnotes

- 1) The other part is that I have a tendency to leave books I'm not enjoying completely unread. And since I won't review an unread book, that means I have a pretty small pool of Bad books to choose from.
- 2) Seriously, the protect your heart business is trying. It's overlaboured to the point where one wonders if Yolen might not be working with Mattel to market a licensed *Foiled: The Drinking Game* in which the book's YA fans are encouraged to take shots whenever Aliera narrates "Protect your Heart" or inexplicably hates Avery or whatever. I'm sure it would be a hit.
- 3) One that might for instance imagine that either *Twilight* or *Hunger Games*, for all the fun that can be had in those books, are examples of quality writing.

Dov Zeller says

Spoilers ahead.

Ugh. I so wanted to like this one for so many reasons, but I found it pretty hard to connect with the narrative and the characters.

Also, awkwardness around gender and sexuality that didn't sit right with me. (For example, because a boy's face is 'baby-ass smooth', the protagonist thinks he might be trans. Huh? And then she sees him with his shirt off and therefore knows that he's not trans. What? Um, that is so not how it works. Also, it turns out instead of being trans, he's a troll. So, if you see someone who doesn't fit into your idea of what adolescent masculinity looks like they're either trans or a troll? Oy va voy.)

The art is great. The idea of a strong female fencing protagonist is cool. But, that's about as far as the coolness goes for me.

Sarah says

I really, really wanted to love this one. I love the idea, the layout, I really liked the art and of course I love the author. I was captivated by the first half or so of the book. But something about the storytelling rhythm was a little off...it seemed like critical scenes were missing, like whole themes were left unexplored.

Lulu (the library leopard) says

me, marking this as to-read that take, cs pacat. i can find my own fencing comics.

Molly says

Aliera Carstairs is a colorblind high school student and fencing enthusiast. I was more interested in the 'real-life' storyline of this book than the fantasy elements, which only really started to come in toward the end.

Eva Mitnick says

This feels a bit like Holly Black's "Good Neighbors" graphic novel series (Kin and Kith so far), but for a younger audience. The artwork has a perky, manga-esque style that is quite different from Ted Naifeh's gothic, edgy drawings in Good Neighbors, and the story line is not nearly so dark. In fact, there really isn't much plot here at all; readers won't learn much about the importance of Aliera's ruby-topped weapon or why she and her family are Defenders or what Avery's role in all this is. I assume there will be a sequel, as the book ends with a great deal of unanswered questions.

Good stuff - Aliera's fierceness and her loyalty to her younger, wheelchair-bound cousin; the bright, unworldly spots of color brightening Aliera's color-blind world (although color-blind people don't see the world in shades of gray, right?); the depiction of Aliera as a lean and graceful fencer but an awkward high school student.

I wish the plot had more depth or at least more content - this is far too quick and light a read for fantasy and graphic novel fans like me. But this very quality makes Foiled just right for reluctant readers or folks who don't want to spend days on one book. This one should be easy and gratifying to hand-sell to kids in grades 4 to 8.

Sesana says

This review is for both books in the series, Foiled and Curses! Foiled Again. I read them one right after another, so they do sort of blend together a bit in my mind. For what it's worth, I'm shelving it as both middle grade and young adult because I feel like it straddles that very hazy line between the two age groups, something that can be appreciated by older middle school students and younger high school students.

I wanted to like this one more than I did, which is kind of a shame. Jane Yolen is, in my experience, a consistently good fantasy writer, I liked the cover art, and the fencing hook interested me. So it's surprising to me that the part that fell flat was the fantasy aspect. If I'm remembering right, most of the first book feels

solidly like a contemporary novel, and I really liked this part. Aliera is a very likable character, and it's great to have a female character who's both athletic and deeply interested in an unusual sport, like fencing. Her crush on Avery is realistically written, and Avery himself is both obviously bad news and someone I can understand Aliera being interested in. So far, so good.

And then the fantasy elements come in. At first, they felt kind of haphazard and pasted on. I honestly would have been happier if this had just been a comic about a girl who fences and who has a crush on a boy who definitely isn't good for her. This aspect does start to develop more in the second book, and it becomes more important to the story, if not more interesting. At that point, it's a mostly bland fantasy, with a villain who's horribly underdeveloped.

But I do like the art. I like that it's mostly in black and white, and only the magical elements get the full color treatment. The fantasy creatures have great designs, and the human characters are somewhat stylized but easy to tell apart. I think this could be a hit with the actual target audience.

Mary Ann says

The tweens and young teens I know eat up graphic novels faster than candy, devouring each one I bring to the library. They especially like graphic novels that combine fantasy elements, action and intrigue. It's no wonder that they have loved *Foiled*, by Jane Yolen. As one student said to me yesterday, "I love stories where it's just a regular kid who discovers that the world around them isn't quite as regular as they thought it was." That fits this story perfectly. Nothing is quite as regular as Aliera expects it to be.

Aliera Carstairs' life is fairly regular. Sure, her fencing hobby is a bit unusual, but her school routine is nothing out of the ordinary. She goes to a small high school in New York City, with all of the usual cliques: the jocks, the goths, the nerds and the preps. Aliera's fine being alone, until a new boy shows up at school - Avery Castle. "Prince Charming all the way."

Aliera is stunned when Avery asks her out on a date. When she meets him at Grand Central Station, the world suddenly starts spinning out of control. At first, Aliera's world is shown in monotone greys because she is color blind. But at the train station, Aliera discovers that with her fencing mask on, she can see a world full of color, full of fairies and dragons and demons. It's a dangerous world, and one in which she has a role to play.

I found the fantasy elements intriguing and surprising. Since we see the action develop from Aliera's point of view, we are as confused as she is when she encounters this alternate fantasy world. The ending left me yearning for more, and I truly hope that Ms. Yolen will write more graphic novels about Aliera. She has created a strong character, one who is skeptical about the world around her, not quite sure of her own strength, but feisty and ready to play either the aggressor or the defender, as is needed.

Jane Yolen is one of my favorite authors, and she has written everything from picture books (*How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight?*) to folk tales (*Not One Damsel in Distress*) to historical fiction (*Devil's Arithmetic*) to fantasy (*The Pit Dragon Chronicles*). She has written over 300 books, and her love of writing and imagination truly shines through each one. In an interview the Graphic Novel Reporter, Yolen says that she while grew up on comics, she found a steep learning curve in writing a graphic novel. The sequel to *Foiled* is in the editing stages, and is called *Curses Foiled Again*. Read more about the story behind the story of *Foiled* in an interview at *Seven Impossible Things Before Breakfast*.

Jennifer says

Loved: the concept (tough smart girl who fences is charmed by new pretty boy who genuinely seems to like her) the artwork (blue-scale Ghost World-ish...until the fairies show up) the fencing, the authentic portrayal of an adolescent crush and the New York City setting.

Wasn't So Crazy About: the supernatural twist at the end, which felt clunky to me and kind of undermined the awesomeness of the first half.

Raina says

I'm trying to put my finger on why this wasn't a four-star book for me. I think there are a couple of things.

First, I loved that the majority of the book is in black and white (like the protagonist's vision) with color coming in only when the magical element is introduced. However, when the color IS introduced, the illustration style doesn't feel in the same vein as the rest of the book, so that the otherworldly elements don't feel integrated into the world on this plane (is it plane or plain in this context?). It feels disjointed.

But I think the main thing is that the first two thirds of the book feels like a great realistic Outsider story. And then this magical realism/faerie stuff is thrown in near the end, and granted, it's been building through the rest of the book, but it feels underdeveloped to me. I don't feel like we get enough of an explanation for the phenomenon, and the exact nature of the magical content isn't explored at all. It almost does feel just thrown in there. It feels like it should be the first of a series, where this just gives introduction and context to the story. But as far as I know, it isn't a planned series. Or maybe I was just feeling down on my GNs this month. I think I would have loved it if it'd stuck with the realistic direction the first part was going towards, but I guess since it was Jane Yolen, magic was required.

Also, it gets on my nerves that the hook comes two thirds through the book. It's gonna be a pain to figure out how to booktalk, if it even comes to that. But my teen bookgroup kids liked the sound of it, so I think I'll try.

Rhea says

All of us, at some time or other, have complained about our lives. But then at some point, we remember the people who live in extreme poverty or with huge disabilities, and then we're like, "*Wow. My life is actually pretty awesome.*"

I'm a really really really picky reader, and read books only after researching them well. Lately I've been craving graphic novels, so I heard this one was okay by a single source, and gave it a shot.

Now, just like I'm spoiled in life and don't often realize it, this reminded me how spoiled I am on good literature. **Foiled** was one poorly-written, cliched mess. I mean, you have the awkward girl with a hidden talent who, with her hawt love interest (who has a terrible secret), becomes embroiled in a conflict of good vs. evil in a secret magical world.

The worst bit is the shameless infodumping. Aliera TELLS you about her childhood, her life, and many more useless nuggets of information in a massive 74-page infodump. The beginning and some other parts are overly melodramatic; the telling never stops. It's very blandly written, which is weird because I've heard mostly praise for the famed Jane Yolen.

The plot's no better; it's overly disjointed, with information forgotten then suddenly remembered, paper-thin character motivation (which is sometimes very muddled), and overall predictability.

The extra star is for the illustrations; while they aren't mind-blowingly beautiful, they have solid character designs and some lovely bits.

I also love how the "normal life" pictures are grey, but the fairy tale creatures are colorful (even though the movie **The Wizard of Oz** had the same effect, after Dorothy arrived in Oz...)

So, no, I don't recommend it. Read Anya's Ghost instead.

Yesha says

Intriguing graphic novel about a spunky teen girl in NYC who is an avid and expert fencer and an awesome defender of the heart.

definitely worth looking into – a fast read, amazing art by Mike Cavallero, and well-produced book you will enjoy holding in your hands.

It's the type of book where, when you finish, you go back to the beginning again, because the aha moment you have at the end illuminates all that happened before, where you may not have gotten it, but now it makes sense... That is to say, yes, it does have some choppiness in its storytelling, but there is much richness also.

Greyweather says

<http://www.bscreview.com/2010/05/foil...>

I'll start off by saying that Foiled was very much not written with someone like me, a man in his third decade, in mind. Amazon recommends the book for ages 9 through 12, which I would say is about right, as the story is rather, let us say, uncomplicated.

The book starts off with an opening narration by our heroine Aliera Carstairs, a young woman in the middle of high school and a skilled foil fencer. She gives the reader a Cliff Notes guide to her sport, offering a glimpse of her dedication and the pride she takes in the skill she has developed over the years. Like the protagonist, I was a fencer in high school, so I can say with some authority that Yolen does a great job portraying the sport. At one point Aliera mentions "surviving" the brutal heat while wearing fencing mask and jacket. This is neither exaggeration nor hyperbole. Wearing the protective gear for fencing is like being

in a sauna, and that probably goes double for women, who have to wear a plastic shell under their fencing jacket to protect their breasts. Another good example is when Aliera takes a dig at saber fencers. I can't speak for everyone, but my problem with saber fencers was they didn't change their style when using other forms like foil or epee. In saber you both thrust and cut to score, but in foil or epee you can only use thrusts. In saber this is not a problem, because they use a much lighter blade, but when a saber fencer uses cuts with heavier weapons such as the foil or epee, their opponent is basically getting beaten with a steel rod.

The story also exposit Aliera's life at school. Aliera does not fit into any of the social cliques and describes herself as comfortable being a loner. She does not have any school friends, or enemies, or any kind of relationships in school at all, apparently. Her practical invisibility at her high school is in direct contrast with her fencing school, where she is the stand-out pupil, an apparent shining star. Even there, however, she is largely disconnected from everyone else, with her strictly professional relationship with her coach the only exception.

Yolen's choice to make such a totally isolated character is to me the most interesting in the book. Feelings of isolation are often a significant source of anxiety, especially for teenagers. I have to wonder if Yolen set up her protagonist in this way to deliberately offer her target audience a character they could connect with in this way, even if she's very different from "the norm" in other ways.

Then movie-star handsome Avery Castle enters the scene as the new boy at school and instantly becomes the school heartthrob, a Prince Charming whom even Aliera cannot ignore. Even so, Aliera tries to avoid his presence until the two of them get paired up as lab partners in biology class. Cliche, but I suppose it was hard to avoid in this setting. Avery proceeds to thoroughly charm Aliera with his good looks and by talking like a serial killer. It is surreal. In one scene where she is thinking, once again, about how handsome he is, the image we see is of Avery hovering over a frog he is dissecting, scalpel in hand, looking for all the world like the doll from Chucky.

Despite Avery's apparent sociopathy, Aliera is so smitten by his looks and outgoing personality, and is apparently so starved for some kind of relationship, that she makes an effort to form a bond with him when they are together in class. I doubt it was Yolen's intention, but to me this suggests that Aliera is both shallow and a poor judge of character. We do learn at about this point that Aliera does, in fact, have a healthy friendship with her cousin Caroline. The two have been close since they were children, and they get together every Saturday to play role-playing games together. Caroline is crippled by rheumatoid arthritis, and the cynic in me has to wonder if her character was created just to counter the earlier impression the we get of Aliera as shallow and aloof.

Aliera's comfortable routine is thrown out of whack when Avery invites Aliera out on a Saturday date. She feels torn, because she has both fencing practice that day and her weekly get-together with Caroline, but quickly agrees to meet him at four that afternoon, anyway. That Saturday, she is so distracted by thoughts of her upcoming first date that she performs horribly in fencing class, and her coach grows so frustrated with her that he sends her home early. That gives her just enough time to meet up with Avery at Grand Central Station for their date, but not enough time to drop her fencing gear at home first. While she is waiting for Avery to show, a bird that found its way into the station starts pestering her and grabbing at her hair. Unable to ward it off, she resorts to putting on her fencing mask to protect herself, and that is when things turn really bizarre.

I'll leave the rest of the story unspoiled, but I will say that I think the story of her "real" life got short-circuited when the fantasy story was introduced at this point, and the fantasy story is inadequate by itself. The bad news is I feel like I only got half a story, as the fantasy part does not resolve itself, or even the first,

non-fantasy part of the story, to my satisfaction. The good news is Jane Yolen is producing a sequel, *Curses, Foiled Again*, which should pick up where *Foiled* left off and will hopefully provide what I felt was missing. Overall, while *Foiled* doesn't have the broad appeal that I think characterizes the best young adult material, for the intended adolescent audience, I think it will be well appreciated.
