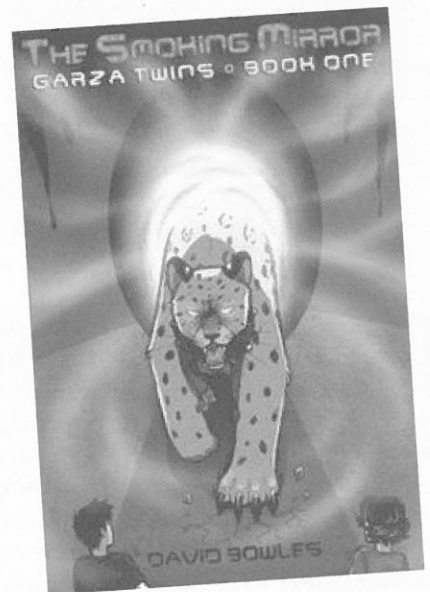


This innovative fantasy novel takes place primarily in the Mesoamerican underworld beneath the Grutas de García in Nuevo León, Mexico. Twin protagonists Carolina (Carol) Garza and Juan Ángel (Johnny) Garza, who live in the small Tejano border town of Donna, are sent to spend the summer with an aunt in the urban metropolis of Monterrey, Mexico because their mother has mysteriously disappeared. Their grandmother helps Carol and Johnny realize they inherited the ability to be shapeshifters, *naguales*, who have a *tonal*, or beast-soul. They must learn how to use their powers, including *soxal*, a savage magic, on a daring quest to rescue their mother and hold back dark forces building against their world.

Almost thirteen years old, the protagonists are realistically distinct: Johnny is like his sculptor mother, with a tendency to wisecrack and allude to movies, and Carol is more cautious like her historian father. Their twin bond helps them survive, as each saves the other's life more than once. In the underworld of Mictlan, they proceed through the Nine Deadly Deserts, full of risks and antagonists, even facing a death sentence by Lord and Lady Death. Helpers include Pingo, one of the *tzapame*, or Little People, and *Xolotl*, the canine form of the god *Quetzalcoatl*. The meaning of the cover design appears when *Tezcatlipoca*, an enemy of all sides, leaps in his jaguar form through the membrane between worlds. *The Smoking Mirror* is realistically embedded in adolescent situations, such as bullying, sibling friendship and rivalry, parental loss, and fear of narcoviolence, while developing fantastical scenarios, such as gaining supernatural abilities, descending into the underworld, and battling creatures from Aztec and Mayan mythologies. Published only in English, the novel includes dialogue, songs, and chants in Spanish. The sequel forthcoming in 2016 is eagerly anticipated.

Amy Cummins



BOOKBIRD POSTCARDS

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