

Mariah Fredericks

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About this Person

Born: New York, New York, United States
Nationality: American
Occupation: Novelist
Other Names: Fredericks, Emmi; Fredericks, M.E.
 Updated: Jan. 31, 2019

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born in New York, NY; married; children: one son. **Education:** Vassar College, B.A., 1988. **Avocational Interests:** Reading tarot cards. **Addresses:** Home: New York, NY.

CAREER

Worked as lead writer for Book-of-the-Month Club and in a bookstore.

WORKS

WRITINGS:

YOUNG ADULT

- *The True Meaning of Cleavage*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (New York, NY), 2003.
- (As Emmi Fredericks) *The Smart Girl's Guide to Tarot*, Thomas Dunne Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- (As Emmi Fredericks) *Fatal Distraction; or, How I Conquered My Addiction to Celebrities and Got a Life*, Thomas Dunne Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Head Games*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (New York, NY), 2004.
- *Crunch Time*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (New York, NY), 2006.
- *The Girl in the Park*, Schwartz & Wade Books (New York, NY), 2012.
- *Season of the Witch*, Schwartz & Wade (New York, NY), 2013.
- *A Death of No Importance*, Minotaur Books (New York, NY), 2018.

"IN THE CARDS" SERIES

- *In the Cards: Love*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (New York, NY), 2007.
- *In the Cards: Fame*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (New York, NY), 2008.
- *In the Cards: Life*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (New York, NY), 2008.

SIDELIGHTS

Mariah Fredericks is the author of many young adult books, beginning with her debut, *The True Meaning of Cleavage*. The book is about two teens, Jess and Sari, and how their friendship is changed by Sari's relationships with boys. Jess and Sari, who have been best friends since seventh grade, are first-year students at Eldridge Alternative. Jess, the intellectual narrator, worries about their friendship when the attractive Sari pursues soccer star David, a senior who is already dating the most popular girl in the class. They begin a secret sexual relationship, while David is still seen in public with his girlfriend. Jess, feeling left out and abandoned, is angered by Sari's lies and continued self-destructive behavior. She comes to realize that the true meaning of cleavage is the division of two people.

A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor wrote that Fredericks "realistically captures high school society." "Readers will be intrigued by" the relationship between Sari and David, noted Angela J. Reynolds in *School Library Journal*, "but the real story is Jess dealing with the pain of betrayal and beginning to understand human nature."

Fredericks also writes as Emmi Fredericks. Her first novel published under that name is *Fatal Distraction; or, How I Conquered My Addiction to Celebrities and Got a Life*. Protagonist Eliza is a celebaholic, obsessed with the rich and famous. She works in a bookstore by day and spends her free time reading magazines and watching television programs that fixate on the stars. Eliza scans the faces of the people she passes on the street, hoping to spot a celebrity, but the only one she knows is Norm the Wonder Dog, who does commercials. Eliza's boyfriend dumps her because of her obsession with stars. Then her best friend, Dinah, claims to have been behind the wheel when she and her rapper boyfriend are involved in a hit-and-run. Eliza thinks Dinah may be lying to get media attention. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor called *Fatal Distraction* an "entertaining look at America's cult of celebrity."

In the novel *Head Games*, Judith's online gaming identity is male, but she realizes that she cannot have a relationship with her online competitor, Jonathan, unless she gives up her real identity and her gender. Judith is comfortable with her male identity because she is recovering from a sexual attack, and she is also trying to get over the loss of her best friend, Leia. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor said that the story leaves readers with a "wistful feeling," and that Fredericks "has a gift for replicating teen vernacular."

Fredericks followed up the successful *Head Games* with the 2006 novel *Crunch Time*. Main characters Leo, Max, Daisy, and Jane are all juniors at a private New York high school, and instead of taking an SAT prep course they have decided to study together on their own. While the teenagers are not part of the same cliques at school, they begin to relate to each other through their collective anxiety over taking the stressful SATs. Adding to the drama, a student at their high school is accused of paying someone else to take the test, and suspicions fall on the group. Critics enjoyed Fredericks's latest teen novel, citing the author's continued skill at speaking eloquently about issues relating to teenagers.

She "works the same magic" as she does in her other novels, noted Taylor Morris in a review for *RT Book Reviews Online*. Others agreed that *Crunch Time* is a success. The novel offers "sharp insight and spot-on humor," wrote *Booklist* contributor Gillian Engberg.

The following year, Fredericks published the first title in her "In the Cards" series, *In the Cards: Love*. In this novel, three very different friends try to navigate life as eighth graders in New York City. Early on, an elderly neighbor passes away and leaves one of the girls a deck of tarot cards. Shortly thereafter Anna, Eve, and Syd are busy trying to find out about their futures. The cards predict that Anna will start dating the popular Delcan Kelso, but when she does Anna discovers the rest of her life seems to be falling apart. Readers enjoyed Fredericks's latest book about the lives of teens, some citing the author's talent at creating realistic and heartfelt scenes between the friends. She has a "keen ear for dialogue," observed Riva Pollard in a review for *School Library Journal*. Readers also lauded Fredericks's well-developed and complex cast of characters. *In the Cards: Love* is about "intelligent, thoughtful adolescents," wrote *Kliatt* contributor Claire Rosser.

Fredericks continued her series about the three friends with *In the Cards: Fame*. As the series continues, the girls keep relying on the tarot cards to help them navigate their lives. Each of the books focuses on, and is narrated by, one of the friends, and while the first story is primarily Anna's, Eve is the main character of this one. Eve wants to be a theatrical star, a goal that distracts her from her studies. She thinks that her parents favor her brother, who maintains good grades and is the model child. When their middle school's production of *Cabaret* is announced, Anna, who tells her the cards portend her future, convinces Eve to try out, even though the competition will be fierce. Classmate Alexa has done television commercials, and the shy Francesca's father hosts a television talent show. "Laced with humor, Eve's fresh, vivid narration will draw readers right into the story," wrote Carolyn Phelan in *Booklist*.

Eve fails to land the lead part of Sally Bowles, but she is chosen to be one of the background dancers, the Kit Kat Girls. Francesca gets the lead and then surprises everyone with her beautiful voice. Alexa, also disappointed, plays the supporting part of Fraulein Kost. Their choir teacher, Mr. Courtney, directs the show, and Syd plays piano during rehearsals. Anna oversees the production as stage manager.

Courtney designates Eve and Alexa to be understudies to Francesca, who, although she is a fine singer, is less effective as an actor. They do not tell her, however, as they do not want her to lose confidence. Francesca manages the role for opening night, but when mean Alexa lets it slip to her that she and Eve are her understudies, Francesca falls apart. Alexa takes over the role until Courtney discovers just before the final performance that it was she who told Francesca of the backup plan. During the performance, Eve brings the fearful Francesca onto the stage to be seen by her father, who is in the audience, and by doing so possibly diminishes her own chances of being discovered.

In the Cards: Life is narrated by Syd, who has always hesitated to turn to the tarot cards, but now she does, and they tell of disaster and death. Her father, a former musical prodigy who never gained the fame he longed for, has warned her not to compete, for fear of risking disappointment. He dropped out of Julliard when the pressure became too much for him to bear and has since become an alcoholic. He also risks losing his job, all of which Syd fears may lead to the prophecy of

the cards. Syd has never been assertive, but in this book, she comes out of her shell to express her true feelings, including to her friends.

In the first book, Syd, who loves animals, rescued a number of cats. In this one she leaves one of the older cats that must be given medication in the care of her father while she is away, during which time the cat rapidly deteriorates. Syd must prepare for its death and then find it in her heart to forgive her father, who is attempting to recover from his addiction. She also acknowledges the feelings she has for Eve's older brother. "This continues to be an entertaining, and also meaningful, series for younger YAs," concluded Rosser in *Kliatt*.

In *The Girl in the Park*, a stand-alone novel, Fredericks tells the story of a teenager named Rain. The narrative is based in New York City. Rain's mother is an opera singer and makes a living with her voice. However, Rain has a cleft palate and is insecure about the sound of her voice and frets about speaking in front of her classmates at her fancy private school. She is forced to speak up when her best friend, Wendy Geller, is murdered. Wendy had been shunned at school for her perceived promiscuity and attention-seeking behavior, but Rain saw the good in her. Rain begins looking into who could have killed Wendy. Among the people she suspects are a young teacher with whom Wendy may have had an affair, and a boy named Nico who threatened Wendy. Rain's investigation puts her in danger of being harmed by the killer, as well.

Writing in *Voice of Youth Advocates*, Mary Ann Darby suggested: "The very real mystery of the story is a riveting background for Rain's self-struggle, and the plot twists make this a true page-turner." "Fredericks ... offers profound, provocative commentary on what it means to grow up in the age of Facebook," asserted a contributor to *Publishers Weekly*. *Booklist* reviewer Lynn Rutan commented: "Fredericks has constructed a taut, suspenseful mystery with convincing characters whose actions and motives propel the plot."

A group of mean girls torments a teenager named Toni in *Season of the Witch*. Toni has had a romantic summer with a boy named Oliver, and Oliver's girlfriend, Chloe, resents her for it. Chloe and her friends begin doing their best to humiliate Toni at school. Toni leans on her best friend, Ella, and her new friend, Cassandra, who happens to be Ella's cousin. Cassandra claims to have abilities in witchcraft and assures Toni that she will get Chloe back for hurting her. It seems that the spells actually work, but the damage they cause is more severe than Toni and Cassandra hoped. Meanwhile, Cassandra mourns the death of her autistic brother.

Madigan McGillicuddy, a reviewer in *School Library Journal*, commented: "This darkly honest look at bullying [and] high school cliques ... will have readers glued to the page." "Fredericks ... delivers an intense but hopeful tale of bullying, revenge, and grief," remarked a *Publishers Weekly* critic. Michael Cart, a contributor to *Booklist*, suggested: "Fredericks' reader-pleasing new novel is a page-turning, well-realized horror story of revenge gone awry." A *Kirkus Reviews* writer asserted: "What seems at first to be a supernatural thriller is actually a realistic and frank treatise on karma." The critic in *Publishers Weekly* concluded: "Fredericks again proves her gift for conveying the intensity of adolescence."

A Death of No Importance is a novel set at the turn of the twentieth century in Manhattan. Jane Prescott is a maid to the wealthy Mrs. Benchley. She observes the unfolding of a terrible scandal involving the Benchley family. The established aristocrats in New York do not consider them to be part of their group, but they reluctantly interact with them in social situations. Charlotte Benchley, their young daughter, plans to marry Robert "Norrie" Newsome, who is from an established aristocratic family. Just when they are to announce the couple's engagement, Norrie is brutally murdered. Jane collaborates with a chemist and a handsome reporter to investigate Norrie's death. Meanwhile, a feminist movement surges, and outrage ensues after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory disaster.

"Fredericks ... has lavished her debut adult novel with period details and strong characterizations," noted Barbara Clark on *BookPage Online*. A *Publishers Weekly* contributor suggested: "The novel's voice, plotting, pace, characterization, and historical background are all expertly crafted."

FURTHER READINGS

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, February, 2006, Deborah Stevenson, review of *Crunch Time*, p. 262; January, 2007, Deborah Stevenson, review of *In the Cards: Love*, p. 212.

Horn Book, July-August, 2003, Lauren Adams, review of *The True Meaning of Cleavage*, p. 455; March-April, 2006, Jennifer M. Brabander, review of *Crunch Time*, p. 188; January-February, 2007, Lauren Adams, review of *In the Cards: Love*, p. 66.

Kirkus Reviews, January 1, 2003, review of *The True Meaning of Cleavage*, p. 60; December 15, 2003, review of *Fatal Distraction; or, How I Conquered My Addiction to Celebrities and Got a Life*, p. 1413; August 1, 2004, review of *Head Games*, p. 741; January 1, 2006, review of *Crunch Time*, p. 40; December 15, 2006, review of *In the Cards: Love*, p. 1267; November 15, 2007, review of *In the Cards: Fame*; July 1, 2008, review of *In the Cards: Life*; September 1, 2013, review of *Season of the Witch*.

Kliatt, July, 2004, Claire Rosser, review of *The True Meaning of Cleavage*, p. 17; January, 2006, Claire Rosser, review of *Crunch Time*, p. 7; January, 2007, Claire Rosser, review of *In the Cards: Love*, p. 11; May, 2007, Claire Rosser, review of *In the Cards: Fame*, p. 24; September, 2007, Claire Rosser, review of *Crunch Time*, p. 20; September, 2008, Claire Rosser, review of *In the Cards: Life*, p. 10.

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Voice of Youth Advocates, February, 2012, Mary Ann Darby, review of *The Girl in the Park*, p. 589.

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