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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ HISTORICAL

Arthurian Tales: Ambrosius Aureliani

Leon Mintz
Erie Harbor Productions
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Countless works of literature have been inspired by the medieval mystique of King Arthur. Blockbuster films and commercial fiction, set in this fascinating period, meet a receptive audience even in the twenty-first century. Though historical accuracy is subject to embellishment, most readers seeking entertainment in a modern interpretation of semi-real events, no longer care whether the work will pass scholastic standards.

In *Ambrosius Aureliani,* the author has graced his carefully-crafted pages with meticulous historical detail. Leon Mintz knows his material to a fine point, and presents his novel much like an animated professor. Narrated by Merlinus, better known simply as Merlin, this work is the first in a proposed four-book series, set in the fifth century as the Roman Empire is collapsing. Mintz's fantastic story begins when Theodosius is kidnapped from his parents, King Adaulphus and Princess Placidia. He is taken by Merlin to Britain where the infant will be raised under the new name Ambrosius. Years later, Ambrosius is driven off the island, but he finds refuge with Merlin at his Gallic villa near Aureliani. Then Ambrosius returns with Bishop Germanus of Auxerre to fight Vortigern and the Saxon army.

Though the book stands on its own, this tale has all the attributes of a prolonged saga with treacherous battles and territorial disputes. The scenes are filled with action and intrigue, usually gripping in their intensity. At no time is the novel boring, but Mintz has allowed an academic tone to hamper his skill as a first-rate storyteller. This intellectual approach may have been intentional: a tactic meant to appeal to fans who enjoy a narrative overflowing with facts, trivia, and minor characters. However, the latent problem in drawing a vast amount of knowledge into a work of fiction, is a tendency to smother the major protagonists and slow down the plot.

According to the publisher, Mintz has relied on "a tapestry of facts and fables woven together from the words of Gildas, Nennius, and Geoffrey of Monmouth," as well as the work of Bede, which is a formidable and time-consuming endeavor. From a professional standpoint, this reinterpretation of the legend is an admirable accomplishment, but the average reader is often in pursuit of riveting adventure, without the intrusion of details that may not have been essential to the primary storyline. Yet Mintz, also the author of *Memoir of the Masses*, an experimental vampire novel, still deserves a high mark for nearly flawless copyediting, and a marketable concept. For history enthusiasts, *Ambrosius Aureliani*, and the subsequent books in his Arthurian Tales series, will be a welcome addition to any personal library.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (November 1, 2010)

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