Clarion Review

General

Cameo
Dawn McCollough-White
Dawn McCullough-White
iUniverse
978-1-4401-5992-3
Five Stars (out of Five)

Cameo the Assassin, a historical novel from Dawn McCullough-White, is an engaging, fast-paced romp about highwaymen, assassins, Lockenwood vampires, their victims, and their evaders in an age when "who knew there were so many vampires running around."

Cameo, an alias for Gwen, "the thrall of a vampire," has two masters to serve. One is Wick, the aging, spell-casting head of the Association of Assassins, who assigns missions to the battle-scarred Cameo. The other is Haffef, Cameo's vampire "Master," who years ago rescued her from certain death after her vicious rape and beating and a deadly attack upon her younger sister. The one wants her to kill the prince of the Kingdom of Sieunes; the other wants her to unearth her sister's bones and return them to him. Her life is further conflicted when she agrees to become the bodyguard for Kyrian, a fifteen-year-old acolyte healer who needs to travel to the Temple of the Sun at King's Basin. As she balances her missions and battles the forces of evil set against her on all sides, she overcomes assassins sent to kill her, seeks revenge against highwaymen who have robbed her of her namesake cameo brooch, develops an arms-length relationship with one of the brigands, and confronts Wick in a deadly duel.

The action is rapid and the multi-layered plot is well-constructed and paced accordingly, with several instances of wry humour despite the overall darkness of the themes. The characters—whether likeable or detestable—are credible. The historical settings, although imaginary, are recognizable, with their references to weaponry like rapiers, swords, and muskets, and travel by horses and coaches. Images of Haffef when he “slipped through the floor feet first” or of the world-weary Cameo swigging from her ever-handy flask create clear pictures in the reader’s mind. The majority of the novel’s text is made up of dialogue, and the way each character speaks is well-suited to their personality.

McCullough-White produced this novel through “spontaneous trance writing.” A sequel to *Cameo* is obviously in the making, and readers will hope the next installment is as much fun as the first.