

Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Defenders of the Scroll: History Legend and Lore

Shiraz

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Three Stars (out of Five)

In the tradition of Edward Eager’s children’s classics, the young heroes in this exciting fantasy novel must figure out how to use—and thwart—a magical item before it either thwarts or kills them.

When eleven-year-old Princess Dara of Mythos accidentally summons eleventh grader Alex to save her from the evil loose in her father’s kingdom, Alex uses his high school history book to summon teen heroes of the past. They’re going to need the help, because Alex isn’t the kind of “Axeman” Dara was thinking of—he’s the leader of a band called the Axemen, not a fighter in the King’s bodyguard.

With the aid of a Roman soldier, an Amazon Warrior, a Nairobi tracker, a samurai, and a Shaolin Monk, the kids fight for the kingdom of Mythos. The life of Dara’s father is at stake, as is the fate of a magical scroll created by him. The young band of heroes must now protect this scroll from the Shadow Lord and his Shadow Warriors under General Askar.

One of the most enjoyable parts of this non-stop action adventure comes about when Dara—and the scroll—are kidnapped by pirates. The matriarchal world of the pirates is fun and unusual. The evil pirate leader, a woman, has some great lines:

“Your reflexes are as quick as ever, Asuro,” she said. “Did you miss me?”

Asuro threw the shuriken back with deadly speed, but Helena slipped out of the way just in time.

“Apparently,” Asuro replied.

“Come lover,” she said, pulling out a single sai and a sword, “Let’s dance.”

Although Alex’s character is flat at times, he has some unusual and funny quirks, such as

grunting out the names of comic book characters to distract himself from pain.

The book occasionally reads like a Dungeons & Dragons adventure with more fighting, and the first encounter with bit player bad guys like a group of Ettins and dog seems random and unfocused. Still, the story is engaging enough for kids to want more. And more they will have. If the book leaves some important plot complications at loose ends, it's probably because this is the first book in a series, and ends with a cliff-hanger.

Steve Criado's full-color illustrations manage to be gorgeous and menacing at the same time. Author Shiraz is from Toronto, Ontario. This is his first published work. Series contributors B. Singh Khanna and Rupinder Malhotra are film producers.