ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Don't Play with Fyre
Judi Flanagan
AuthorHouse
978-1-4634-4733-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

Molly Fyre is twenty years old and ready to live forever. She consumes a special elixir that grants her immortality and provides her with extraordinary abilities. While she understands much will be expected of her as an immortal, she is unprepared for just how important her role turns out to be.

Molly is chosen as leader of a group of immortals being sent to retrieve the powerful Krystal of Carolan for Arnos, the man who took her in after her mother's death. Their journey is full of unexpected twists and turns, and Molly soon realizes that her true mission may not be exactly what Arnos described. As her belief in Arnos begins to deteriorate and her new talents emerge, her other relationships start to change and truths are revealed.

Don't Play With Fyre, Judi Flanagan's debut novel, is largely a fantasy coming-of-age story. Molly and her friends progress realistically in terms of honing their individual talents, and each of the primary characters' personalities and abilities are explored with some depth. One character can shift into animal form, another can cast protective barriers around others, and Molly herself can conjure fire and transform into a dragon.

Although the novel is well structured and contains few grammatical errors, the author's inexperience is apparent in her occasional use of unnatural dialogue and her tendency to exaggerate the protagonist's youthful personality. As a result, Molly's voice often suggests a far less mature attitude than would be expected of a twenty-year-old woman. Her emotions go from one extreme to another, and her reactions are often overdone. For instance, Molly's initial trepidation about taking on a leadership role dissipates quickly, and she goes from hesitant to overbearing in a single scene when she tries to stop an altercation between two other characters: "'Look you two', I barked with my hands on my hips. 'Who's the leader here? Or have you forgotten? Wait, I'll answer that myself … ME.'"

Flanagan makes a valiant effort to build a realistic fantasy world, but her story leaves many questions unanswered or unsatisfactorily explored. Molly states, for example, that Arnos

took her in after her mother's death, but she is strangely unfamiliar with his home and unaware of whether or not he has children. This lack of clarity, along with a very vague explanation of what it actually means to be immortal, may pull readers out of the story.

Don't Play With Fyre is appropriate for young adults. The level of violence is mild, and sexual encounters are alluded to several times but never actually described; they are often brushed off with a comment such as, "I knew we had to make dinner soon, but not right now … if you get my drift."

Flanagan's debut novel contains a promising story line and several interesting characters, and the book concludes with a clear opening for a sequel. More meticulous attention to detail and world-building will certainly make future installments more appealing.

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