



Explorer Academy: The Falcon's Feather

Trudi Trueit

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Cryptic puzzles, heart-pounding action, and international intrigue power this second book in Trudi Trueit's Explorer Academy series, *The Falcon's Feather*.

Cruz Coronado and his peers from the Explorer Academy have boarded a ship to sail to places across the ocean that complement their studies of anthropology, biology, technology, and more. Their unique school offers its preteen students extraordinary opportunities to foster their curiosity and promote deep thinking, as well as providing them with cutting-edge tools such as camouflage uniforms, cross-species communication helmets, and voice-activated video-recording drones.

Cruz has a special mission on this ship, however. He seeks to find the pieces of his murdered mother's cipher that have been scattered across the globe in order to solve the mystery of her dangerous work. And there's a catch: a group called Nebula is plotting to stop him and procure the secret technology for themselves.

The constant threat of Nebula—the knowledge that there is a spy aboard the ship, for instance—amps up the suspense of an already exciting plot that's layered with school struggles, friendship tension, and family concerns.

Cruz's life is full and complicated, always pushing him to his limits, and his and his friends' consistency in their thoughtful ethics is a valuable lesson. The book acknowledges children's emotional intelligence—as when Cruz communicates with whales trapped in a net in order to comfort them so that his classmates may free them—as well as their mental intelligence. The friendship dynamics—even among the cool, futuristic technology and the dramatic international travel—are the most compelling facet of the story.

Fast-moving and emotional, *Explorer Academy: The Falcon's Feather* is a sensational middle grade adventure that will stimulate the minds of young readers.

AIMEE JODOIN (May/June 2019)

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