Clarion Review

General

Farewell the Dragon
Lee Barckmann
AuthorHouse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Drawing on his experience from the three years he spent teaching in China, author Lee Barckman offers this compelling tale about Nathan Schuett, also a teacher living in China, who believes there surely must be more to life than what he has experienced so far.

The novel is set in 1987, just prior to the events of Tiananmen Square and the end of the Cold War. Nathan is an intriguing protagonist who never ceases to capture the reader's interest with his likeable enthusiasm and relatable personality. He finds out about an ancient tablet known as a "stele," which has gone missing. Plenty of colorful characters would love to get their hands on it, but none is more dedicated that Nathan, who finds himself entangled in a treasure hunt. In the process, he falls in love with a woman and discovers that she is his real treasure.

Barckmann relays facts about history and his settings with ease, while still allowing the story to flow at a steady pace. These tidbits of information are simply seasoning for an already delicious dish, and their inclusion is seamless. For example, Barckmann is quickly able to build excitement and set the scene when he writes:

> *I don't know how long the pounding had been going on when I realized it was at my door and I wasn't in Beijing in the 1940's. It was 1987 and I was staying at the apartments meant for guests of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. I was still fuzzy minded as I pulled on my pants and opened the door.*

The story itself is pretty standard fare, but the descriptive quality of the writing and Barckmann's wonderful imagination make *Farewell the Dragon* a true standout. By including real-life events, such as Peter O'Toole riding around the city on his bicycle while shooting The Last Emperor, the author captures the time period in a manner few have yet to do.

While there are certainly political overtones to the novel, Barckmann doesn't focus entirely on the political side of things; instead he lets the story take center stage. The result is a compelling read that will have readers sticking with the book long after bedtime. It's hard to put down, easy to understand, and a good example of solid commercial fiction writing.

Liam Brennan