

Flames of Alnara

J. L. Adams

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Young adults who enjoy fantasy that is both intelligent and thought provoking will most likely enjoy *Flames of Alnara*. Author J. L. Adams has left plenty of room for future books, and readers will finish the last page looking forward to the next installment.

The main character, Talen Freeborn, is full of social anxiety and teenage angst. He believes that he is somehow entitled to popularity and the power and status it would bring, but he is awkward and has no real friends. When an opportunity to take a school trip to the capital city arises, Talen thinks it might help him connect with a girl named Mila, on whom he has a major crush. Talen is also interested in some of the historical monuments the students will see along the way—particularly those dealing with Kogan, his favorite mythological hero—but the social aspects of the trip are much more important to him.

When Talen finds the monument to Kogan, he is goaded by the school bully to speak the enchanted words that are supposed to free Kogan from a magical imprisonment. Though at first nothing appears to happen, it quickly becomes evident to Talen that the myths are true. Accompanied by another classmate named Leandra, Talen runs away to join the followers of Kogan in an attempt to develop his own magical powers and assist Kogan in saving the world.

While *Flames of Alnara* is an enjoyable book, there are frequent typos and some of the writing is awkward. For example, Adams describes one of his characters, Mr. Govun, as follows: “There wasn’t anything particularly striking about his overall appearance: he was of medium height and build. One striking aspect about him was his short brilliantly-white hair.” Additionally, the author never gives the reader any clear explanation as to why Talen has special abilities, and there do not appear to be any other signs of the supernatural in the world Adams has created. He does hint that there will be other characters with unique powers in future books, but the omission here is frustrating.

That said, the plot is compelling and original. The story is centered on themes of religion and faith, but without any specific dogma or attempts to convince the reader of the “rightness” of a particular religious path. The characters go through a great deal of discussion and soul searching as they attempt to find the right actions to take in the face of extraordinary circumstances.

Teens, who are often exploring their own spirituality on their paths to adulthood, will find within *Flames of Alnara* some very thoughtful discussions on right and wrong, belief, and autonomy.

CATHERINE THURESON (June 17, 2013)

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