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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SCIENCE FICTION

Forging Paradise: Book Two in Legends of the Four Races

E. A. Rappaport
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In this the second in the Legend of the Four Races fantasy series a menacing army sets out to destroy humanity. Our only hope lies with the aging wizard Ogma who casts out five warriors to the underworld in the hope of finding the necessary magic required to defeat the invaders.

If the story sounds familiar that's because it bears a strong resemblance to the fantasy lover's bible the Lord of the Rings series. But first appearances are never quite what they seem to be as this story is actually geared towards young readers whose patience and attention may not be suited for long epics like those by J.R.R. Tolkien.

But it is clear where Rappaport found his tale somewhere in those vast unstable lands dominated by ghosts and goblins and every creature in between. Rappaport draws upon his childhood favorites here creating a world that is as entertaining and imaginative as any other in the fantasy genre. With a small cast of characters both good and evil Rappaport successfully navigates his own complicated fantasy land. The result is a truly entertaining adventure tale that will impress younger fantasy lovers and even seasoned fans of the genre.

The story's real merit lies with Rappaport's original characters. Ogma is a strong-willed wizard who never fails to take matters into his own hands even if it goes against the code of his predecessors. The character of Gwenn is a capable warrior who shows patience and understanding before presenting her sword to defeat her enemies. This is where Rappaport's story truly shines focusing less on the imaginative world in which these characters reside and more on the world that exists inside the characters themselves. Readers will be enthralled.

Though the similarities to Tolkien are at first glaring Rappaport seems to be aware of this and wastes no time in making the story his own. His prose is strong and commanding but never overly complicated making it easy for young readers to follow along without the headaches of many complex fantasy tales that stumble over their own rules. There is a straightforwardness to Rappaport's writing that is often lacking in fantasy epics yet the story resounds with action and adventure and plenty of creepy creations. In the end it's downright fun just what a fantasy novel should be. (August 21, 2009)

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