

Gambit: For Love of a Queen

Kat Jaske

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The three musketeers and D'Artagnan are back but they've acquired a female sidekick in this improbable but fast-paced book. The second of a series *Gambit* tells of the efforts of the musketeers and Laurel *marquise de* Langeac to rescue the Queen of France Anne d'Autriche after she has been kidnapped for ransom in a Prussian plot to raise money for the impoverished country.

The author a teacher and fencer offers a great deal of enthusiasm in this novel but the book suffers from her inexperience as a novel writer. This second volume of the series does nothing to orient the reader on what has gone before and those who remember the original musketeers will wonder how they came to be chasing around Europe with a woman in tow no matter how talented. Implications of past history surface throughout the book but more as an annoyance than an enrichment. Back history is an important part of series books; it does take practice to include it without boring those who have read the early books but it must be done here since otherwise it risks losing the reader.

Laurel is depicted as an energetic young woman with 21st century tendencies chafing at the restrictions of 17th century French society; she has a *tender* for Aramis which results in some awkward moments as the five — and Yvette the sister of Porthos — endeavor to rescue the Queen. They all labor under the handicap of keeping the abduction a secret from everyone including the King of France; Anne is pregnant with his heir and while Louis XIII is not in love with his wife he would not be pleased to learn that she is in the hands of the Prussians. It would mean war — something the musketeers seek to avoid at all costs.

Jaske's story is engaging and never flags in action but lacks continuity; scenes jump from place to place without adequate groundwork and the timeline is never clear. Some scenes take place after a lag of moments and others are weeks removed from previous action yet there's little to orient the reader. Also the book would have benefited from the attentions of a good copy editor. This would have eliminated the mistakes in German words and phrases as well as much of the awkwardness in phrasing and illogical behavior in some of her characters. Many of the over-explanatory scenarios would benefit from tightening; Jaske must learn to show and not tell of events and emotions.

Still these are things that can be learned and improved on in subsequent books. Readers who love action will find plenty here as characters battle their way through a Berlin torn by fighting and uncover a plot to poison one of the musketeers in his undercover guise as the brother of an English noblewoman. Characters are sympathetic if sometimes acting contrary to their personalities and the story itself — a kidnap and rescue — is plausible enough.

With practice and editing Jaske could become a novelist to watch.

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