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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

In the Shadows of the Gods: The Rise of the Guard

John F. Raines
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In the kingdom of Shale, fourteen hybrids were bred to be the ultimate soldiers. Each hybrid represents a cross between a human and a different mythical creature. Each hybrid has the magical abilities most associated with the creature from which they were born, and each soldier is extremely powerful. Their sole duty is to guard the king, and since no one seems to want to attack the king, they are bored and unhappy. Then the unthinkable happens: A stranger breaks into the castle, defeats three of the hybrids, and kidnaps a mage (wizard). All of the hybrids are desperate to give chase, but only a few are given permission to go. The stranger had been interrogating the mage about something called the relic sword, and, in order to find the stranger, the hybrids must follow the trail of the relic sword as well. In the course of their journey, they learn a great deal about the kingdom they are sworn to protect. Ultimately, most of the hybrids are left questioning their role as the king's personal guard and their allegiances to the kingdom and to one another.

In the Shadows of the Gods is well-written and entertaining. Author John Raines has created a rich fantasy landscape full of magic and a plot that is well-paced and able to hold the reader's attention. The characters are the best part of the book. Few of the characters fall neatly into the category of good or evil. The King is weak and selfish, far more concerned with his personal safety than he is with the well-being of his subjects, but he does not appear to wish anyone harm. The stranger, who the author eventually names Cearon, is on a quest he truly believes is noble, but he is very willing to sacrifice anyone who gets in his way. The hybrids are powerful warriors skilled in magic and fighting, but they are also naive, sullen, and egotistical—more concerned with finding personal glory than with serving the kingdom. The author writes: "With a last, mighty swing, Crash had slain the last of the Rogues. It would not be long until the stories of the power of hybrids were told across the land, and Crash told Silver that he hoped to hear his own name being spoken with reverence along with the heroes of old."

The author clearly intends for this to be the first in a multiple-book series. By the end of this book, the story is just getting started. Fans of high fantasy will find a worthy quest *In The Shadows of the Gods* and will likely turn the last page anxious for more.

CATHERINE THURESON (February 7, 2011)

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