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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ FANTASY

Laurentina: Myth, Legend, Legacy

Linda D. Coker
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Larentina is a Spartan princess-demigoddess who can command the wind, shoot lightning from her fingertips, ride a flying horse and yet still chooses to fight hand-to-hand, fully armored with sword and shield against hoplites or nearly naked with daggers against other princesses. She also drives a mean chariot in the Olympics, leads an expedition into the underworld to battle Hades, wars with the gods, and marries her childhood sweetheart.

In her rather breathless life Larentina trains with the boys in the Spartan agoge, earns the respect of the soldiers, elders, and kings of that fifth-century BC warrior-state and fights for the rights and honor of women, especially women warriors everywhere. She is drawn into all manner of adventures populated with just about every character from Greek mythology from Apollo to Zeus, with guest appearances by Cerberus, Charon, a Cyclops and the queen of the Amazons. To round this out are visits by Isis, Semiramis, the jackal-headed, anubi spearmen of Egypt, the king of Rome, and even the Archangel Gabriel.

Ninety-seven percent of this book is about Larentina, “She-Wolf of Sparta,” and her adventures in the ancient world. As such, it is *Xena Warrior Princess*, *Percy Jackson* and *Clash of the Titans* all tossed together, sprinkled with lessons on Spartan history and culture and dressed with a light but noticeable feminist message.

That message, the character, and the brief pseudo-autobiographical interlude concerning the author’s own experiences as a female recruit in the United States Army, all work toward honing this spear to hit its target audience. That audience would seem to be largely but not exclusively female, and one that enjoys mixes of fantasy, mythology, historical fiction, and tales of feminine empowerment.

An editor might have suggested the author remove the semi-autobiographical, modern chapters—few though they may be—as they delay and might even put off the reader from getting to the story. That editor might also have considered convincing the writer to change the voice of the book, as it is all told second-hand by the author’s stand-in character’s grandmother (“Mom-mom”), complete with quotes before every paragraph. While these are obviously near, dear, and personal to the author, both devices present hurdles—low hurdles, but still hurdles—that a reader must decide to overcome before getting on with the story.

It is worth the jump, however, as the story is a good fun tale, and one that is colorful, enjoyable, and unintentionally funny at times but very often surprising.

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (May 12, 2011)

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