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Clarion Review ★★★★☆ FANTASY

Moriah Jones: Cerridwen's Cauldron

Hanial Kashim
iUniverse (Oct 19, 2021)
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In the winsome fantasy novel Moriah Jones*, a girl caught between two different realms discovers more about her powers and her place in the world.*

In Hanial Kashim's entertaining Arthurian fantasy novel *Moriah Jones*, a resourceful, roguish teenager draws out her own magic while searching for a friend.

The daughter of a fairy mother and a human father, fifteen-year-old Moriah lives in Wales. She's haunted by memories that make her ashamed, of events that caused others to dub her an "outlander." But when her best friend, Gwen, disappears after a maypole dance, Moriah sets her own problems aside to bring her back. Against a backdrop of looming war, disharmony within the fairy realm, and the fairy queen Mav's concerns about the unexpected opening of a rainbow door, Moriah and others work to restore order.

Light references to the King Arthur tale and Merlin's interventions are a grounding force. Still, the book's magic involves herbalism, the zodiac, fairy abilities, and dark magic—a busy mix that's short on specifics. Later in the book, religious references and the creation of a golem complicate the picture further. Nonetheless, Moriah's rich, rustic village and the fairy realm are both developed in approachable ways.

Moriah's potent teenage issues are more prominent than these fantasy elements: she is self-conscious about her perceived shortcomings, and witnesses nascent romances around her that are variously misguided and innocent. Moriah also contends with dangers like the temptations of drinking and the threat of boys' lust. There's implied harshness to her world; such allusions, and the reference to a previous trauma, are shown to have shaped her fears. When Moriah embraces a quest that is revealed within her grandmother's tarot cards, her courage is driven by a sense of rightness, but she also remains fragile due to her past and her differences. The complexity of Moriah's inner life, and of teenage relationships, is honored within the text.

Between perilous fights with fantasy creatures, Moriah has quiet moments to grow and step into her new responsibilities. She is subject to ingenious tests of wit, but remains motivated by love, friendship, and a desire to make sacrifices for others. Suspense is maintained around Gwen's fate, which is addressed intermittently, while focus given to Queen Mav develops the book's background further.

Rewarding and generating anticipation for what comes next, the winsome fantasy novel *Moriah Jones* follows a girl who's caught between two different realms as she discovers more about her powers and her place in the world.

KAREN RIGBY (March 10, 2022)

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