

Rendezvous Rock

Rickey Bray

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Based on the title, description, and cover image featuring the silhouette of a young couple embracing in the moonlight, *Rendezvous Rock*, the debut novel by Rickey Bray, might be initially seen as a simple, boy-meets-girl romance. In actuality, this story about a mystical religion in the midst of a monumental turning point is very much a fantasy story with contemporary romance elements, and those interested in either genre will find something that appeals in this book.

In youthful but earnest devotion, teenage Eric goes through a ritual binding ceremony with the captivating, beautiful witch Susan. In Susan's religion of The Three Circles, this binding ceremony is a bond deeper than conventional marriage, and by completing this ritual, Eric and Susan have taken one step towards the fulfillment of a gravely important prophecy. Separated from Susan for ten years, Eric must educate and train himself to become the man he must be if he is to play his role in the prophecy, and all members of the Circles must fight against the constant threat of exposure and those who wish to harm and eradicate the secretive clan.

With a mystery to explain, secrets of a religion to divulge, lovers to reunite, and villains to outwit all in one book, Bray had a daunting task in explaining enough so the reader doesn't feel lost while also driving the story forward, and tying up any loose ends. Generally, background information about The Three Circles is divulged throughout the pages, so the reader usually learns along with Eric, and it is here that Bray is fairly imaginative. While the mystical group does have echoes of paganism and some interesting parallels to other religions, ideas such as the Corona, a distinct group responsible for protecting the secrecy and stability of the Circles, are more unique.

At times, Bray uses scenes and chapters to delve into the political ties of the group and the outside threats, which are the main sources of conflict in the story, but he occasionally loses momentum, perhaps because there is so much to cover. By carefully developing certain secondary characters and relationships, such as Ned, Eric's uncle, and Schulita, Eric's trainer and second love, Bray really brings them to life, and Eric becomes much more relatable through his interactions with these characters. Bray has a very descriptive style that helps the reader really visualize scenes, and the characters' unique personas often come solely through his descriptions. On a rare occasion, he repeats a descriptive phrase, and some oddly placed or awkward sentences do exist, but once a reader engages with the story, these are less distracting.

Adult or perhaps late-teen readers who enjoy a magical atmosphere could also examine the latent, perhaps unintended themes of physical appearance, sexuality, faith, and religion in this action-oriented selection. The religion and society Bray created in this book could also easily lend itself to future writings.

ALICIA SONDHI (June 2, 2011)

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