

Spellbound

Elizabeth A. Lewis

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Spellbound, Elizabeth A. Lewis's debut fantasy novel, is ambitious in scope. It chronicles the adventures of several teenage heroes and heroines, collectively known as Story Keepers or Riders of Earth, as they do battle against Aethelinda, an unstable yet powerful witch. There's time travel, crystal-horned unicorns, budding romance, exciting sword fights, nefarious goblins, a dangerous book of magic, and looming castles on nearly every horizon. Spellbound's landscape is a fantasy world built richly upon the shoulders of authors like J.R.R. Tolkien and Christopher Paolini.

The action takes place mainly in Eldasor, a world that is "lingering on the edges" of the real world. Five princesses have built this world, and they have taken on the powers of the five elements: water, air, fire, earth, and the most magical of all, sight. These princesses hardly enter into the action, but their offspring do. Two of the Riders of Earth, twins Esmeralda and Kieryn (there are several sets of twin in the novel), actually come from modern-day California. Others hail from fourteenth-century Europe and Asia, but they all find each other through time portals.

Several members of the heroic group are related to Aethelinda the witch, who herself is the daughter of one of Eldasor's founding princesses. It's often hard to keep track of who is who, and one has to wonder if so many characters are necessary. Eventually, however, readers will begin to distinguish between the girls and boys of this band as they start to couple up and discover their powers.

Lewis begins strongly, with a message to her readers that, "this is a book for those who believe in themselves, in magic, that dreams can come true, and most important of all, that true love can exist." This opening pays homage to fairytales, in which author and reader are partners in a special journey. However, it soon becomes clear that the author of this tale is a very young writer; Lewis was fifteen when she completed the book, and the writing is uneven. For example, fourteenth-century characters say "milady" and "you guys" in the same breath. Action scenes are over-written, as if the author doesn't trust her readers to visualize for themselves the world and characters she has built.

Clearly Lewis's skill at the craft of storytelling will improve with practice and experience. She already has the enthusiasm and heart that every writer needs.

OLIVIA BOLER (May 18, 2010)

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