Clarion Review

Fantasy

The Alexandrite
Rick Lenz
Chromodroid Press
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Four Stars (out of Five)

A time-hopping actor in Tinseltown searches for life's deeper meanings and a meeting with Marilyn Monroe.

Touching upon existential themes such as the nature of life, second chances, and the purpose of choices, former actor Rick Lenz weaves a fascinating tale of success, failure, time travel, and what it means to be human in *The Alexandrite*.

In 1996 Hollywood, downtrodden actor Jack Cade comes to possess a ring with an alexandrite gem. Alexandrite, coincidentally, is the birthstone of Jack's favorite actress, Marilyn Monroe. With the help of a kooky woman, Jack finds himself time-traveling to 1956 Hollywood and back again. When he's in 1956, Jack has the opportunity to meet Marilyn, but this potential encounter is complicated by the fact that his soul inhabits the body of Richard Blake, a gemologist. Richard lives with his discontented wife, Margaret, and her sister, Lily, who ostensibly has a cognitive disability. Can Jack, as Richard, fulfill his dream of meeting Marilyn, or will he screw up everything for everyone involved? If he does make mistakes, can he return to right those wrongs? With shades of *Groundhog Day* and *It's a Wonderful Life*, Lenz's novel plumbs the depths of metaphysics with its thought-provoking concepts.

With the shrewd insight of a Hollywood insider, Lenz likens Jack's situation to acting. When Jack realizes he has traveled back in time and is inhabiting Richard's body, he thinks, "The business I've spent almost all my adult life in is, face it, escapism. I and…this Richard are a *study* in escapism. We seem to be coming together to play one role…No! Two roles!" Observations such as these reimagine Shakespeare's "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players," while simultaneously underscoring the universal wish to sometimes flee one's own existence. Jack's predicament also underscores those days when one

can do nothing more than go through the motions. With wonderful similes, such as “feverish as Frankenstein’s monster out on his own for the first time,” the audience experiences Jack’s inner turmoil along with him.

As Jack travels back and forth in time, Lenz both creates a love letter to 1950s Hollywood and honors today’s Tinseltown. While some references to actors of yore may be lost on all but die-hard movie buffs, the author’s intimate familiarity with the setting helps draw readers into the story.

Like the setting, the characters are multifaceted. In particular, Lenz deftly paints Marilyn as a tragic figure yearning for happiness instead of the common depiction of her as all beauty and no substance. Sometimes it is difficult to keep track of which era Jack is inhabiting, although most chapters have dates assigned to them. Certain scenes are written in italics for reasons that remain unclear. Overall, however, the author has created an enjoyable, compelling romp.

Jill Allen