

The Calling of the Protectors: The Legend of Chief

Louis Paul DeGrado

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With its sweet kitten heroine and environmental themes, this novel will resonate with readers of all ages.

The age-old strategy of keeping cats as pest control gets a fresh twist for young readers in Louis Paul DeGrado's *The Calling of the Protectors*. A conflict between companion animals and creatures that humans have mistreated and neglected adds age-appropriate philosophical depth to this engaging novel.

Chief the cat and the "Protectors" he is descended from are physically and supernaturally equipped to eradicate danger from the human homes they inhabit. These astounding powers are tested when an amoral lab rat with a grudge against humanity sets his sights on invading the apartment complex Chief is charged with protecting.

While *The Legend of Chief* is an accurate subtitle, the true star of this story is Chief's daughter, a tiny, fluffy kitten named Mouse, who by all appearances is an unlikely candidate for the call of the Protectors. Mouse struggles to be more like her father and to find friends of her own, issues that mirror the concerns of upper-elementary-aged kids. Like today's students, she uses twenty-first-century skills like collaboration and innovation, drawing upon the strengths of the quirky assortment of animal characters that populate the apartment complex in an effort to protect their home. Her relatability is further enhanced by the author's attention to sensory detail, particularly scent and sound, which adds a richness to the experience of Mouse's point of view and those of the other animal characters.

Despite some intense scenes, as in the sewers where rats congregate and the lab where Bragar, the antagonist, is tortured and discarded, the overall tone of this fantasy offering is light and positive. The plot progresses clearly and the writing is simple yet engaging, with just enough physical description and sensory detail to bring the apartment complex setting to life without boring or overwhelming a young reader. Cleverly titled chapters add interest and break up the action into easily digestible episodes. Throughout the novel, many of the characters burst into song as a means of sharing their story or offering a philosophical insight. These rhyming interludes have great cadence and add a spirit of fun which lightens up potentially grim moments in the story.

Most upper-elementary-aged children will find *The Calling of the Protectors* an appealing and easy read, and the structure and writing style make it a good candidate for a family or classroom read-aloud. Themes of environmentalism, animal treatment, progress, and the value of teamwork will resonate with readers of all ages, making this a thoughtful choice for intergenerational sharing.

CAROLYN BAILEY (April 20, 2016)

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