



The Hidden City of Chelldrah-ham: Stig's Flight of Encounters

Stephan von Clinkerhoffen

Stephan von Clinkerhoffen, Illustrator

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Strange creatures, exotic landscapes, and an innocent inventor make this story a welcome addition to the genre.

In *The Hidden City of Chelldrah-ham*, Stephan von Clinkerhoffen delivers a classic young adult fantasy novel made fresh and engaging with a mix of magical beings, mechanical wonders, and a charming, capable protagonist as humble as he is tenacious. What at first seems like a standard coming-of-age tale quickly becomes something new through a diverse cast of characters and fantastical landscapes.

Stig, a young inventor and flying enthusiast, brims with excitement. He has finished the prototype of a new mechanical engine for his plane and can't wait for the moons to rise, lowering the gravity and allowing him to test his invention. Despite the warning of the Elders, Stig launches his plane early, determined to explore beyond the walls of the city.

After losing his way, Stig crashes in a land thick with dark, evil creatures called Bach, who hold him captive and torture him with their sharp claws and putrid stench. Managing to free himself and escape their clutches, Stig uses a magical map to head toward home. A child of the forest finds him and teaches him about the bounty of the living world and how to use his hidden telepathic abilities. Together they find and repair the damaged plane, allowing Stig to continue his journey. But the Bach are on his trail, bringing with them a spreading decay and the power of an untold evil.

Instead of diving deeply into the systems that drive the world or the interactions between races, the story is shown through the eyes of the innocent Stig, who has never ventured beyond his city walls. This narrative choice provides an unbiased view of the world as he navigates its many strange locales.

Von Clinkerhoffen's writing is clear and precise, managing the balance between complicated descriptions and a vocabulary that suits a young audience. There are occasional breaks in the main narrative as italicized sections show the perspective of other characters. These are presumably meant to broaden the scope of the world, but they often feel out of context or not fully explained, making them more confusing than enlightening.

Though there are some slow scenes, like a long period showing Stig's repair of a tractor belonging to some kindly farmers who help him on his quest, other sections are gripping and feature high-speed action. Overall, these action scenes are convincing and exciting, though they can occasionally wash over details that serve to help visualize certain scenes.

Seasoned fantasy readers will find many aspects of the story familiar, and it will appeal to young readers who love to be whisked away to strange and magical lands.

ERIC ANDERSON (February 7, 2016)

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