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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Last Falcon: Book 1 of the Cael Stone

Colleen Ruttan
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Two years after witnessing the murder of her father at the hand of horse thieves, sixteen-year-old Erynn has found a place for herself as a servant in King Wryden's palace. Unsurprisingly, she is still haunted by memories of the day her father died. When the man who killed her father turns up at the castle, she learns he is Lord Caden from the enemy country of Galia, and his arrival launches Erynn on a journey that challenges much of what she believes to be true about herself and her kingdom.

The Last Falcon is the first in a planned series and the first book published by Colleen Ruttan. Early chapters set the scene for the rest of the novel, with extensive dialogue and narrative explaining the political situation in the generic medieval fantasy world of Valentia. In addition, the author also introduces a large cast of characters and certain readers may grow impatient waiting for the action to begin. Fortunately, Ruttan will maintain the interest of her fantasy readers because she concludes many of the chapters with cliffhanger sentences, as well as cryptic comments foreshadowing future plot points.

The real action starts about midway through the book when Erynn learns that she is not a servant's daughter but a Daughter of Maegan, a bloodline of women who share a special relationship with dragons. She and her best friend, Adena, flee the castle to escape Lord Caden. From this point on, the simple progressive plot moves quickly with clever and satisfying twists that keep Erynn and Adena continuously on the brink of danger. There is a moment when Erynn looks at a map of the kingdom and reflects on her childhood: "She knew that the story was a lie and that she had no idea where she was born. Any one of the eleven kingdoms could be her first home." In plain view, Erynn changes completely from the obedient servant the reader meets in the opening chapters.

While many of the questions surrounding Erynn's heritage and the politics of Valentia are not fully resolved, the book ends with a promise of future adventure. Erynn and Adena team up with two women, and the quartet seems poised to embark on a quest to find the last falcon of the book's title and perhaps learn more about Valentia. Young adult fans of the fantasy-quest genre will enjoy reading about these strong female characters and puzzling over the details of Erynn's heritage.

CAROLYN BAILEY (August 23, 2012)

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