

The Moon Coin

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You see, a story can be made up as easily as you please, or not. But a tale, now that's a moon of a different color. A tale is an account of things in their due order, often divulged secretly, or as gossip. Would you like to hear one?

Lilly and Jasper, a sister and brother just a year apart, have grown up hearing bedtime stories and tales from their mysterious Uncle Ebb. He tells them about the Moon Realm, where creatures they can scarcely imagine live, like the giant cat-like Rinn and the even more enormous Min Tar. Along with his stories, he also brings gifts, ranging from tiny shells and other trinkets stuffed into his many-pocketed coat to magic dragons that take flight when they're tossed in the air.

The story then jumps nine years, to a time when Lily and Jasper are young teens who are worried about their uncle who has been missing for a month. Wandering around his magical mansion full of electronic creatures and beautiful murals, the siblings find their uncle's necklace, a coin suspended on a golden chain. Lily decides to take it home, just for the day. But that night as she fingers the coin, it illuminates, suddenly forcing her into the Moon Realm and to the realization that her Uncle's tales were all too true—though the Realm is full of less magic and more danger than she ever imagined.

The Moon Coin is a beautifully written fantasy novel, perfect for middle graders to pore over themselves or as a bedtime story for younger kids. The descriptions of everything, from Uncle Ebb's electronic fish-bird hybrids to the fanciful creatures Lily meets in the Moon Realm, are so rich that the action instantly comes alive for the reader. The story's tension builds slowly but the excitement is constant, with Lily asking the same questions puzzling the reader.

There are sections when too many fictional creatures are introduced too quickly with not enough details to distinguish them in the reader's mind; though the author does do a good job of tying most of the creatures to a description of something the reader is familiar with in order to help ground them, like a bug or a weasel.

The beautiful illustrations that accompany the story really pop on the e-reader, and they are few enough that the reader is able to use their own imagination to conjure much of the landscape and the inhabitants of the Moon Realm. *The Moon Coin* has all the elements of a great fantasy: a unique, complex world, a battle between good and evil, and creatures that are a mix of comical and terrifying. What makes it a great middle-grade fantasy is the easily identifiable modern teen who's thrown into the world, entranced by the new land she is seeing for the first time but also sure to pack some granola bars and an iPod for the next visit.

MOLLY HORAN (February 16, 2012)

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