FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Return of the Ancient Ones

Gary Caplan
BookSurge
Unknown $0.00 (pp)
978-1-4392-7283-1

The sequel in *The Chronicles of Illúmaril* series by Gary Caplan, *The Return of the Ancient Ones* is the tale about Gideon Finelen, the scion of Lith-Gilad, who returns from Earth to *Illúmaril* to claim his territorial birthright. At the Academy of Spellweaving Arts, Gideon completes his education in order to "defend the Key Worlds from being taken by the Lords of Entropy and Chaos." Gideon prepares to regain his ancestral lands from the Darkspawn and Lords of Chaos. The hero learns to use his Sword of Order, a weapon bestowed with great powers. Meanwhile, the forces of Chaos are gathering their troops, including the Undead, to return rule over Illúmaril to the Ancient Ones.

Gideon's advisor, Tauri Ragan, grandmaster sorcerer and mentor of spellweaving, holds great hope in Gideon and his Companions of the Sword of Order, but it is Thatos, the enemy of the Darkspawn who instigates a deadly move. And while the Darkspawn have no intention of giving up their power, the return of Thatos and his twelve evil sorcerers from their ancient, watery graves distracts Darkspawn's allegiances enough to help the Armies of the Free Peoples mobilize their forces against Thatos and other Chaos warriors. While the confrontation builds, Gideon races to find the Amulet of Noros, which holds the power to defeat the Undead.

Uninitiated readers of fantasy tales will find this book complicated and overly intricate, tending to get bogged down in details of Illúmaril's denizens—all at the expense of a grander struggle at hand. Also daunting are the plotting devices employed to weave military strategies by the Order of Chaos as they prepare for war. Perhaps a "primer" at the beginning of the book would have dispelled confusion for the neophyte fantasy reader. Notwithstanding, with a little patience, the persevering reader will be rewarded.

With ingenuity and sophistication, Caplan has conceived a fantastic world filled with

marvelous, otherworldly creatures: man-lions, dragon-elves, tentacled Undead, hippogryphs (part bird, part horse), tree-people, and other animal-like demons, giants, and elves. Likewise, inventive mystical powers and weaponry abound—spellweaving energies from "Quellien crystals," stones for translocation, frost-enchanted arrows, amulets imbued with protection, "pure essence flux waves," and telepathic swords.

Intriguing are the Tauri, Jedi-like masters who teach Gideon and his Companions of the Sword the skills of spellweaving. At the academy, Gideon is mentored by Ragan, a grandmaster sorcerer. Just as it is inevitable that any fantasy tale succumbs to one trope or another, then so does *The Return of the Ancient Ones*, reminding readers of comparisons to Harry Potter and the martial arts training at Hogwarts. Dungeons & Dragons videogame fanatics will find striking similarities in the story's portrayal of the duel.

The story falls short in its lack of deep relationships and paucity of character development. Regardless of the flaws, the story is well paced, complex, and descriptive, as is borne out by Caplan's inventive language and fantastic creations: telepathic swords, crystals with "mentallic" defensive powers, and the "Talaxis" energy field. Lovers of fantasy combat will find this tale a compulsive read and richly satisfying.

GARY KLINGA (February 17, 2011)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.