Clarion Review

Young Adult Fiction

The Scourge of Muirwood
Jeff Wheeler
CreateSpace
978-1-4564-0635-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

Jeff Wheeler's Muirwood trilogy takes place in a world that seems to be an amalgamation of Medieval Britain, Wales, and Ireland. His work as a fantasist is influenced by Sharon Kay Penman's medieval mysteries and there are strong similarities between Wheeler's stories and Lloyd Alexander's sword-and-sorcery epic The Chronicles of Prydain, which was loosely based on the Mabinogion, a collection of stories from Welsh and pre-Christian Celtic myths. Immersed in history and legend, Wheeler spins yarns and sings the songs that celebrate the exploits and spirits of heroes and heroines of yore.

The Scourge of Muirwood, the third book in the series, continues the adventures of Lia, Wheeler's teenage heroine. Using her skills as a "hunter" (warrior) and a "maston" (shaman/magician), Lia must warn the world of the coming blight and find her beloved Colvin. Aided by friends, allies, and a supernatural force called the Medium, she must thwart her enemy's plans to exploit all the people of the kingdom by poisoning their minds with a dangerous cider that lowers their inhibitions to political intrigue and war and keeping the truth about the blight hidden. Wheeler writes, "In her [Lia's] mind, the pieces clove together making a whole. The Queen Dowager was corrupting the kingdom through Muirwood's cider. Was there a poison she was adding to it which enabled her to control the minds of others?…The Medium whispered to her [Lia]…there were poisons. Dahomey was the land of poisons and serpents and subtlety."

The author is wonderful at plotting and setting a breakneck pace, as if the reader, too, is galloping on horseback across the terrain of Lia's world or sailing on a ship buffeted by giant waves. Wheeler writes, "Lia advanced, swaying with the ship and stepped out into the storm. The lashing washes had swamped the main deck and crewmen clung to ropes to keep from going overboard….The Medium began to churn within her…Water splashed across her face.

Foam hissed like ten thousand serpents."

Unfortunately, Wheeler's prose suffers from grammatical errors and awkward sentences. While readers will be captivated by the author's brilliance and ability to enthrall, they may not be forgiving of his grammatical mistakes. While there is no argument that Wheeler is a great storyteller, one hopes that he will seek professional editing for his next project and continue to share the creations that spring from the heart of his imagination.

Lee Gooden