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The Lost King, by Frazier Alexander. Reviewed by Michael McCartney.

Michael McCartney

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REVIEWS

Alexander, Frazier. *The Lost King*.
Fireside Publishing, 2020. 349 pages.
Reviewed by Michael McCartney.

As an English teacher, it is always a pleasure to be pushed out of my library of familiar authors and try something new. Frazier Alexander's *The Lost King* was just the type of book that I needed - familiar elements in unfamiliar settings, beloved themes reconsidered, and engaging characters who drive the plot.

Our story opens with the return of the prince, Thalos, to Antaranis, his recently conquered homeland. While Thalos is clearly our central character, his sister Thera, struggling to overcome the drugs which the new ruler has used to pacify the populace, is another essential perspective figure. We occasionally get to experience events through the eyes of other characters but, ultimately, this narrative is

about the siblings and their personal struggles. And what struggles they face! The loss of their kingdom and family is at the core of every move they make and each tortured, haunted thought. Equally important from a thematic perspective seems to be the replacement of the Seven Virtues of Antaranis, the guiding moral philosophy of this world, with the two new ideas set up by the usurpers. In this binary, we see Alexander presenting an initial choice between what might be called the traditional virtues of the Greco-Roman world, “Humility, Wisdom, Honor, Courage, Justice, Peace, Love” (Alexander 2) and a sort of hedonistic totalitarianism that purports universal equality while also instituting capital punishment against supporters of the old king.

While I may have made this story seem rigidly this-or-that so far, it certainly isn't. In fact, so numerous are the characters and places, that I initially wished that Alexander had included a map of his world and divided his principle glossary by character, geography, and object instead of just alphabetically. However, as the novel unfolded, I realized that my sense of being adrift in a sea of the unfamiliar echoed what almost all of the characters were feeling. Whether it was the royal siblings deprived of home and purpose, the Loyalists who have lost their place in the world, the citizens who have given themselves over to mindless revelry, or even the other explorers who Thalos encounters along the way, everyone in this book is unmoored. The world has changed so fast and in such unexpected ways that the familiar seems like a phantasm just out of reach while the unfamiliar appears suddenly and with frightening frequency. It is perhaps something with which a reader in 2021 can empathize.

It would be reductive to call this story a “sandals and sorcery” tale - although there are both sandals and sorcery in the first chapter. Ultimately, there's so much more to it than that - especially for Tolkien and Lewis aficionados! *The Lost King* is peppered with allusions for those of us steeped in Inklings lore - but not in a heavy-handed way. Instead, Alexander deftly plays with the elements of each author's work the way a jazz musician spins out variations on a theme. While we feel the echoes of Tolkien's Aragorn when we see that Prince Thalos has returned, he is immediately confronted by the novel's villain, the witch-queen Sundra, who is absolutely reminiscent of Jad-

is, Lewis's diabolical White Witch. Watching the alchemy that comes from this combination was enough to instantly draw me in. As the novel unfolds, we find elements of an Earthsea-meets-Ancient-Greece archipelago, populated by adventurers who blend elements of the vikings and the argonauts, an army of Loyalists led by a prophetic giant owl who tugs at the memories of Aslan in my mind, and wicked orcs who seem to be a mixture of everything wicked that Mordor and the Calormen Empire could imagine. The brew is initially heady but it becomes an absolute delight.

I don't like spoilers so I won't reveal what happens to Thalos, Thera, and those loyal to them - but in a way, that's perfect for this story. All of our characters, whether heroes, villains, or those who walk the line, spend much of this novel in a haze of uncertainty. Alexander gives us a number of questions to chew on throughout his tale: Can a culture or society turn back the clock - and should it? Do we need a king or hero to save us? What is the cost of freedom and who determines what it means?

If those questions - plus dynamic heroes, strange monoliths, wicked enchantments, island-hopping adventure, mysterious ruins, and a host of dryads, unicorns, trolls, griffins, and ghosts, - aren't enough - then this isn't the book for you. As for me, I can't wait to read more of Alexander's work!