

## **Cleopatra's Daughter by Michelle Moran**

**2009. Quercus. 432 pages including glossary, map and list of characters.**

The publicity paragraph for this book was "another riveting and untold historical tale set against the backdrop of Egypt's demise. Following Cleopatra and Marc Antony's deaths, their three children - twins named Alexander and Selene plus a younger son named Ptolemy - are exiled from Egypt and sent to Rome in chains to be raised in one of the most fascinating (and dangerous) courts of all time. Cleopatra's Daughter is the remarkable true story of what happens to these three surviving children as seen through the eyes of Selene. Their adaptation to Roman culture, their treatment as both a curiosity and a threat, and Selene's perilous journey to adulthood, are all chronicled in the elegant detail and gripping pace for which Michelle Moran is celebrated". It's not a bad description of the novel, which started well with the dramatic end of the Ptolemaic rule in Egypt beginning with Antony's defeat against Octavian at Actium, which resulted in his bungled suicide and Octavian's conquest of Alexandria, shortly followed by Cleopatra's suicide by poisonous asp. The story is told through the eyes of Kleopatra Selene, the daughter of Kleopatra VII and Marc Antony, who at the start is a ten year old girl who feels responsible for her younger brother Ptolemy, and has a fiery nature. From the very beginning the character development starts so by the end of the first few chapters there are clear traits for each of the key characters of the story which immediately makes the reader care about what happens to them.

Princess Kleopatra and Prince Alexander are taken to Rome for Caesar's Triumph where they were paraded through the streets as captives. However their exploits following the Triumph stretched my belief. They are staying with Octavia, Antony's abandoned wife who treats them as her own, with freedom to go to school, the circus maximus and even the market with only a handful of guards for security. As part of Kleopatra's schooling she is trained as an architect and helps to design the mausoleum of Caesar, and she has maintained enough wealth to free Octavia's favourite slave Gallia; something somewhat unlikely for someone who is captive herself. As an Egyptologist rather than classicist I may be wrong but this freedom seems somewhat unrealistic, but does make for interesting relationship development between Kleopatra, Alexander, and the Roman children Marcellus, Julius and Tiberius as well as an introduction to Livia, Octavia and the guard Juba, who was later to become Kleopatra's husband. The freeing of slaves is closely associated with the back-story which is that of the Red Eagle, a revolutionary who is running a campaign to free the slaves of Rome through acts of riot and rebellion. Caesar was already angered by this revolutionary even before he turned his attention onto the royal twins, Kleopatra and Alexander, and it transpires that the Red Eagle and Kleopatra are very closely intertwined.

Kleopatra throughout the book is spelt with a K, and there is specific reference to it in the text and yet the title of the book is spelt with a C; a mistake on the publisher's behalf or some other intention which is lost on me. 250 pages into the story I began wondering when the story was going to get going as the pace had waned a little. As interesting as the mundane aspects of daily life in Rome are, there is only so much of the children visiting Roman institutions that you can take, before it becomes an indulgence on behalf of the author, who seems to want to demonstrate how much research she has done. However the novel picked up again towards the end, and all the loose ends were tied up, with happy marriages all round, although the brutality of Octavian (Augustus) is emphasised in a dramatic scene towards the end.

The Afterward of the book was particularly interesting as it provides an outline of the fates of all of the main characters from the novel, an historical note and a glossary of all the Roman words used throughout the novel. The book is written well, and although I found some aspects hard to believe, and I found my attention drifting a little in the middle I did enjoy "Cleopatra's Daughter" and would recommend Moran's novels to people who want a book within which they can lose themselves. Pure escapism and good fun.