



House of the Star

Caitlin Brennan

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Elen is a princess of the kingdom of Ymbria. Her greatest wish is to become a rider of worldrunners: the magical horses that are the only safe way to travel the roads through the worlds of Faerie. Now Elen has the chance to fulfill her dream at last, but the price is much too high.

To become a worldrider, Elen must journey to the House of the Star on Earth, the Arizona ranch where the worldrunners live and breed. There, she must try to forge a peace with her people's worst enemy—a traitor from the world of Caledon—and end the war that has been tearing their worlds apart for centuries. If Elen doesn't succeed, the Master of the House of the Star will close both Ymbria and Caledon off from the worldroads forever. Can the wisdom of a worldrunner named Blanca help Elen in her quest to save her world?

Caitlin Brennan's first novel for young readers is an enchanting tale of a very special breed of horses, the tribe of horse girls, and faerie magic.

House of the Star Details

Date : Published November 9th 2010 by Starscape
ISBN : 9780765320377
Author : Caitlin Brennan
Format : Hardcover 282 pages
Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Animals, Horses, Magic

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From Reader Review House of the Star for online ebook

S. says

This book was one that I signed up to receive in the 'giveaways' area. It looked interesting, I like fantasy and horses. How could I lose, even though I knew it would be an advanced readers copy and unedited for the most part. I was a bit late getting back in here to list that I had received it. Got it about a week ago--just when a writing challenge had started (National Novel Writing Month). So I got it the first day of NaNo and decided to relax and read a chapter or two after a long day. BIG mistake! I started it about 11 in the evening. Could not put it down. Well, I suppose I could have, but once I got involved I was hooked! The writing was very good, found few errors throughout (there was a part toward the end where a name got mixed up, but easily enough figured out).

The overall premise of the book is conflict, especially between two contending worlds that exist along the roads between the worlds. The conflict between these two realms is spilling over into and causing great havoc for the other worlds. Even to the point of complete destruction if it continues. Enter the young protagonist, who feels compelled to escape a fate she considers horrendous--a marriage to the enemy in order to bring about peace between these two worlds. Horror of horrors, she must spend time with this person in the one place she truly wants to be--earth, Arizona, learning to ride the most precious of steeds. Rather than give in to this arraignment, she chooses to run away from the only home she has ever known and loved. And, as things so often do, it all falls apart. She must face herself and her greatest challenge, but can she? Does she have what it takes to sacrifice everything for the one thing that is most needed?

I thoroughly enjoyed the twisting plot and the adventure, not to mention the determination of the rivals as they face themselves and each other across the antagonism of centuries. Well done! And thank you!

((In compliance with FTC guidelines: I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads. Posted in accordance with FTC guidelines.))

Erin says

3.5 stars.

I was definitely one of those girls that went through a horse (and horse-book) phase, and this book brought back memories from that time in my life.

There's absolutely no romance happening in this book (which I found a refreshing break), rather, the focus is squarely on the relationships between 3 girls--Elen and Ria, two princesses from rival kingdoms, and Sara, the Earth native who tries to make peace between them, but can't until they make it for themselves. Of the 3, Elen is the most fully developed since the book is really her journey and the POV is tightly focused on her experiences.

The worldbuilding (a bit reminiscent of the many worlds in Diana Wynne Jones' Chrestomanci books) and the descriptions of the bonds with the horses are lovely.

I do think, though, that even though the characters are teens, the book got lost in YA and might have done

better as an MG title.

Janni says

"Magical horses who travel among worlds, a magical school where students dream of being chosen to ride them, an undercurrent of unpredictable faerie magic--this book is for anyone who's ever dreamed of magic and horses and escaping to other realms. I didn't want to put it down, and I longed to keep riding with the tribe of horse girls when I ran out of pages to turn."

Put another way: this book made my inner horse girl, and my inner searcher-for-magic, and my inner 11-year-old all very happy. :-)

Yvensong says

Sometimes no matter how much someone may try to run away from all the problems that are thrust upon them, they end up right in the middle of what they tried to avoid. This is exactly what happens to Elen, a young girl with big dreams and even bigger problems in this creative fantasy written for young readers.

As I noted in one of my previous reviews of another author's book, Caitlin Brennan has taken something she knows about, (in this cases, horses) and has weaved a story around what she knows, that is entertaining. Her knowledge of horses brings a depth of feeling for the horse that Elen is connected to that goes beyond the norm.

Another pleasure in reading this was that the editing was well-done. Lately I've read (or started to read) published novels that were in dire need of editing, so to find an Advanced Reader's Copy that needed little to no correction is a joy.

I would recommend this novel to any young girl looking for a fantasy novel that includes strong female characters, a sense of being part of a tribe, and of course loves stories that include horses.

Hannah Cobb says

Elen is the princess of a faerie kingdom, but her dream has always been to come to earth and earn a place as a Worldrunner-one of the elite few gifted with the opportunity to ride the Worldrunners, special horses that can only be born on earth. On the surface this book is all about horses (and I wouldn't recommend it to anyone who isn't a horse lover) but Elen also makes a lot of hard choices, learning about justice and self sacrifice as she grows into her place as a worldrunner. Ten to eleven year old girls will most enjoy this fantasy novel.

Sandy says

I got this as an advance giveaway copy, and I appreciate the opportunity to add my review of this middle reader. As a 9 year old, horse crazy, daydreaming girl, I would have really liked this story - it has the elements of magic, smart horse/soulmate, Celtic mythology, and cool summer camp. What girl doesn't want this? It has the elements of conflict and learning how to deal with, and reconcile with, one's enemies, along with this whole issue being important enough that it affects the survival of your world and others.

However, as an adult, I found it lacked depth and character development. It was too "easy" and didn't let me struggle along with the characters. I don't think it is just because it was targeted for a younger audience, as I do enjoy other books in this genre. The opening pages were catching, but the meat of the story wasn't there for me.

E. says

A young girl named Elen from Ymbria aspires to become an elite worldrider, able to travel amongst different worlds by riding on special horses called worldrunners. Before she can be judged worthy, she has to prove herself by participating on a horse ranch located on the neutral world of Earth. The problem is that Elen is expected to follow tradition and marry her counterpart from the hated world of Caledon, a world that has been at war with Ymbria for countless years. Elen seeks to escape her destiny but discovers unexpected allies in her perilous flight from home and must decide what is most important to her, pursuit of her lifelong dream or maintaining a feud that threatens more than just the two worlds involved. The love of horses and an overwhelming desire to protect the very special horses capable of traversing the magical paths among the worlds draws a disparate group of youngsters who must learn to work together if they are going to succeed but failure may result in the destruction of the worldpaths themselves.

An entertaining story that has a few loose ends and some inconsistencies but will appeal greatly to those who love horses and fantasies. The author's background with Lipizzan horses and her familiarity with Arizona give a wonderful depth to the story.

eleight says

While this book is marketed to middle-school readers, I think it will appeal more to late elementary-age girls (4th-6th grades). If you or your daughter is not already very into horses, and feels that folks who like horses are a special breed, then this book may leave you a bit cold. If you or your daughter is horse crazy, you'll love this book. Horses, princesses, ranches and far-away worlds -- this book has it all. An enjoyable romp into lessons of responsibility and getting along with folks you might not like. Disclaimer: I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads

Lisa Dunckley says

This is the author's first book for younger readers. Like many of her books, it has the theme of Lipizzaner horses as mystical "other-worldly", intelligent beings (the author is a known Lipizzaner breeder). Elen has

the chance to become a Worldrider—someone who rides the rare Worldrunner horses. These horses have the ability to travel a road between worlds, and find a way to bring peace to the worlds. Elen goes to the training camp to learn how to do this, and is forced to work with Ria, who is from a world that is Elen's world's deadliest enemy. Part “horse book”, part fantasy, and part “teenage girls at camp”, this is a worthy successor to the author's Mountain's Call series. The horse sections, like all of Caitlin Brennan's works, are spot on. As a breeder myself, the scenes with the mare foaling were extremely well done and did a fantastic job building up the tension. I highly recommend this for any lovers of fantasy or well done horse fiction!

Vanessa Wright says

Grab your best saddle: author Caitlin Brennan has unleashed a herd of new magical horses! They're called worldrunners, and they travel the enchanted roads that connect planets in the Faerie universe. In this fantasy novel for tweens and teens, the worldrunners must also try to connect two young princesses from warring planets who are brought to the worldrider training ground and horsey summer camp, Earth's House of the Star.

At the camp, Elen, Princess of Ymbria, dukes it out with Ria, Princess of Caledon in a nonstop claw-fest that mirrors the ancient war between their people. A shared love of horses is their one hope for finding common ground, and together the girls learn how to care for, ride, and understand the wise - and often implacable - worldrunners. But the damage caused by their squabbling spreads beyond them. They hurt their friends. They endanger their planets. Finally, the worldrunners - all of them - get caught in the crossfire. The girls have to decide whether fight their prejudices or fight each other, and only one thing is certain: this summer, the war and the world as they know it will end.

House of the Star is a thrilling read for girls ages 10 and up, particularly for those on their way to summer camp or headed back to school. Brennan is like that camp counselor or history teacher every horse-crazy girl wishes she had, one full of breathless, magical tales that, best of all, are revealed in the Author's Note to be based on real-life places and real-life horses - including her Arizona ranch and her beloved (and inherently magical) Lipizzans.

Samantha says

This book is just okay. I enjoyed it enough to finish reading it, but not enough to keep it.

The setting was an interesting one, with worlds being connected together by these magic roads that special horses from Earth can navigate. Two of these worlds are at war with one another, and have been for quite some time. While there are many stories of those from Earth going to other worlds through magical means, and while there are some stories of people from fantasy worlds ending up on Earth, I have never seen the worlds mixed together like this. I will say it the Earth setting was revealed a little too slowly for my liking, as I wasn't sure what time period of Earth we were in, or what this Earth was like, and so I wasn't sure how to imagine things.

Side note, it does seem a little odd this worldroad magic seems to stem from Earth, but yet it is the world least aware of what is going on.

Then we have the main characters. For the most part, I did like them, but sometimes Elen just annoyed me, with how she stereotyped her enemy. It does make sense both with her being a narrow-minded teenager and being raised up in a war environment, but she was so shallow about it, and so it got annoying quick. Ria was the same way, but since the book wasn't told from her POV, it wasn't brought up as much. Aside from that, though, they (and Sara) were all interesting characters, and it was great to see them grow and change.

Then there's Blanca. This book almost feels like it should be part of a series, as there was a big fuss made about certain things, but then those things aren't really explained or dealt with. It feels like there should be another book that more fully explains Blanca, and where they deal with the worldroad problem.

Then to go back to the warring worlds... If there's so many marriages between the two sides in an effort to end the world, wouldn't they all be related at this point? Which is just eww. As well as, with so many marriages, it seems odd the hatred between the two worlds is still so strong. It would make sense with the people of the land, but not the royalty. A nitpick, but it's one of the biggest things that bothered me.

Very small nitpick, it seemed odd to have a character named The Horned King. I get that's a pretty generic name, but it's also one of the most well-known villains out there.

This was meant to be a rather short review, but I guess I have more nitpicks with it than I thought. Not that it was a bad book, as the author certainly knows her stuff about horses, and it was kind of nice to see enemies forced to be together because they have a common interest, as it's not often we see that. I do wish the story had gone in a different direction, as I actually would have preferred less action and more time with the two characters slowly growing to be friends, but the more action wasn't bad, as it raised the stakes even higher.

So, overall, it wasn't a bad book, but I think I would have enjoyed it more as a tween. The characters were interesting, but were emotionally immature, and while the setting was one I haven't really seen, there were a few odd things about it. I won't be keeping this book, but I'll be passing it on to my horse-loving teen sister. This book seems right up her alley.

Estara says

This is the book I would have LOVED to read when I was still 12 or 13! It's centred on horses, it's got female heroines, it's got fantasy - perfect!

The reason I only give it three stars now that I'm 44 is that I don't have patience with utterly stubborn teenagers who only see their own view any longer (especially since I have to do with them often in my daily job) AND because this is a wild ride but much too short. I wanted to spend more time on the farm, I wanted more background about Ymbria at least - I just wanted more.

Do give this book to your female horse-mad youngster though, they're bound to love it! I mean, it's Judith Tarr, so how could they not. A good entry drug into her oeuvre ^^.

Colleen says

This book combines two very well-known tropes in young adult books. Brennan blends the plot line about

the young princess who must end the grinding, centuries-long war AND the two girls at horse camp who can't stand each other into a reasonably well-laid story. Our heroine, Princess Elen, had been charged by her Queen mother to end the two centuries of fighting between the Capulets - I mean - Ymbrians and the Caledonians. Elen ends up meeting her supposed ally-from-the-other-side, and of course absolutely can't stand the kid or anything about that family/clan/world. Except, well, both kids are mad about horses and are stuck at horse camp on Earth together. Cue nasty words and glaring glances and sneaking into barns and riding horses in storms and the Major Mistake by one of the kids resulting in the Big Long Chase Scene (with bonus angst and injury!) and you have the whole story at a glance.

I recommend this book to fantasy-loving, horse-mad girls who are good readers but might be on the emotionally immature side. There is nothing emotionally (or physically) mature in this book, only the well-examined questions of when a grudge is long past expiration, and when listening to your better nature can really solve problems.

Sara Menashe says

I received this book as an advanced copy from Goodreads Giveaway! Thanks so much!

I am an elementary school teacher and cannot wait for my students to be old enough to read this book so I can hear their reactions! For any young girl who loves horses and fairy tales with depth, they will love this book! The attention to detail and imagination that went into writing this book is phenomenal, and the world where this book takes place is one where many girls I know will want to live! Caitlin Brennan is a YA force to be reckoned with!

(In compliance with FTC guidelines: I received the book for free through Goodreads First Reads. Posted in accordance with FTC guidelines.)

Jenne says

Having read so many books like "My Friend Flicka", "National Velvet", "The Little White Horse" and the like, played with and collected My Little Ponies and still catch up with Mercedes Lackey's Companion books every time a new one comes out, I was very pleased to win the ARC of this book. I had high hopes, which were not disappointed.

At the beginning it was the premise of the book to that drew me in - a princess from another realm is sent to work on a horse ranch in Arizona, along with the scion of her country's worst enemy in hopes that the feud destroying the lands of faerie can be stopped. Of course, the horses there are not just any horses, but magical ones called worldrunners, (similar and yet strikingly different to Lackey's Valdmar Companions) that are the only safe way to travel the roads through the worlds of Faerie.

But I also love that Brennan makes her main character, Elen, arrogant and unyielding in her hate for her enemy and therefore gives the readers a chance to form their opinion of the feud, instead of having to choose a side. Indeed, there were times when I really didn't like Elen, but so much the better!

Brennan draws you into the life of working a ranch, and the bonds formed by working with animals. She

doesn't gloss over the mucking out and the hard labor, nor forgets about the competitive nature of a group thrown together.

This is a book I am happy to add to my book shelves and hope that one day I'll have a daughter who will appreciate the book as much, or more that I did!
