



The Contender from Delos

by Leo Carrington



Young Adult - Coming of Age

Kindle Edition

Reviewed on 05/26/2025

Book Review

Reviewed by Grant Leishman for Readers' Favorite

The Contender from Delos by Leo Carrington is a wonderfully nuanced story of the struggling journey of a young wrestling champion from the poorest area of Rome, who dreams of achieving the ultimate reward: a gold laurel presented by none other than Caesar himself. Alexander is the son of a former Roman soldier-turned-carpenter and his beautiful Greek wife, whom he had met and married when stationed on the Greek island of Delos. For now, Alexander is forced to wrestle in underground, illegal matches where his earnings are determined by the cut-throat gangs who run and control the betting on the outcomes. Alexander dreams of training with the best at one of Rome's exclusive palaestras under a true champion coach. Fortunately for Alexander, his father has a plan to make that happen, but it will change Alexander's and his mother's lives forever and send him in a new direction.

The Contender from Delos is a wonderfully crafted story that perfectly encapsulates the philosophy and lifestyle of the Roman Empire, where differing cultures and religions were tolerated under overarching Roman rule and protection. Leo Carrington has created an endearing character in Alexander, the product of a Roman father and a Greek mother, caught between two worlds, two sets of gods, and two philosophies. Through wrestling and his trainers' teachings, he found his place in society. I particularly enjoy historical novels that use story arcs to educate the reader on aspects of the culture of the time. I loved the focus on Greek philosophy, in general, and stoicism, in particular. The idea that the world is ordered and it is not what happens to us but how we react to it that determines our place in society is one that resonates with me, as does the overarching theme of gratitude, which is seamlessly woven into the narrative. It was fascinating to see both Roman and Greek religions operating virtually side by side in an attitude of tolerance and grace, although the new religion sweeping the region, that of Kyrios (or Jesus), perhaps not so much. The relationships, the honor, and the camaraderie between the wrestlers, even those who were bitter opponents or stood in the way of success, shone through in these characters. The idea of not just living but living with honor, love, and family was redolent throughout. I thoroughly enjoyed this fascinating tale and highly recommend it.