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TITLE INFORMATION

THE ANGEL OF LORRAINE

Peter Tallon

BookVenture Publishing LLC (368 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

This final installment of a trilogy reimagines the story of Joan of Arc.

In 1428, the situation for France is dire. The war against the English is “going from bad to worse,” and the possibility that Orléans will be conquered poses a grave threat: “Everyone knew that if Orléans fell, the heartland of France would be open to the invaders.” Then a sliver of hope is delivered by a young girl, Jeanne Darc, the daughter of landowning peasants in remote Domremy. She’s only 16 years old but claims to have received divine communications from St. Michael, the archangel, who assures her that her mission in life is to ensure the revival of France’s sovereignty: “I must go to the dauphin and lead his army to victory against the English. My banner will show Jesus Christ Our Saviour blessing an image of the fleur-de-lis held by a warrior angel.” Astonishingly, Jeanne is able to convince a series of important men she is neither delusional nor a malevolent agent of Satan, impressing each with “an aura, a kind of light about her which forces you to listen.” In this volume of Tallon’s (*The Templar Legacy*, 2019, etc.) Richard Calveley Trilogy, an earnestly credulous account of Jeanne’s contribution to the war effort is chronicled alongside a portrayal of Richard, an English captain forced in his dotage to consider his future beyond military life. The author vividly re-creates the historical period in all its riveting drama. In addition to a rigorously realistic account of the war, he skillfully articulates the views of the competing sides. Jeanne’s part of that history has been told many times, and Tallon’s version doesn’t add anything that is particularly fresh. The novel also assumes the least plausible rendering of a tale that reads like mythology—Jeanne is presented as genuinely inspired by divine epiphany. Of course, this is a matter of great debate, and she could perhaps more plausibly be portrayed as a mentally ill teenager cynically exploited by statesmen. Whatever position readers take on Jeanne, the author grippingly brings to life her extraordinary existence and grim end. Richard’s story is less enthralling and so quotidian by comparison that it seems tepid. As a result, the book drags a bit—a shorter version may have more effectively sustained the tale’s electricity.

A captivating depiction of a 15th-century conflict and a dramatically thrilling interpretation of Joan of Arc’s life.

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