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# The Falconer's Apprentice



## Synopsis

“That bird should be destroyed!” • Andreas stared at Ethelbert in shock. Blood from an angry-looking gash on the young lord’s cheek dripped onto his embroidered tunic. Andreas clutched the handles of the basket containing the young peregrine. Perhaps this was a dream.”

Andreas, an apprentice falconer at Castle Kragenberg, cannot bear the thought of killing the young female falcon and smuggles her out of the castle. Soon he realizes that his own time there has come to an end, and he stows away, with the bird, in the cart of an itinerant trader, Richard of Brugge. So begins a series of adventures that lead him from an obscure castle in northern Germany to the farthest reaches of Frederick von Hohenstaufen’s Holy Roman Empire, following a path dictated by the wily trader’s mysterious mission. Andreas continues to improve his falconry skills, but he also learns to pay attention to what is happening around him as he travels through areas fraught with political unrest. Eventually, Richard confides in Andreas, and they conspire to free Enzo, the eldest of the emperor’s illegitimate sons, from imprisonment in Bologna. THE FALCONER’S APPRENTICE is a story of adventure and intrigue set in the intense social and political unrest of the Holy Roman Empire in the thirteenth century.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 11 - 15 years

Grade Level: 6 - 10

## Customer Reviews

“This well-researched and carefully plotted novel features a likable protagonist and a setting straight

from the Newbery canon." Kirkus Reviews Issue: April 15th, 2015 "Von Hassell's beautifully written journey tale introduces the world of falconry to readers and vividly evokes European daily life during the thirteenth century." Booklistonline "The Falconer's Apprentice by Malve von Hassell has met all my expectations of a good historical book. The book is well-structured, well-researched and very well-written." December 2015, OnlineBookClub.org, review by chytach18

Malve von Hassell was born in Italy and spent part of her childhood in Belgium and Germany before moving to the United States. She is a freelance writer, researcher, and translator. She holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from the New School for Social Research. Working as an independent scholar, she published several books and journal articles, in particular, *The Struggle for Eden: Community Gardens in New York City* (Bergin & Garvey 2002) and *Homesteading in New York City 1978-1993: The Divided Heart of Loisaida* (Bergin & Garvey 1996). She has also edited her grandfather Ulrich von Hassell's memoirs written in prison in 1944, *Der Kreis schließt sich - Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft 1944* (Propylaen Verlag 1994). She has taught at Queens College, Baruch College, Pace University, and Suffolk County Community College, while continuing her work as a translator and writer. She has published a children's picture book, *Letters from the Tooth Fairy* (Mill City Press, 2012) and her translation and annotation of a German children's classic by Tamara Ramsay, *Rennefarre's Wonderful Travels and Adventures* (Two Harbors Press, 2012). *The Falconer's Apprentice* (nameless 2015) is her first historical fiction novel for young adults. She is completing a historical fiction novel set in Jerusalem in the time of the crusades and is working on a new book set in Germany in the 16th century.

Young Andreas has never known his father and his mother died years ago, leaving him in the protection, such as it is, of his Uncle Stephen at Castle Kragenberg. Although he is allowed to take his uncle's lessons with the other boys and he spends his free time helping Oswald in the mews with the lord's falcons, Andreas knows there is no future for him at Kragenberg. But where else would he go, really? When his favorite young falcon Adela gets herself into a spot of trouble with the lord's son, Andreas gets just the push he needs to set off on his new life. He feels responsible to save Adela's life and, in the process, he just might find his own. When Richard the trader and his daughter Gemma, along with their garishly colored cart show up, that's just the ticket Andreas needs, if only he can stow away without being caught. Or maybe he was meant to be caught. This story is sort of a meandering coming of age story of a boy who doesn't fit in. As his life unfolds along the trader's road, Andreas hones his

abilities with the falcons, learns a few other useful skills and learns some life lessons along the way. An interlude in the mountains with a kindly healer gets Andreas to thinking maybe he has some gifts for healing himself, but first he has to get Adela to Emperor Frederick II, who will surely take the noble in to her rightful place in his royal mews. Along the way he will meet many of Richard's noble and royal contacts, learn the political realities of the Holy Roman Empire, and maybe even free the imprisoned King Enzo. As noted, this story tends to meander a bit. We don't really have a sense of where exactly the story is going. Things tend to happen to Andreas "he seems to lack his own agency throughout much of the book. And once things happen, they tend to get left behind on the road. We think maybe they will tie in later, but it doesn't really pan out that way. At times in fact things seem to happen only to educate us as readers about life in the mid-thirteenth century, not because they are intrinsic to the plot of the story. Furthermore, things seem rather easy for our young hero. Aside from an unpleasant encounter with Richard's former assistant, Andreas rarely faces serious danger and he seems universally welcomed and appreciated as an astute young lad wherever he goes. I can't say this was my favorite book, but it's not a bad book. I basically cared about the characters and became invested in knowing what happened to them. The plot is interesting enough to keep the pages turning. And in the end you might feel a little smarter, having learned a few things along the way. Please note, I received a complimentary copy of this book for reviewing purposes.

Set in the Germany and Italy of the 13th Century, this tale of adventure follows a young apprentice falconer and his falcon from a harried existence in a cold Northern castle on a road filled with mystery and intrigue. Andreas leaves his secure but unfulfilled existence to save the life of his favorite falcon and embarks with trader companions who turn out to be more than they seem....and gets to meet and interact with a King and an Emperor along the way. He learns much about his World and gains talents that allow him to save lives, as well as become his own man. An excellent and entertaining read about a period of time and place that isn't all that well known to many young readers, this novel delights and educates at the same time.

While not intense or action filled, the quiet subtlety of this historical fiction for young people is engaging, thought provoking, and very enjoyable even for this older adult. the book was well written and obviously well researched. My husband picked it up and started reading it even before I finished and was immediately drawn in to the story. He loved the gentle way the characters developed as

well as the way the social aspects of the age were depicted.

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