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Stormdancer: The Lotus War Book One



Synopsis

The first in an epic new fantasy series, introducing an unforgettable new heroine and a stunningly original dystopian steampunk world with a flavor of feudal Japan. **A DYING LAND** The Shima Imperium verges on the brink of environmental collapse; an island nation once rich in tradition and myth, now decimated by clockwork industrialization and the machine-worshippers of the Lotus Guild. The skies are red as blood, the land is choked with toxic pollution, and the great spirit animals that once roamed its wilds have departed forever. **AN IMPOSSIBLE QUEST** The hunters of Shima's imperial court are charged by their Shogun to capture a thunder tiger â “ a legendary creature, half-eagle, half-tiger. But any fool knows the beasts have been extinct for more than a century, and the price of failing the Shogun is death. **A HIDDEN GIFT** Yukiko is a child of the Fox clan, possessed of a talent that if discovered, would see her executed by the Lotus Guild. Accompanying her father on the Shogun's hunt, she finds herself stranded: a young woman alone in Shima's last wilderness, with only a furious, crippled thunder tiger for company. Even though she can hear his thoughts, even though she saved his life, all she knows for certain is he'd rather see her dead than help her. But together, the pair will form an indomitable friendship, and rise to challenge the might of an empire.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I should have known better, since Stormdancer's own cover blurb praises the idea of the book rather than its actual quality. But I was intrigued by the description, and didn't realize that the book is much more appropriate for teenage anime/video game fans than for a general adult fantasy audience. To start with something positive: the dystopian/steampunk elements of this book are pretty cool, and I like that it deals with environmental and social issues. And I didn't feel the urge to throw it at a wall. It does get a little bit better as it goes, and finishes strong (relatively speaking--I was never moved, but the end is the best part). And, in fairness, I am not a teenager and have never been very interested in anime; I don't melt at the phrase "chainsaw katana"; and so I'm not in the target demographic for this book. Now the plot. Teenage Yukiko accompanies her father on a supposedly impossible mission to capture a "thunder-tiger" (part eagle, part tiger, essentially a griffin) for the evil Shogun, but winds up teaming up with the thunder-tiger to fight the Shogun instead. Here's where my problems with Stormdancer begin. The plot drags, especially but not exclusively in the first third of the book, weighed down by a ponderous style. Rather than building great imagery through well-chosen details, Kristoff dumps enormous amounts of detail on the reader in a pedestrian writing style, such that almost nothing happens for the first 50 pages. Here's a sample: "She wore an outfit of sturdy gray cloth, unadorned save for a small fox embroidered on the breast, cut simply for the sake of utility. An uwagi tunic covered her from neck to mid-thigh, open at the throat, long, loose sleeves with folded cuffs rippling in the feeble breeze.

This book reads like a generic steampunk fantasy that was sent back by its editor with a note that read, "I like this, but it needs a little kick. Find a way to make it more original and we'll publish it." So the author decided to go and re-skin the whole thing with Japanese motifs and terms he barely appears to understand. Beyond that, it's fairly by-the-numbers for a 'steampunk' adventure. I disagree somewhat with those that take issue with fantasy stories not representing an Asian culture accurately (i.e. the inclusion of Chinese, Korean or say, Indian elements). Authors mix and match and play fast and loose with European and Mediterranean cultures all the time and no one cares. I don't see that Asian cultures should be any different when used as inspiration for fantasy settings. That said, when you start using real-terms aside from what's absolutely necessary to build your world (using the term katana is fine in this sense but throwing in random Japanese words for other things is less fine, like Arashi-no-ko when Stormgirl works fine; Arashitora is fine but

constantly mis-using suffixes like -sama or -chan is not), there are certain expectations of understanding on the part of the author, and these expectations are reasonable. Additionally, if an author is going to present a world heavily based on a culture, he or she does owe it to that culture to accurately represent certain aspects of that culture, the things that really set it apart, things that will grant it a certain verisimilitude it will otherwise lack, as is the case in Stormdancer. Samurai are not just knights with two swords and funny hairdos, Bushido is not chivalry, a shogun is not a generic autocrat, and the caste system - if present - should actually mean something.

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