



Serpentine

Cindy Pon

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SERPENTINE is a sweeping fantasy set in the ancient Kingdom of Xia and inspired by the rich history of Chinese mythology.

Lush with details from Chinese folklore, SERPENTINE tells the coming of age story of Skybright, a young girl who worries about her growing otherness. As she turns sixteen, Skybright notices troubling changes. By day, she is a companion and handmaid to the youngest daughter of a very wealthy family. But nighttime brings with it a darkness that not even daybreak can quell.

When her plight can no longer be denied, Skybright learns that despite a dark destiny, she must struggle to retain her sense of self – even as she falls in love for the first time.

Serpentine Details

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Author : Cindy Pon

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From Reader Review Serpentine for online ebook

CW (The Quiet Pond) ? says

I read this book following the whole Nagini mess and I am so glad that I did, because Pon's *Serpentine* demonstrates that East-Asian women *can* be serpent shape-shifters without being exoticised, enslaved, cursed, and later decapitated.

???

- About a handmaiden, Skybright, who discovers she is part-human, part-serpent demon and her journey of self-discovery, save her best friend/sister, and star-crossed love.
- Guess what: Skybright has AGENCY. She is a developed character with feelings, sometimes conflicting, who falls in love, who feels jealousy, who feels anger, but takes her destiny into her own hands despite her station.
- Set in historical China in the fictional land of Xia, this book has fantasy elements complete with demons from Chinese folklore.
- The romance was a little shaky at first, but I actually really enjoyed the dynamic and development.
- I adored the friendship here between two girls, and it depicts how far you'd go for someone you love.
- I can't wait to read the sequel, *Sacrifice*, which I've already reserved at the library!

Trigger/content warnings: (view spoiler)

Amerie says

*AUG WRAP-UP/SEPT TBR + BOOKBUDDYATHON TBR video <https://youtu.be/mz98GwzfKiY>

Chinese mythology + historic details = atmospheric, detail-oriented fantasy that has as much heart as it does world-building

The world fell away when I read this, which, at 290 pages, took me two sittings/less than twenty-four hours. I became fully immersed, as Pon not only provides visual details, but goes in-depth when it comes to food, perfumes, sounds, etc. **Yet there isn't one wasted scene, no plodding bits; the pacing is quite fast, but character development and relationships don't suffer because of it.** The heart of the story is the sister-like relationship of two young girls, but the romantic aspects of the story do not disappoint.

Highly recommend this to those who are looking for a fantasy offering new aspects to world-building (instead of a traditional European medieval setting) as well as one that offers as much focus on character as it does plot.

Tina says

Y'ALL THIS WAS PUBLISHED today. That means it's time for you to go to a bookstore and buy your copy - or buy it online - and ask your libraries to get copies of this book. This book is really, really good.

Finishing this novel, my first thought was: Cindy Pon is a really talented author. Even in the middle of reading *Serpentine*, I knew that I would a.) want to return for the sequel and b.) want to read Pon's other

novels. In looking up and adding those other novels to my TBR, I discovered that they are also set in the Kingdom of Xia. I love when authors expand on worlds that they have already established with spin-offs.

For the world within *Serpentine*, Cindy Pon gives plenty of details that create an atmosphere of a distinctly different time and culture and help settle you into her fascinating world. The lush atmosphere is reminiscent of older fantasy narratives. In these narratives, I have never had trouble picturing what the characters were doing - the details of their everyday lives had been mapped out. Pon does this well in *Serpentine*: you can imagine the food and clothing as well as Skybright as she routinely wakes to help Zhen Liu, her mistress but almost adopted sister. But don't let my praise fool you: though the lush atmosphere is wonderfully established with evocative details, the plot is not bogged down by those details; it's fast-paced and full of action. The plot and atmosphere enhance one another and showcase Pon's beautiful, sweeping writing style.

Atmosphere and culture? Check. World-building? Also check. I do not know much of Chinese folklore and mythology, but what Pon introduced in this novel made me WANT to know so much more. The underworld, Skybright's power, the monastery, and more. The way Pon incorporates these elements is also particularly fresh. This story is about a girl whose life is changed when she comes into an extraordinary power, yet there are no info dumps that I can recall about her power. Everything is smoothly settled into the plot and character development. Skybright is determined enough to take charge of her own destiny, and you as a reader are along for that ride without pause.

Skybright is perhaps what I enjoyed most from *Serpentine*: her voice is a particular treat to read. I must admit to a personal prejudice when it comes to YA: most of the main characters who are described or praised for being selfless, well, I'm not really sure they are. They seem to be selfless mostly when it comes to showy displays of self-sacrifice. However, Skybright is actually selfless on a day to day basis as a handmaid to her good friend and mistress, Zhen Liu. While many other characters might bemoan the circumstances surrounding their mysterious fate, Skybright learns how to control her power without faltering in her daily duties. Her quiet strength, determination and dedication add an interesting, fresh lens unseen in YA. Fighting otherworldly creatures is portrayed in a distinctive manner for her coming-of-age, as is the evolution of Skybright's friendship with Zhen Liu. If you enjoyed reading about the strong female friendship between Nehemia and Celaena in *Throne of Glass*, well, this isn't between an assassin and a princess, but Zhen Liu and Skybright are two fierce women in their own right, with an absolutely wonderful bond that is tried but true at its core. At the beginning, Pon discusses how she was inspired by the women in her life. This shows in *Serpentine* and its heart, the main female friendship and the strong character development for these ladies.

Side characters such as Zhen Liu and Kai Sen are developed alongside Skybright's narrative, with stories of their own. Skybright's romance with Kai Sen is intense and intimate; they discuss their lives on a deeper level, and their kisses are imbued with a charged edge because of that emotional connection. If you enjoyed the way the romance was handled in *The Hero and The Crown*, I believe that you will also enjoy the romance in *Serpentine*. I am also partly reminded of how the main character in that novel goes off to fight dragons and no one believes that she can until she brings back proof. For all the limitations of Skybright's power, she too is a force to be reckoned with, and others would do well not to underestimate her.

When I first read *Serpentine*, I wondered why Kristin Cashore was quoted on the cover - because she's the current face of YA high fantasy or because of a specific element? For all that I love Cashore's novels, hers can be considered slow to start. *Serpentine* is not only shorter than one of Cashore's novels, but it's also paced much quicker (though perhaps those two are not exclusive). But the more I considered the novels, the clearer it became. In *Graceling*, Cashore discusses the idea of what makes a monster, and Fire's power can be seen as an extended metaphor. Likewise, Skybright considers her transformative power in terms of self-identity, and it can serve as a very discussable metaphor for what the synopsis terms as "her growing otherness." Not only does *Serpentine* feature a wonderful main female friendship, sweet romance, lush setting, and significant growth for the main character, but it also has an innately discussable premise. This is the kind of book that I wish I could have read when I was growing up, and am glad that I got to read even

now.

Don't let my comparisons fool you either: I have not read anything like *Serpentine*. I've added in comparisons with the hope that they will make you more likely to pick up this novel. Once you start *Serpentine*, you won't want to stop (I definitely finished it in one sitting...). In short, if you like young adult fantasy novels or coming-of-age fantasy novels, **BUY THIS BOOK**.

If you're looking forward to *SOUNDLESS* by Richelle Mead, put *SERPENTINE* on your list as well.

FANTASTIC. Reminded me of older fantasy narratives, and I think that it'd be perfect for fans of *THE HERO AND THE CROWN* & Rae Carson. Features a wonderful main female friendship, sweet romance, and such significant growth for the main character.... plus the lush setting! Cindy Pon gives plenty of details that help to create an atmosphere of a distinctly different time and culture and to settle you into her fascinating world.

More to come later.

P.S. - Got this ARC at BookCon.

P.P.S. - Can I say how fantastic it is that the main character is the handmaid? LOVE when the perspective shifts like that (since so many fantasies are told from the PoV of the lost heir, etc.).

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nick says

Despite the vast possibilities of cultures that can be explored, YA fantasy is unusually lacking in diversity. The promise of a **Chinese setting** and that **gorgeous cover** are what initially attracted me to Cindy Pon's *Serpentine*. Going in, I knew deep down that *Serpentine* would be a good book, but I was surprised by how much it was able to **hook me into its characters' lives, the stunning world building and the dynamic relationships the book explored**.

As soon as I read the first line of *Serpentine*, I was **lured in by the gorgeous writing**. Cindy Pon's prose was **luscious and vivid**, and it was hard to look away from the book. It's the kind of writing that will make you want finish the book in a single sitting, sweep you off your feet, make you feel like you are also part of the story and make you wish that the book never ended. Yes, it was THAT beautiful to me. Because her writing was so striking, **the world building also came to life**. Inspired by Chinese mythology, *Serpentine* was a riveting read from start to finish. Our protagonist, Skybright's, life completely changes when she shifts into a giant snake and starts seeing mythological creatures from the underworld. The plot was **slow** when compared with other fantasy books, but it **worked** in the case of *Serpentine*, because the story really was **Skybright's journey** discovering where she stands and fighting to close an opening in the underworld that allowed the infiltration of all sorts of fascinating, but scary supernatural creatures into the human world. I also loved how the author portrayed ancient Chinese cultures in the book - my mouth especially watered at the description of all the delicious-sounding food.

Serpentine wouldn't have been the wonderful novel that it is without **the shining star of the novel, Skybright**. As a character, Skybright's voice instantly drew me in. She was a **quiet character**, with her

being a handmaid, who grew to be wonderful in the book. **Her generosity, her selflessness and her devotion**, especially when it came to her mistress and good friend, Zhen Liu, made her very easy to like and relate to. Throughout the book, as Skybright learned more about her origins, she grew to become an even braver young woman, who I found truly spoke to me. I was sad that I had to temporarily part ways with her when the book ended.

Her mistress, Zhen Liu, was also yet **another beautifully fleshed-out character**. As opposed to Skybright, Zhen Liu was more outspoken and daring, but she too was battling with her own share of issues - she was pressured by her family to find a good husband to marry, but Zhen Liu wasn't remotely attracted to boys. **Her situation was heartbreaking** because I knew that given the time period she was born in, being with a girl would be nearly impossible.

Another highlight of *Serpentine*, for me, were **the relationships that were explored**. Firstly, the **slow, but passionate romance** that budded between Skybright and an adorable boy who works at the local monastery, Kai Sen. I loved how sweet this relationship was and the two of them were perfect together. **They talked and really connected emotionally**. Not to mention, the kisses were swoony and so delightful to read about. Zhen Liu found herself a love interest too in Lan, a girl who visited her home and even though their relationship was rife with obstacles, I couldn't help but wish hard for a happily-ever-after for the two of them.

Then, there was perhaps, my favorite part of *Serpentine*, the **bond between Skybright and Zhen Liu**. These two were on the surface handmaid and mistress, but theirs was **a special relationship of friendship and sisterhood**. Throughout *Serpentine*, they had to face rough patches in their friendship because they both had secrets they were afraid to reveal to each other, but they were still incredibly close together and I loved how tight this bond was, with them willing to fight for each other.

For me, *Serpentine* is one of my favorite books I've read this year. It ended on a **cruel ending**, but there is a sequel in the works, releasing next year that I'm already itching to get my hands on. **With characters that you will want to root for, romances that will leave you with a smile, friendships that will make envious and writing that will make you drown in its beauty, *Serpentine* is not to be missed out on.**

Wanderlust_WL says

Hmm rather unexpected and interesting ending. I am intrigued by God Stone and his future interactions with Skybright.

Mundie Moms & Mundie Kids says

Cindy Pon has given her readers something utterly unique and exciting with *Serpentine*. Filled with Chinese mythology, fantasy, romance, heart pounding action, and characters whom I enjoyed getting to know, and want to read more about, this book hooked me!

Read my FULL REVIEW here <http://mundiemoms.blogspot.com/2015/0...>

Roshani Chokshi says

LOVED this book. I haven't had much exposure to Chinese mythology, and I thought the depiction of the Otherworldly characters and relationship between immortals and humans was stunning. Pon writes with poetic urgency that lets you linger with the language and still keep turning pages. I really liked how this book was sex-positive and female-friendship positive. At its heart, this is a tale of sister-friendships and navigating your way through the world when you're on the margins. Great read, great characters, strong romance and tender portrayal of love in all its forms.

Rana says

This book pissed me off.

That it ended! I was so completely enthralled and then it was over. But no worries, there is a sequel!

Cassie C says

See more reviews on my blog [Novels and Necklaces](#)

Actual rating: 2.5 stars

I had a very difficult time rating this book because while there wasn't anything particularly bad about it, I just never fully got into reading the story either. Nothing stood out to me enough that made me like it...it was just, eh. I was excited for this book originally because of the mythology. Chinese mythology isn't something that is used very often in books, and so any type of book that I find that has this type of mythology has my interest piqued. Even though this aspect of the book was good, the story just never captured my interest in the way I was expecting.

There were some things I enjoyed with this novel, so I want to talk about those before moving on to the aspects I didn't really like. So first is the mythology. The setting and the mythology is very well described and well written. I could easily picture everything, and in some ways, the story was very refreshing. I liked the uniqueness of the setting and the mythology. I also liked the fact that this story isn't about the upper class girl...it's about her handmaid. I thought this too was an interesting spin because the story could have easily been reversed. Granted, this is nothing new...I could name a handful of books that do this, but it worked well for this book and I think it deserves a mention. Finally, I did like that there is a female-female relationship in this book. Not many books do this right now, and it didn't feel like it was just put in the story (this is important to remember later on). The relationship actually had a role/place in the story, and it helped the story progress.

Now onto what I felt didn't work. First was the characters. Nothing was particularly wrong with the characters, but none of them were *that* interesting either. I just never felt like I could connect to any of them, and I didn't find myself rooting for anyone. I didn't hate the characters in any way, but there were only little parts of each character that I truly loved. I didn't feel like the characters were developed enough for the reader to truly connect to them. Every character just needed a little something more.

My biggest problem with this book was the romance. The romance between the main character, Skybright, and Kai Sen just felt rushed and thrown in the story. It's kind of insta-love because basically it was just one minute the characters meet, and the next they decided to be in love with each other. Half the time, I didn't even feel like they actually knew each other to even be friends! Ultimately, their romance just felt extremely unbelievable to me, and I just couldn't get over this fact while reading any scene. And then there was the lovely addition of a love triangle...at the Very.End.Of.The.Story.

This is a major no-no in my book, and I honestly was just left wondering why?? There was literally no reason for it, and again, it just felt thrown into the story to maybe add some drama. Only problem, there wasn't any drama to be had because as soon as the love triangle is introduced, the book is over. I'm not even kidding about this.

Overall, this book just wasn't for me. The plot was kind of a roller coaster, as it had it's strong moments, followed by weak moments, but it did have it's shining moments. I loved how strong the friendship between Skybright and Zhen Ni was, but there is definitely some room for improvement for this book. I think that for some, this will be a great book, but at least for me, it wasn't my cup of tea.

Happy reading :)

Sherwood Smith says

Wow!

I read far too late last night, slammed into the ending, yelled "What?" as I desperately reached for pages that weren't there. Not a cliff-hanger ending precisely, but a turning point.

So many things to love: the rich descriptions, the resonant use of Chinese myth to create a fascinating world where the supernatural blends into the natural world with awe-inspiring and also terrifying effect. The strength of female friendship alone would have made me a fan of this book, but even better was the exploration of all kinds of love: simple attraction, not so simple attraction, passion, the dizzying love that has nothing to do with attraction, love of family, or community, of self (and sacrifice), love of the Other. And then the exploration of the pain that love, and life, can cause.

There are some very interesting things going on with the Other here, and the variety of emotions that react and reflect.

I will be revisiting this book when the second one comes out, which will complete the second half of the story, and I expect I'll have more to say. Suffice it to say now that I really enjoyed this book and am impatient for Skybright's story to carry forward.

Kells Next Read says

This is my first read from this author and I can safely say that I will definitely be reading the sequel to this

book plus her other works.

This story had a little of everything that I love to read in a novel and I couldn't put it down once I started it. I need to find out more about Stone (my badboy immortal crush), Skybright, Zhen Ni and Kai Sen. The characters were rich and full of depth and I found myself wanting to know more about the world and their own personal struggles.

Cindy Pon did a fantastic job of weaving a lot of life truths, questions and struggles in the pages of the book. It made me stop and think and question the decisions that we make and the consequences that arise due to those decisions.

I would definitely recommend this read to anyone looking for a Chinese, erry but very complaining type of read.

Mari says

Definitely a strong 3.5 stars.

I really enjoyed my reading experience during Serpentine. It was engaging, quick, it was centered around a female friendship and is for all intents and purposes a coming of age story. Tick, tick, tick, tick on the list of things I like to read.

I had the pleasure of hearing Pon speak at NerdCon and I just fell in love with the bright and personable way she comes across. However, it was how she described this book that made me want to read it. In Serpentine, she said she created a female character whose body changes and it makes her question everything. Pon said she wrote it for her growing daughter, though in her book, her MC is less going through puberty (I promise) and more turning into half a serpent. I will say that I really enjoyed that theme throughout the story. Everyone was telling Skybright who she was or who she was supposed to be, whether serpent or human. Her roles and lots in life were pre-determined and the more she asked the questions of who and what she was, the more voices joined the mix to provide answers she wasn't fully sold on. Zhen Ni's story underlines this in a super heartbreaking way. We don't learn a ton about the context of the world these two live in, though we know it is Chinese-folklore inspired, it has gods and monsters, and it seems to pretty old-school in terms of handmaidens and marrying off womenfolk. Zhen Ni falls in love with another girl and she gets a difficult lesson on duty and those pre-determined roles for women. Zhen Ni is a little spoiled and... squeaky?... for my tastes, but she is also loyal and full of fire and I felt for her a ton by the end of the book.

All that said, I think there is definitely some room for improvement. I love description heavy writing, but if you don't, you may run into a couple problems here. I mean, when I was reading it, I didn't think, "wow! These are a lot of descriptions." If I'm honest, there were a couple times when I jumped a paragraph or two to get to the action. As I was reading through reviews on Goodreads, I saw "description heavy" come up a couple of times and went, "ooooh." If that helps at all. Basically, description level: I didn't notice it per se, but a few times I skimmed to get to the action.

Also, as much as I loved the main themes of the story, they got to a little bit repetitive toward the end. In general, the story told had lots of repetition. We find Skybright waking up as a snake a few times, she runs into the forest a few times, she searches for Kai Sen a couple of times. What saves it all is that the story moves quickly and is relatively short so that repetition never got out of hand for me.

I really liked Skybright as a character. She's so mature and gathered and loyal. I wish we had seen a little more of her (in terms of getting to know her), but again, it was a relatively short book with a lot going on. And of course, Skybright is in flux when we meet her so we only get to know her as much as she's getting to know herself. As an aside, when I first started reading, I thought Skybright and Zhen Ni were a lot younger than they actually are. I think it might be some of the dialogue that made it seem that way. There were points I would've pegged them as young as 12 or 13. I wish I had been paying attention to if this seemed that way because 1- stilted dialogue or 2- sheltered characters or 3- me and some reading comprehension issues. Alas.

I finished this book last night and immediately bought the second book from my Kindle. Y'all know how terrible I am about series, so the fact that I even want to read the second book should convey that I'm invested in this story and these characters.

Solid, entertaining read made for a Saturday afternoon when you've got some hours to spare.

Chapter by Chapter says

Oh my gosh, where do I start with this review? Serpentine by Cindy Pon was a book that reminded me of reasons why I fell in love with reading to begin with!

Author Cindy Pon's writing completely and utterly drew me into a world filled with magic and Chinese mythology. Honestly, there wasn't anything that I didn't love about it. The characters all had personalities of their own that readers will love and hate, and the storyline is one that I just could not get enough of! And the action! Battles between monks and demons? Say whaaaaaat? The slice of a sword, the swipe of claws, the screams of pain and the sounds of death...ugh! This book was just...perfection!

Imagine being a girl who, on her sixteenth year, learns that she is not exactly who (or what) she thought she was! That the life that she came to accept was nothing compared to the destiny that she was born to become.

All her life, Skybright has always been the handmaid to Zhen Liu, the daughter of a very wealthy and prominent family. Where, through the years, the two become as close as sisters. But when the time comes when Zhen Liu must take a husband, secrets unfold, not only for Zhen Liu, but for Skybright herself.

Unaware of who her parents were, Skybright has only known the life of being a handmaiden. But suddenly her world is turned upside down when she awakens to find herself with a tale of a serpent with her own upper body. Where rather than walking around, she is slithering along the ground and is able to smell and feel her surroundings in a completely different way.

The way in which the author describes her transformations was done on point. I could totally picture Skybright transforming from human to serpentine right before my eyes. I could imagine the pain and fear that goes through Skybright's head. Her fear of being found out turned into my fear as well! Not only the fear of being found out by her household, but also by being found out by the man that she has feelings for.

The question of who to trust is constantly thrown in the picture which had me reading faster and faster to see which way the story would go. With Skybright finding out her lineage, to witnessing such a beautiful friendship, and watching Skybright's acceptance of her destiny, Serpentine by Cindy Pon is a book that should be on everyone's list of must reads. For some, the beginning may have been a slow start as the heart of the matter starts to unfold, but for me it was perfection! I was able to absorb myself slowly and more in-depth with the turn of each page.

This book is at the top of my MUST READ list. It's amazing! You definitely need to check it out because OMG! If this book could be turned into a movie as exactly how it played out in my mind, that would be topping on the cake. Fans of fantasy and mythology will devour Serpentine by Cindy Pon. Read this book. Now. Run. Slither away and get a copy ASAP!

Faye, la Patata says

*Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool?
Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!*

For some reason, I can't get this song out of my head. And I think I know the reason why:

Because I did not like this book... like at all.

We rarely get Chinese-inspired YA books published by American publishers - so taking that into consideration plus that pretty cool hand-drawn cover, I was seriously psyched to read this. I couldn't wait to get to know a rootable, sympathetic, bad-ass Chinese heroine and be a part of her journey in knowing who she really was and her role in the grander scheme of things; I was stoked to be immersed in a setting deeply rooted in Chinese culture - the food, the architecture, the atmosphere, the words, and the mythology surrounding mythical beings and urban legends; I was and best of all, I was thrilled to witness a romance so exciting between a handmaiden and a false monk, excited to be engrossed in lyrical writing that would give me the bestest ever reading experience.

Long story short: **I experienced none of these things.**

So, um, *baaah*.

The major reason why this book is not getting more than 2 stars from me? The writing. The writing was so unnecessarily wordy. Now, don't get me wrong - I've read humongous books before. I mean, Brandon Sanderson churned out two 1000-pages books in his Stormlight Archive and I gobbled all that up with a big smile on my face, asking for more. *Uprooted* was pretty wordy as well, but because the writing flowed so well, but because the writing was just downright beautiful, it's not hard to fly through it.

This is where *Serpentine* is different: **the writing is full of unnecessary details - of the surroundings, of what the characters are doing at every second in minute triviality.** Like, this book literally took pages just to describe Skybright's walking (or slithering?) into the forest as she tried to look for Kai Sen and/or Zhen Ni. Sometimes, it would keep repeating the same sentiments over and over. And you know what makes it worse? **THE WALLS OF TEXT.** On my Kindle, this had about 3500 locations, but the book felt so much longer because of the walls of text every time we're not in a conversation between two people. **Walls of text, and then unnecessary details, plus the "telling than showing" narrative? Good lord, exhaustion galore.** I wouldn't have minded the first one if the writing was amazing to consume ala Libba Bray or Helene Wecker, but it wasn't, it was just so tedious. Halfway into the book, I started skipping pages when it was all about the *~*~*~details~*~*~* and only came back reading when something vital happened.

I didn't miss a damn thing.

BUT! It doesn't end there. Sometimes, a boring narrative can be tolerable as long as there's a heroine you can root for, a heroine with an engaging personality. **Skybright was unfortunately as interested as watching paint dry.** She was the handmaid of Zhen Ni, the youngest daughter of the Yuan household. She couldn't marry, and could never leave her mistress' side, unless of course, she was relinquished of this position, but seeing as these two had grown up like sisters, that wasn't something that could have happened anytime soon. I get that because she was the handmaid, she couldn't be too strong on the personality side, but goodness gracious, she was so, so, so, so, so, so flat. **Was it the monotonous narrative? Was it because majority of the time, it was all about the details, that this heroine didn't shine? I'm not sure, but all I know is I was so detached from her.**

I couldn't even bring myself to care when the narrative was about her internal conflicts, which usually started with a question...

What would happen if she changed with her mistress beside her? Skybright's throat closed at the thought. She heard Zhen Ni's steady breathing, and slipped out of bed and into a courtyard dimly lit by starlight.

When she had shifted, it was always at nighttime - she only wished she knew what triggered it, so she could anticipate it. Could she control it somehow? Will it away when it happened? Skybright sat on the stone bench beneath a peach tree, digging her toes into the earth and enjoying its coolness.

Ugh, ugh, ugh. **The monotonous narrative just made me want to bang my head onto a wall. Am I the only one? AM I???**

This makes me real sad because despite the overwhelming details, it wasn't immersive enough. The details may have been in abundance, but they were about shallow things, and thus, the world-building wasn't really given that much of an emphasis, in my opinion. Like, the only stuff we got about the backstory of the Serpent Demon were from a fricking textbook, and that took like half a page, and some words in passing from this guy called Stone (heh). I couldn't even picture the Kingdom of Xia - like were the Yuans a close relative of the Emperor? What kind of business did the master of the household do? Can the Ghost Festival be described in better detail other other than it being that event where ghosts come out?! **I mean, come on! I want to get to know this culture more and the ones I got felt half-assed at most.**

Plus, I didn't ship the ship.

First meeting: you guys saw each other for only a few seconds, AND at a distance.

Second meeting: you guys meet each other in the woods, by accident, even. You talk a bit.

Third meeting: YOU FUCKING KISS?! WHAT THE FUCK?!

Kai Sen was an intriguing character IN PAPER. I mean, he's a false monk, for crying out loud! That screams panty-dropping already, but like Skybright, he was as flat as a cardboard. He was way too too-good-to-be-true, who didn't have any actual intriguing thing about him, who was drawn to Skybright and dropped the L-bomb despite their lack of romantic development (or at least a development that felt meaningful). This aspect felt so shallow, too, and I just couldn't bring myself to care about these two, even when Skybright was having her heart-clutching moments thinking of him or with him. And me? I was all...

Sigh. I don't think I'll be checking out Book 2 at this point. HOWEVER, take this opinion as one opinion too many. Majority of the reviews have been positive so far, so I am clearly in the minority. You may still like this book so go ahead and try. As for me? Game over.

The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says

It's Cindy Pon. It's an awesome cover. It's Asian-themed fantasy. What else do you need?

So much awesome in this book. Lead heroines of color (in fact nothing Eurocentric at all, which is refreshing). Strong female friendships, quests, magic, the RIGHT way to utilize romance in a YA fantasy, no heroine hijacking, and passes the Bechtel test.

Longer review coming soon. I promise.
