

Diva Queens: The Promised One

Rodd Symian

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In the quest novel Diva Queens: The Promised One, heroes and villains on another planet anticipate meeting each other in battle.

Twin sisters, separated during childhood, work together to overcome an old family foe in Rodd Symian's fantasy novel *Diva Queens: The Promised One*.

Rodd is on a mission to prevent war. He works to arrange a meeting between Queen Martha of Aga and her long-lost twin sister, Ornesta. To do that, he allows himself to be captured and imprisoned by Martha's guards, hoping to request a meeting with her.

But before Rodd is able to talk to the queen, the castle is attacked by shadow knights. The intruders are tasked with delivering Martha to their queen, Matilda. Martha and Rodd escape and begin pursuing Ornesta, but Matilda will not be thwarted. Along the way, secrets regarding Martha and Ornesta's family are revealed, including the real reason that Matilda wants to capture Martha.

While the story takes place on a planet that's similar to Earth, the book's world-building is hazy; it takes place at the margins of the story. The society has a steampunk, medieval sensibility, and the book mentions bright flora and sentient fauna. But the quest is the book's first concern; the landscape is made incidental to it. There are underdeveloped mentions of space travel, too: these tie into how Rodd began his mission.

The cast is large, and most of the characters are introduced in a clunky manner; few are rendered dimensional, and few change as a result of their extraordinary experiences. Every conversation takes place to confirm or reinforce its participants' expressed beliefs. Even when new information is revealed that could push the cast emotionally, the characters remain fixated on their goals.

While several interactions begin with characters ready to impart essential information, their conversations shift before such information is revealed. The more characters interact with each other, the more their speech patterns blend. Secondary characters enter the story without their backgrounds being clarified; in one case, two unknown individuals enter into an intimate scene in an awkward manner, and then they join the questing party.

The quest is the main source of propulsion in the story, which always points toward its final battle; it is alluded to even in the opening pages of the book. There are a few detours; space is consumed by a series of skirmishes and crossings on land and over water. When these issues are coupled with the repetition, homophones, and nontraditional capitalization in the prose, all of which are interruptive, interest wanes.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (November 2, 2021)

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