

Dukkha Reverb: A Sam Reeves Martial Arts Thriller**Loren W. Christensen**

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Martial artists study contrasts: deep calm gives way to heated battle in the blink of an eye. Loren W. Christensen, himself a black belt several times over, cleverly captures this balancing act in *Dukkha Reverb*, the second novel in his Sam Reeves Martial Arts Thriller series. He does this by sending Portland, Oregon, police officer—and talented martial artist—Sam Reeves to Vietnam, a country that is itself a study in contrasts.

Christensen sends Sam to Ho Chi Minh City, where he is comically terrified by the frenzied traffic on the streets but then entranced by the spectacular view from the top floor of a high-rise. He can't hold his beautiful girlfriend Mai's hand in a public café, but she can seduce him in a room with walls of glass. He's captivated by his father's serene living quarters but notices that in addition to meditative koi ponds, there are security cameras in every corner. He's come to Vietnam looking for peace but discovers he's being hunted by a nefarious Vietnamese mob boss with a grudge. For every yin in Sam's life, there is a yang.

Watching Sam duke it out with the world is a pleasure, due to Christensen's light touch with dialogue and a cast of eccentric characters whose antics provide comic relief between conflicts. The combat scenes, while expertly choreographed, are not just pretexts for action, either. Instead, they stem directly from Sam's personal passions: while he's fighting to stop a massive child sex-trafficking ring, for instance, he's also taking in a teenage runaway who asks him for help. When Sam steps up to fight, he means it.

SHEILA M. TRASK (Winter 2014)

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