

Emberhawk

Jamie Foley

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In Jamie Foley's *Emberhawk*, a young woman escapes into enemy territory, hoping to save her people; there, she faces the prices of pride and of faith in an unstable deity.

Driven by unceasing drought and her mother's untreatable illness, Kira goes into the forest that borders her tribal land and that demarcates a no man's land. She captures a feline capable of becoming invisible, but discovers a more dangerous threat: a scout from a rival tribe, Ryon. Kira and Ryon flee into the forest, where both are injured, left unable to reunite with their respective people.

Though it begins as a classic tale about two very different people who are forced to work together, the story transitions to encompass compelling adventures, romance, and magic. Kira and Ryon survive monster attacks; their affection for each other grows. A princess-turned-diplomat plays a lesser role; her actions lead to a drastic late-hour reveal.

The book balances its tender moments, as with Ryon's personal project to protect and care for orphans in his home city, with tense ones, like the sky-shattering final sequence in which a giant hawk and dragon clash over a burning city. Its magic system connects to an absent god and bickering elementals with aspirations of godhood, contrasting well with the human characters' politics.

There are unsettling elements within the novel, including violent deaths and subtle threats of sexual assault, but wholesomeness permeates it and overshadows these darker features. Kira and Ryon's refusal to act on their affections is comedic and heartwarming, especially when they take risks with the single hope of protecting one another.

Emberhawk is a heartfelt fantasy whose tinges of darkness don't threaten the endearing relationship at its core.

JOHN M. MURRAY (March / April 2020)

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