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Explaining Wardiyah: Book II of Kurgan Tales

David Uerkvitz
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Yes, even prehistoric humans had motives and desires we'd recognize today, and Uerkvitz tells this ancient tale well.

Fans of Jean Auel's *The Clan of the Cave Bear* will thrill to David Uerkvitz's inventive prehistory of clans. The second installment exploring the lives of these fourth-century South Asian tribes has a unique alien setting of the Stone Age, where Uerkvitz deftly delves into themes of family, nature versus nurture, love, and loyalty.

Explaining Wardiyah: Book II of Kurgan Tales picks up shortly after young Kurgan Vlo'Ur saves his father's life and slays the leader of an enemy tribe known as the Scythians. He journeys across the steppe again to reunite with his mother and, along the way, a green-eyed, redheaded girl named Wardiyah proclaims herself his slave. The longer the two remain with one another as they come of age, the more complicated their relationship becomes.

Much like a pleasant journey, the book takes time unfurling as the author makes the audience feel at home in Vlo's era, setting, and belief systems. Although the language of Vlo and other Kurgans is translated into English for the audience's sake, the author uses italicized words, whose meanings can be guessed from context clues, to give readers an authentic glimpse into the Kurgan language. The masterful use of third-person omniscient narration enables these primitives to resemble the people of today.

It is enjoyable to watch the relationship grow between Vlo and Wardiyah. The pair turns the cliché of the master falling for a slave on its head as Wardiyah doggedly pursues Vlo and demands servitude. But he never gets comfortable with the idea of having a slave, and Wardiyah submits with a smirk, sensing she plays the role of thrall but can come into her own if need be. And come into her own she does, smashing the stereotype of the one-dimensional exotic beauty. In fact, Wardiyah shrewdly uses her odd looks to political advantage. Her mischievous acumen finds its perfect counterpart in Vlo, whose bravery and ability to marshal others allows them to create an effective team.

In addition to the affection that builds between the pair, one also sees the complicated rapport Vlo has with his mother. Torn away from her at a young age because she practiced black magic, Vlo nonetheless loves and misses her presence in his life. This need compels him to seek her out, although he fears her powers. When he sees her again, these feelings war within, compounded by the jealousy he feels upon meeting his half brother, born of the same womb. Having conflicting emotions about a parent is a universal struggle, and Uerkvitz adroitly works the theme.

A handy preface detailing facts about Kurgans, a prologue describing the events of the previous book in the series, and well-integrated flashbacks help *Explaining Wardiyah* function as a stand-alone novel. One hopes for more Kurgan tales from this talented storyteller.

JILL ALLEN (January 23, 2014)

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