



Haruffa Tales

Kenneth E. Hautala

Theodore Trout, Illustrator

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This fantasy novel tells the surprisingly tender and often humorous coming-of-age story of a deeply conflicted and complex man.

Wildly exciting from the opening scenes onward, *Haruffa Tales*, an exotic and fresh fantasy adventure from Kenneth E. Hautala, is an action-packed story of one man's quest to fulfill his destiny.

Born sickly and weak but much loved, Haruffa is not expected to survive the first few weeks of his life. However, the prayers of his mother and father, brilliant healers, reach the ears of the mystical Aspects, who have foreseen the need for a champion, and a bargain is struck. Haruffa is gifted, fairy-godmother style, with tools to enhance his natural abilities, unaware that his future now includes battling the necromancer Bruab, who is successfully raising an undead army in search of a dangerously lethal weapon that could destroy everything in its path.

Haruffa hails from the coastal city of Madra, in a vividly drawn realm with a distinct Southeast Asian flavor that sets it apart from typical fantasy fare. Some creatures are easily relatable, like the ganomay people, similar to dwarfs, with an affinity for creating enhanced weapons and gadgets with precious bloodmetal ore. Others, like the jinn and rhakshasa, have definite roots in Arabian and Indian mythology. Mead-soaked fig delicacies, jungle and desert landscapes, names, faces, and customs all hint at Hautala's successful blending of well-known Western fantasy elements with Eastern culture as well as with completely original components.

Fast-paced and full of land and sea attacks, mythical friends and foes, magical weapons and warfare, murder, sorcery, spells, and more, *Haruffa Tales* also manages to tell the surprisingly tender and often humorous coming-of-age story of a deeply conflicted and complex man. As one Aspect remarks, "You were born a healer only to become a killer. You kill without remorse but won't murder. In our own fear we created you as a weapon, but you've become so much more." A trained assassin, armed with enchanted weapons and extensive knowledge of poisons, Haruffa embarks on a journey of revenge that would make even the Punisher proud. Caught up in the relentless quest to stop Bruab, Haruffa is a truly a "new champion."

Haruffa Tales is illustrated by Theodore Trout, whose black-and-white drawings range from half- to full- to double-page spreads of delightfully graphic action sequences. The addition of the comic-style sketches enhances the text and adds an element of gory fun to the numerous violent encounters. A brief glossary of names and terms notes all key players and elements. There are a few grammatical errors, mostly in the form of dropped articles and occasional inconsistencies in spelling or style (e.g., magical/magickal, Specter/Specter), but ultimately, the fast-moving action makes them easy to overlook.

With the next installment of *Haruffa Tales*, *Specter Past*, already on its way, now is the time to enter Haruffa's world. For fantasy devotees or graphic-novel lovers looking for something a little different, Hautala and Trout's collaboration is not to be missed.

PALLAS GATES MCCORQUODALE (December 3, 2014)

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