

Kirin Rise: The Cast of Shadows

Ed Cruz

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This manga-style novel features distinct, interesting characters and, of course, lots of mixed martial arts.

In the future envisioned in Ed Cruz's *Kirin Rise: The Cast of Shadows*, an economic collapse has eliminated the middle class, and forced a divide between the higher and lower economic groups. Out of society's pain and the government's own greed rises the influence of mixed martial arts fighting. An organization known as the United Federation of Mixed Fighting capitalizes on this popularity, holding tournaments that capture worldwide attention and ultimately become modern-day gladiator contests.

The main character, a teenage girl named Kirin Rise, has mastered the art of Wing Chun Gung Fu, taught to her by a wise but unorthodox teacher. The characters are memorable and distinct. Kirin's relentless training in her art makes her an interesting character. Her teacher's unconventional methods create an engaging dynamic between the two of them. The book weaves elements of Asian culture throughout, seamlessly mixing them in with the contemporary American setting. The martial arts in the book also seem well researched.

The fact that the fighters have to compete for the attention of sponsors, and even hold competitions that regularly result in opponents dying (or, at the very least, being severely injured), is reminiscent of *The Hunger Games*. The book is clear that the fighting tournaments are thinly veiled attempts at making money for already-rich bigwigs. This aspect of the book lacks subtlety, with the main villains in the beginning actually saying they "love the look of hope in the eyes of the competitors" right before those hopes are crushed. The story could benefit from more complex villains, only because their actions in the story seem a bit predictable.

The book starts out with manga-style sketches of the characters, coupled with aspects of their personalities such as likes and dislikes. This, as well as the cover, gives the book a sort of anime feel, as do the illustrations throughout. The information presented in these profiles, while interesting, doesn't seem to have any relevance to the plot. It does, however, give readers a good sense of the characters.

Different parts of the story are presented almost as vignettes from different characters' points of view. Mostly, the story stays with Kirin, at times drifting to different narrators or to a third-person narrator. The text is divided into sections, with numbered short stories that sometimes list days or even minutes before and after an important event. This way of dividing the book seems overly complicated. The book's organization would have been better served by conventional chapters.

Young adults and people interested in martial arts as well as anime will get the most out of this book.

SONYA LOVY (October 28, 2014)

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