



Clarion Review

Science Fiction

Life Shaker

Adam Altman

iUniverse

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Two Stars (out of Five)

Adam Altman's fantasy novel concerns a quest for an amulet of ambivalent power. LifeShaker creates positive change for its holder but always at great cost to someone the possessor loves. In *Lifeshaker* Altman explores the personalities and motives of those who seek out the dangerous amulet.

Altman who grew up in Woodstock New York brings previous writing experience to *LifeShaker*. He has previously written a children's mystery/fantasy novel *Liliana's Fan* and a collection of poems *Enlightened Darkness*. *LifeShaker* the first book in a series reflects his persistent interest in magical worlds.

Set in the country of Tasmear *LifeShaker* features a semi-medieval world populated by humans dwarves elves sprites and other familiar beings of fantasy. The novel focuses on a representative spectrum of characters: Petinor a young human tradesman; Vande a "gypsy dwarf"; Mular a wise and enigmatic elf; the gentle human woman Lacerna; soldiers Colter and Shanchio etc. The group slowly gathers and journeys about Tasmear looking for the LifeShaker. They wish to harness its destructive forces for good in order to solve their land's political problems. But the band must also face the amulet's perils vividly described by one member of their group:

I have read a little about LifeShaker. Why would any of you want to find it? For power? For greed? For good fortune to the one that bears it? Then what would happen if we found it? Would we fight for it? Will the need for it overtake one or more of us? It is an accursed jewel.

Despite the unusual twist that *LifeShaker* provides on the quest formula and its

potentially interesting cast of characters the novel suffers from two problems. First it is poorly organized. The story begins with Petinor blundering into the magically confusing Twin Town and experiencing a vision of Tasmear's past rulers. Although these events do introduce the readers to Mular Vande and Lacerna it is not clear how they are relevant to the search for LifeShaker. In fact the characters do not really get moving until around page 48 which would not be a problem if the story was clearly building toward their journey. However Altman's meandering plotlines do not build narrative drive. A clearer definition of both cast and conflict would help Altman's future works.

Second *LifeShaker* contains many editing errors. Problems with spelling punctuation and grammar permeate the text. Words are frequently misused. For example Altman writes "The last person to bereave her grievances to him had left." "To bereave" does not mean "to present in front of an audience;" it means "to deprive of through death." Such mistakes make readers much less attentive and more puzzled. Rather than trying to wield flowery language Altman achieves more punch with a simpler style as demonstrated by Alviar's enumeration of LifeShaker's dangers.

Targeted at a general fantasy-loving audience *LifeShaker* is appropriate for teens and adults but because of its stylistic and structural weaknesses it is not recommended.