



Noku's Invaders: The Rasken

Suzanne Maxwell

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Author Suzanne Maxwell begins her Noku's Invaders series with *The Rasken*, the fast-paced story of how a young girl, Margole, finds an ancient relic with unknown powers during a dangerous and tumultuous time on the planet of Hera.

Margole is coming of age in the village of Mellansh. She is the niece of Hilde, the village chieftess. Hilde's unsuccessful attempts to produce an heir have weakened her physically and mentally, and her leadership is now in question. As she continues to become more unstable, her desire to maintain her power becomes increasingly selfish and desperate. Margole must find the courage to help her village and stop Hilde from doing irrevocable damage.

Meanwhile, Mellansh is being threatened by the upsurge of the river Noku; Margole's beloved sister has gone missing; and Margole has just found a powerful relic, a rasken, which gives her a power she cannot yet use correctly.

The author's own experience among other cultures is perhaps what makes her able to create believable characters within a realistic setting. Maxwell develops the religion, the rituals, and the societal expectations that provide a backdrop of reality for the more fantastic elements of the book. Her descriptions of less significant elements, like the dangerous fauna of Hera and the beautiful cloth from which the village women make their garments, further develop the culture the author has created.

The author draws us into Margole's life through her struggles within her confining and gender-divided society. This makes the pain she feels when her brother joins a hunting tribe all the more palpable, because the reader understands that Margole may never see him again.

At times, though, Margole's character seems underdeveloped. This may in part be due to the fast pace of the book. Maxwell also does not share enough about Margole's relationship with some characters even when they are crucial to the plot. One particular relationship is well developed—that of Margole's relationship with her Aunt Hilde. The author does a good job of portraying their ambivalence toward one another through their feelings of betrayal, anger, awe, and fear.

Ideal for teens of all ages, *The Rasken* explores gender roles and personal identity throughout a plot that moves along quickly. The author keeps the readers fully engaged in the story as they wonder what challenge Margole will face next in order to help save her village.

While a few inconsistencies exist in *Noku's Invaders: The Rasken*, overall Maxwell has delivered an enjoyable story, with a rich setting that sets the stage for further books in the series.

ALICIA SONDHI (April 24, 2012)

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