

The BlackHawk Meets the Tiger

Tiger BlackHawk

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Inventive and original comedic touches make this riff on fantasy standards a satisfying read.

Tiger BlackHawk's morality-fueled fairy tale *The BlackHawk Meets the Tiger* is an entertaining and humorous fantasy mash-up in which a deadly and much-feared assassin finds redemption and personal acceptance as the ruler of a wealthy kingdom.

The murderous assassin BlackHawk and his drow elf companion, Shadow, arrive in the city of Napol to collect a reward for rescuing its kidnapped princess and a group of merchants. When the merchants fail to pay, BlackHawk murders the men and robs and terrorizes Napol's greediest overlords.

At the same time, a white-robed, shape-shifting assassin named Tiger arrives to conduct legitimate businesses in Napol, using the looted coffers of a local pirate as capital. Tiger becomes wealthy through his enterprises and builds a city called Serious on Napol's outskirts, which grows in size as a result of profit sharing. However, Tiger's uneasy similarities to the BlackHawk force him to confront a secret past or risk all-out war.

The BlackHawk Meets the Tiger riffs off of fantasy standards, playing with and mixing subgenres to varying degrees of success. The yin and yang of the main protagonists, Tiger and BlackHawk, and their respective spheres of influence serve as effective moral and social commentary. Serious exists as a model city of righteousness and orderliness, while Napol is a seedy center of crime, corruption, and political oppression.

Lying on various points on the moral spectrum are dwarfs, giants, shape-shifting weretigers, and humans. A complex subplot involving pirates adds comic relief, particularly through their carefree dialogue, yet it also plays a pivotal role as the staging area where yin and yang meet and engage in a moral and territorial battle of wills.

Scenes involving vampires and the underworld work less effectively, however, serving as a triple exclamation point to an already heavily action-packed thriller. This mishmash of characters provides the story with some of its craziest—and most enjoyable—moments.

Tiger and BlackHawk's story unfolds from the point of view of a bard named Silver, who mostly uses a third-person perspective in relating the history between these two men. However, Silver also loops back into first person to describe how the actions of these two affect his own life. The language alternates between familiar slang and formal, old-fashioned high fantasy dialogue.

Where terms are not obvious, Tiger BlackHawk employs additional exposition to define words, much like a textbook introducing a foreign concept. This has the effect of making certain sections of the narrative unnecessarily longer, particularly in the pirate battle scenes, where entire paragraphs are dedicated to defining specific terms, interrupting the existing action sequence. There are also dichotomous points of view, and simple explanations and dialogue geared toward young adults alternate with more expletive-laden dialogue and violence more suitable for mature audiences.

The characters and situations may be familiar incarnations of fantasy standards, and the dialogue a study in contrasts, but Tiger BlackHawk's deftly woven comedic touches show inventiveness and originality enough to deliver a satisfying read.

NANCY POWELL (January 30, 2017)

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