

Forest of a Thousand Lanterns (Rise of the Empress #1)

Julie C. Dao

Reviewed by: Anika 17

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

www.bethestaryouare.org

For a long time, the cards have prophesied a majestic destiny of greatness and power for Xinfeng. Her Guma says Xinfeng is fated to become the next Empress of Feng Lu, should she take that path. Raised under her Guma's magic and cruelty, Xinfeng wholeheartedly accepts her fate and hungers to leave her poor village behind. But Xinfeng's lust for power will come at a great cost. She must give up her only love, Wei, and take advantage of the dark blood magic within her. The magic strengthens Xinfeng each time she consumes a heart of a living being. Xinfeng uses this dark magic to enhance her beauty, sending her further into darkness as she hunts down her enemies. And all the while, an ancient corrupt power looms over her in her pursuit for greatness.

Xinfeng's story is incredibly intriguing and intense. A Forest of a Thousand Lanterns is an East Asian fantasy that reimagines the story of the Evil Queen in Snow White. I found it to be very unique with all the deeply complex and developed characters. Xinfeng herself is an ambitious and arrogant anti-heroine. In fact, readers may find Xinfeng to be both relatable and despicable at the same time, knowing her rather questionable choices, but that makes the story all the more compelling. Xinfeng explores the boundaries of her dark magic and the inner workings of the treacherous court at the palace. She ruthlessly exploits both these things to claw her way up the ranks to get closer to the Emperor. This dark fantasy is impossible to put down and the ending leaves readers wanting more. Readers will definitely want to give this book a read!

That being said, readers will have to watch out for the fantasy violence as some may find Xinfeng's blood magic to be particularly gruesome along with other instances of gore. There are some mentions of intimacy and sex but aren't too emphasized. Drugs, alcohol, and bad language also make a few appearances in the story. Nevertheless, all these elements do not detract from the overall story but help better the story itself. For these reasons, I would highly suggest this book to anyone 13 years or older. A Forest of a Thousand Lanterns would make an amazing gift for fans of fantasy

Recommended Titles:

Kingdom of the Blazing Phoenix by Julie C. Dao (Rise of the Empress #2)

Song of the Crimson Flower by Julie C. Dao (Rise of the Empress #2.5)

The Wrath and the Dawn by Renee Ahdieh

Red Queen by Victoria Aveyard

Stealing Snow by Danielle Paige