

Boxers

Gene Luen Yang

Reviewed by: Anika 17

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

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Little Bao makes sure to always pay his respects to Tu Di Gong, the local earth god, and to watch the captivating operas during fairs at his village. The Gods of the Opera continue to stay with him as he goes about his everyday life doing chores with his family. But all of that is turned upside down when missionaries and soldiers start constantly tormenting his poor village. Their supplies are stolen, and Tu Di Gong is smashed into pieces by an angry Christian priest. Sick of all the suffering, Little Bao picks up Kung Fu from Red Lantern Chu, a traveler who aided his village. Little Bao learns to defend himself and is desperate to prove his worth. After hearing more bad news, Little Bao's opportunity arrives with the gods of his faith. By teaching his fellow villagers Kung Fu to harness the gods' power, Little Bao recruits them into a rebellion to rid the earth of the Christian "foreign devils" ruining China. Along the way, he will make many friends and enemies, but soon enough he will find that the cost of his cause may have been greater than he once thought.

Boxers is an incredibly captivating graphic novel, knowing that I read all of it in one sitting. I immensely enjoyed Gene Luen Yang's master storytelling throughout this book as it never failed to catch my attention. He casted many of the themes in a multi-faceted light that made you acknowledge the convoluted reality of Little Bao's revolution. I give huge props to Gene Luen Yang for staying true to the historical context of the Boxer Rebellion and managing to craft an engaging graphic novel at the same time. I feel that this story can be a good starting point for getting readers to learn more about the more unknown events of history. I for one, know that I will be researching the Boxer Rebellion as a result of reading this work. Through his expressive art, Gene Luen Yang does an amazing job of blending historical and fictional elements. He uses bold colors to make the gods stand out along with very animated facial expressions to add to the action-packed storyline. All of which make for a great reading experience! I would recommend giving this a read!

As much as I enjoyed this graphic novel, there are a few drawbacks readers may want to keep in mind. The Boxer Rebellion was a violent and gruesome event that Gene Luen Yang made sure to reflect in his historical graphic novel. There is much blood, death, and violence, but is toned down in the book with simple splashes of red. Some of the characters I feel did not achieve much development because of that level of slaughter. In terms of romance, there is a character that has a crush on another, but it does not get very far to be worrisome. A few of the characters also mention superstitions regarding women and their bodies. For these reasons, I would recommend this novel for readers 12 years and up. Boxers would make a great gift for fans of graphic novels and history.

Recommended Titles:

Saints by Gene Luen Yang (Boxers & Saints #2)

Little Fires Everywhere by Celeste Ng

Revolution is Not a Dinner Party by Ying Chang Compestine

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck