

Crier's War

Nina Varela

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Nina Varela's *Crier's War* blends science fiction and fantasy to create a world where Automae, once the servants of humanity, have become Rabu's ruling race. The Automae themselves are divided between the Traditionalists, who profit off of human slaves yet follow human cultures, and the Anti-Reliance followers, who want to abandon human tradition and forge their own customs. The story follows Ayla, a human servant with a tragic past, and Crier, the Automae princess of the Sovereign. Ayla dreams of avenging her dead family by murdering Lady Crier, however her plans are foiled by an unexpected promotion from palace gardener to the princess' handmaiden. Both human servant and Automae princess must navigate political conspiracies, while addressing their growing feelings for one another in a hostile and deceitful society.

I really enjoyed Crier's maturation as she uncovered the truth behind the Automae and the humans who created them. I wish she was able to use this knowledge more, but she was unfortunately prohibited from doing so by the manipulations of other Automae royalty. The high-stakes politics made for a tense read, but the incorporation of romance helped abate that sense of looming danger. My favorite part of the book, though, was how beautifully the history and the world of Zulla was written. I loved the timeline Varela introduced in the beginning of the novel, and it was so interesting to read about those events through the lenses of the characters themselves.

I would recommend this novel to high-school students or young adults. This story is a great option for lovers of history and fantasy looking for a sci-fi twist. This book is also amazing for the lesbian representation alone, something difficult to find in fantasy or science fiction. Some of the romantic and violent themes would be inappropriate for readers younger than high-school age, but I believe older readers will appreciate the world-building and romance Varela has created with *Crier's War*.

Recommended Titles:

Girls of Paper and Fire by Natasha Ngan

The Dark Tide by Alicia Jasinska

Queen of Coin and Whispers by Helen Corcoran