



Dragon Horse

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Editorial Choice:

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This is a quite extraordinary debut novel; it may well come to be considered one of the most remarkable books of 2008. At the outset, readers should be undaunted by a couple of pages worthy of a Russian novel, listing characters ranging from 'The Wise Lord, supreme deity, creator of Heaven and Earth and all things in them' to 'Vartkhis Boghos, rich Armenian merchant and bitter rival of Vaishravana's' by way of named Horses, Dragons and the wandering nomads of the north. This epic fantasy strides the length of The Silk Road, traversing steppes, deserts, mountains and forests. The stakes are high, for the struggle 'Miltonic in scale' is between The Wise Lord, and his fallen favourite, The Shadow-without-a-name and his dark minions. As is the way of such conflicts in fiction, it is played out by mortals, tiny players on this vast geographical stage. We begin in 818 AD, in the trading city of Maracanda (Samarkand to you and me), in the School for Special Envoys. Among the students here are the brothers Rokshan and An Lushan and their friend Lianxang, Spellweaver Elect of the mysterious Darhad people of the Northern Forests. Ahead of these three lie dangerous journeys and desperate battles, treacherous enemies and loyal friends, among them the Wild Horsemen, guardians of horses whose spirits are descended from the Dragons themselves. Rokshan's 'mindjoining' with these mighty creatures 'especially with the lord of the dragon horses, Stargazer the grey stallion' are among the most powerful dynamics of the book. The struggle in which the young students play decisive roles is not easily resolved; sacrifices must be made and definitions of the worth of human life itself revised.

A brief notice can only hint at the huge ambition of this tale. Such ambition is, as readers of fantasies know too well, perilously vulnerable to the implausible or the downright risible. There may be some small inconsistencies here 'but for me these were swept aside by the fierce current of the narrative. The adventure is always strongly visual, perhaps potentially filmic; human and horse, for example, are fused together through visions of swirling colour rather than dialogue. Riding the many powerful narrative lines is a fine accomplishment by Mr Ward 'and it will be a challenging, but exciting achievement for his readers.

Running Order:

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