



Sacred Scars

Books Reviewed:

[Sacred Scars](#) [1]

Issue:

[181](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Ruth Taylor](#) [3]

[New to the Choice](#)

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Sacred Scars is the second part of a trilogy entitled 'A Resurrection of Magic', the first of which, **Skin Hunger**, appeared in 2007. This second novel plunges us immediately into the Limori Academy, a truly horrific parody of an English public school located in a 'wormhole maze' of subterranean stone passages and chambers. There, young people are drafted to help preserve the magic contained in old songs which they must learn and recite in class on pain of punishment, despite the incomprehensible language used. The Academy is run by wizards and presided over by the evil Somiss, an arrogant and sadistic nobleman who wishes to revive the magic for his own selfish purposes.

Duey presents two parallel stories based in the Academy but set generations apart, and recounted in alternating chapters. The earlier story, written in the third person, concerns Sadima, a peasant girl whose ability to communicate with animals has apparently led to her entrapment in the Academy. The later story is a first-person narrative by 14-year-old Hahp, an unwanted second son deposited in the Academy by his merchant father. Hahp's story is mostly one of the daily grind in an oppressive institution, closer to Ivan Denisovich than Tom Brown, with mutual suspicion, secret communications and, eventually, covert resistance. Sadima's story starts in this milieu but changes momentum after she escapes from the Academy, ending up in a nightmare version of a mediaeval seaport 'stinking of rotting fruit and dead fish and sailors' piss'. There, Sadima discovers that she doesn't age and, after 'living nearly four lifetimes', could be approaching the time-period represented in Hahp's story.

The book portrays a dark, grim world which is developed fully and convincingly. There is a stark reality to many of the descriptions, including the frequent use of words that are often asterisked out in periodicals. The split structure provides scope for a range of styles and issues and the development of parallels and contrasts. Hahp's story is essentially masculine, with persistent violence interspersed with questions of loyalty and trustworthiness, in a situation where nothing is quite what it seems. Sadima's story is innately feminine, describing her love for various people and sad acceptance of apparently eternal life in some extremely moving passages. However, the fact that the two story lines constantly interrupt each other can be frustrating for the reader. Overall, despite the persistent harshness of its contents, **Sacred Scars** presents a positive view of the human spirit in adversity, and the trilogy seems to be moving towards reasserting a sense of fairness and rural tranquillity. Undoubtedly, the book is most suitable for older teenagers with strong constitutions.

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