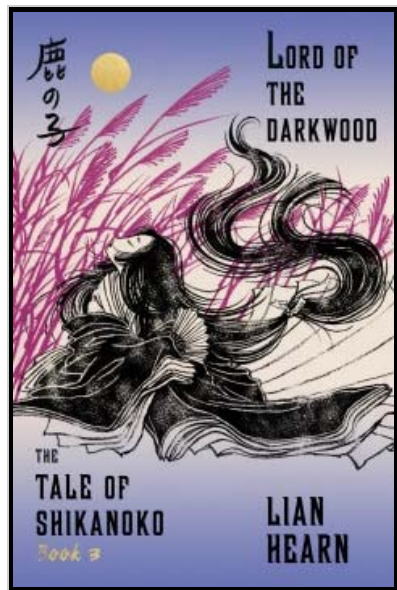


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Lord of the Darkwood

Book 3 in the Tale of Shikanoko
by Lian Hearn

Price: \$13.00(Paperback)
Published: August 09, 2016

★★★★★
Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher:

Shikanoko, at what should be a warrior's hour of greatest triumph, turns his back on those around him, in mourning for a secret love . . .

The Spider Tribe, spurned by their guardian, explore the extent of their powers and ruthless ambitions . . .

Hina, who alone knows the whereabouts of the true emperor, has to forge a new identity of her own. No one must ever know that she is Kiyoyori's daughter . . .

As the traditional powers navigate weakness and disarray, old spirits and new figures enter the epic battle for the Lotus Throne . . .

In *Lord of the Darkwood*, the major players of *The Tale of Shikanoko* are forced to deal with the consequences—expected and unexpected alike—of their past reckless actions. Each of them strives to achieve their destiny, but so far the paths they have followed seem to have done nothing but...

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About The Author

Lian Hearn

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What We Say

NOTE: This is a review of all four books in the series, with minimal spoilers. The best-selling author of the "Tales Of The Otori" adventures has another winner in "The Tale Of Shikanoko." Call it a Japanese "Game Of Thrones" and you'll get a good idea of the fun on tap here. While George R.R. Martin's cycle draws upon the epic fantasy of Tolkein, writer Lian Hearn harkens back to the classical models of Japanese works like "Revenge Of The Soga Brothers" and "The Tale of The Heike." Martin is looser, rawer and more sprawling. Hearn is more formal and rooted in the ethos of honor familiar to fans of movies by Akira Kurosawa and the like. And here's the really good news for "GoT" fans: Hearn has already written a complete 1000+ page epic, it's been split into four parts and they come out one after another, with the finale Volume 4 out in September. So, no waiting. Believe me, once you start you'll be glad you won't have to wait long to reach the end. In the first two books -- "Emperor Of The Eight Islands" and "Autumn Princess, Dragon Child" -- our story begins with a lord who (Lear-like) creates turmoil by splitting apart his family and demanding the eldest son take the wife of the second-born son, sending the latter off to a rival clan. He's determined the family will survive a coming civil war one way or another so each son is thus paired with a rival clan. Needless to say, this proves disastrous. The vivid characters come tumbling out, especially our hero Shikanoko, who tumbles from one home to another, first targeted by a jealous uncle, then coming under the sway of a mountain sorcerer, later learning the wily ways of a thief and finally becoming the servant of yet another master. Taking center stage at one point or another are royalty, commoners, men of magic and women of cunning, monkeys, demons, and the young but wise true Emperor, who must go into hiding when a usurper takes the throne. It's tremendous fun, with Hearn taking the point of view of a particular character for each chapter. To her credit, the people who seem like villains (and sometimes truly are), become complex, full-bodied people we have empathy for even when they do terrible things. You know you're in good hands when a chapter begins with a certain character (such as the resourceful young girl Hina or the perennially frustrated second son Masachika) and think, "Oh good!" because you were wondering about them. And when the next chapter picks up the tale of someone else, you're eager to hear about them. There's magic here, from an enchanted mask made from a stag to imp demons who love to fulfill the unspoken dark desires of our hero. (He really should have killed them at birth as the old sorcerer warned, I fear.) This story has the engrossing feel of a Japanese legend, right down to the tropes -- the rape of a woman by someone she loves, magical reveals that cheat on climaxes and the like. I loved the movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and still wish for a decent English translation of the novels it was based on. Indeed, even most of the classic tales Hearn references in this book are available only in dry academic versions, if at all. (Just as we await a truly thrilling English language translation of the Chinese Monkey King stories. One exception for Japan is the 2012 translation of "The Tale Of The Heike" by Royall Tyler.) With meticulous attention to detail for the period, along with a bone-deep appreciation of Japanese culture, Hearn's homage to those masterpieces is as close as we're going to get for the moment and tremendously entertaining in its own right. True it doesn't deepen the complexity of the characters the way, say, "Crouching Tiger" added a moral, modern complexity to the grand entertainment it delivered. But "The Tale Of Shikanoko" has romance, intrigue, fantasy, passion, betrayal, sacrifice and the old-fashioned pleasure of truly having no idea what will happen next. Fans of fantasy and mythology shouldn't hesitate...unless they want to wait till September so they can gobble it up all at once. -- Michael Giltz

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