

A Light from Below

Chadham Thomas

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A Light from Below is an action-packed high fantasy novel that deals with the spectre of a coming war.

In Chadham Thomas's fantasy novel *A Light from Below*, war is coming to a peaceful nation, but the one person who knows about it is the one person whom no one believes.

Helyan has had terrifying visions for ten years, since the night of a devastating fire that claimed his mother's life. In these visions: creatures with green skin and glowing eyes are in training for war. One night, the visions are more specific than ever, showing the creatures attacking, and houses falling, in a neighboring city. But when Helyan tries to warn his father, Avuran, who believes that Helyan's visions are signs of trauma, he is rebuffed.

Helyan takes it upon himself to carry the warning to others. Anxious over his now missing son, Avuran calls on the Stormane, a traveling band of mercenaries with whom he used to work, to help locate Helyan. Alvudd, the youngest member of the Stormane, thinks he is dreaming when he finds himself in front of an altar holding an antler crown, but the sharp pain he feels when touches the crown follows him to the waking world, sending him into an unsettling spiral of malcontent. Both Helyan's visions and Alvudd's dreams are real, and a battle for control of the world has begun.

Though the book includes some intriguing world building, questions remain. The explanation for how the strange creatures, the Judara, are able to move through dimensions collapses under examination, while the book's setting—an island nation whose culture is reminiscent of the Middle Ages—relies on the establishment of a particular atmosphere that the novel struggles to maintain. The high stakes nature of the story should propel the action, but every time the story begins to gain steam, a scene or a snippet of dialogue derails its momentum.

In the end, the story is carried by its most interesting and villainous character, the Lord of Corruption, a demon from the underworld. His is one of two distinctive voices in the book; the other belongs to Helyan, who is nonetheless underdeveloped. Similarly, though Alvudd is driven by resentment, its source is not identified beyond hints that are few and far between. Most of the time, he seems at ease with his place within the Stormane; at other times, he seems desperate to prove himself.

In the end, the book turns on its many skirmishes in the streets of Visfirth and Mulden, where the fight scenes are cinematic. Glimpses of the underworld realm of the Lord of Corruption and his boss, an even larger though less corporeal demon-god, result in a sinister angle that keeps the novel interesting. The Judara are almost unimaginable—both terrifying and distinct.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (February 16, 2021)

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