

The Chosen One: A Soldier of Light Novel: Book One

Ashley LeBlanc

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A knowledgeable heroine trains a prophesied hero to face down an unrelenting curse in the thrilling fantasy novel The Chosen One.

A heroic warrior spreads a message of loving-kindness in Ashley LeBlanc's fantasy novel *The Chosen One*, in which darkness is unleashed by a demonic sword.

Nadiri, a bumbling king forced to retreat after yet another failed attempt to subjugate a neighboring land, discovers a black sword that absorbs all light and releases a harrowing screech when it's unsheathed. The sword grants him the unrivaled power to trap the souls it defeats and allows him to embark on a decades-long quest for conquest. Meanwhile, Prince Jaya, prophesied to be one of the seven kingdoms' most beloved rulers, is secreted away, and Ari trains to be a Path Walker, helping those born with gifts to fulfill their destinies. The discovery of the black sword and Jaya's birth force Ari and others like her into action: Jaya has limited time to master his abilities if he is to defeat Nadiri and prevent the annihilation of life on Earth.

While much focus is devoted to Jaya, Ari—trained for centuries in a meditative form of magic—commands more attention than the ostensible hero. Her characterization is somewhat dichotomous, but in fascinating ways: she can heal others by directing energy through stored trauma, ushers new magic users through their powers, and is a trusted compatriot to several rulers. Further, she plays a large role not only in training Jaya but in other major events, and she's feared as a warrior. And in her narrative capacities, she explains how her world works with clarity. Further, there are tantalizing hints of a realm beyond Earth, where the magic users existed first before deciding to cross the veil and become human.

The monumental threat posed by Nadiri results in continual tension. This is juxtaposed with Ari's explorations of the unusual force that controls and connects all life, reliant on self-validation and community engagement to do so. But this more metaphysical work leads to some lulls in the tale, with the magic system explained in an almost didactic manner: Ari names the discrete set of steps needed to slow one's breathing, confront thoughts, and self-correct negativity. This process also powers Ari's fighting style, though: in exciting scenes, she thinks and processes information at near-instant speed, strikes with amazing accuracy, and propels intense balls of light that obliterate her enemies. And this first series title ends with a hopeful cliffhanger, ensuring investment in Ari and Jaya's continuing tale.

A compelling fantasy novel, *The Chosen One* blends elements of meditation and magic into a story about the powers of love and community.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 25, 2024)

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