



## The Sword of Kaigen

**Miracle Wang**

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*Complex societies and an unique magic system make The Sword of Kaigen an engaging work of high fantasy.*

M. L. Wang's fantastical story *The Sword of Kaigen* is compelling and rife with magic and heartbreak.

The Matsuda clan have earned a reputation as fierce warrior mages called the Sword of Kaigen, the first and last line of defense for the Kaigenese Empire. Mamoru, the Matsuda's primary heir, struggles with learning his family's secret and prized ability to channel ice into weapons. A student from abroad opens his eyes to the true nature of the Empire just as a rival country strikes. Meanwhile, Mamoru's mother Misaki eschews her violent past in hopes of protecting her family but finds herself drawn into fighting. Both mother and son attempt to stand strong as their pasts and futures collide, resulting in the growing realization that they may be fighting on the wrong side.

The Kaigenese Empire is an intriguing country on the earthlike planet of Duna. It's almost medieval in many respects; it draws heavy inspiration from feudal Japan, but there are also allusions to advanced technologies like smartphones. Kaigenese people honor their pasts through rigorous study and dedication to time-honored practices like prized metallurgy, and society is patriarchal. This leads to fascinating insights, especially in relation to Misaki.

Misaki is an expat from one of the more advanced countries on Duna—a society where women and men are equal and magic is regarded as mundane. She's earned a fearsome reputation as a blood mage and rogue. In Kaigen, she slips into the role of housewife and mother and becomes subservient despite being more intelligent and powerful than the male warriors and leaders.

A complex social dynamic and hierarchy feed off of each other, helping to round out other characters as the narrative unfolds. Interactions between the community of Kaigen and the rest of Duna are realistic, leading to some gut-wrenching twists in the final chapters.

The writing is expository at times; at other times, it shows more flair. The balance between the two modes of writing keeps the story on track. Characters speak realistically and conversations are engaging. The characters' imagined languages sometimes cause confusion, though, even with the included glossary.

There are many interesting elements at play in the story, especially around social dynamics. There's a twist regarding the Empire's policies and strife with the Matsuda clan that's compelling. Still, the book moves slowly, especially in its early portions, and it feels unresolved by the end. The book is a series adventure and can stand alone, but it reads like a preface to the events of other books in the series.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (December 12, 2018)

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