



Forest of a Thousand Lanterns

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An East Asian fantasy reimagining of The Evil Queen legend about one peasant girl's quest to become Empress--and the darkness she must unleash to achieve her destiny.

Eighteen-year-old Xifeng is beautiful. The stars say she is destined for greatness, that she is meant to be Empress of Feng Lu. But only if she embraces the darkness within her. Growing up as a peasant in a forgotten village on the edge of the map, Xifeng longs to fulfill the destiny promised to her by her cruel aunt, the witch Guma, who has read the cards and seen glimmers of Xifeng's majestic future. But is the price of the throne too high?

Because in order to achieve greatness, she must spurn the young man who loves her and exploit the callous magic that runs through her veins--sorcery fueled by eating the hearts of the recently killed. For the god who has sent her on this journey will not be satisfied until his power is absolute.

Forest of a Thousand Lanterns Details

Date : Published October 10th 2017 by Philomel Books

ISBN :

Author : Julie C. Dao

Format : Kindle Edition 377 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Retellings

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From Reader Review Forest of a Thousand Lanterns for online ebook

may ❀ says

Full review posted

I don't think this book is TERRIBLE, I just think that the synopsis DECEIVED me and I've faced too much betrayal from my loved ones ~~books~~ to continue being a victim to such treachery ~~I'm lying, I clearly never learn since I keep reading kasie west books~~

Pros *this gonna be short oops

- Asian setting!!!!!!!
- its pretty gruesome, so if you're into that it might appeal to you I guess :|
- um...girl power but done like sneakily so youre not sure if the characters are evil-villainous-pieces-of-trash or their strong-willed-freedom-fighting-heros
- the mc literally takes no crap from anyone, except her crappy aunt, but she deals with her pretty quickly

(s)

Cons

- where do I start?
- Okay the writing is LONG, DRAWN OUT, AND LITERALLY ENCOURAGES YOU TO SKIM bc its just :|
- The world building is so confusing and hard to grasp, my poor brain rip
- I didn't like the mc, shes selfish and vain and annoying and keeps reminding everyone how **oh so terrible** she is without OUTWARDLY saying WHY she is so terrible so idk she's basically poop sorry
- I. was. Bored.
- There were SO MANY characters that could have been developed more and provided an excellent conflict but nope they pretty much get thrown into the trash bin and poof, they are never seen again
- Basically the ending is really ACTION PACKED but the 300 pages leading up to it is like an exam and a half to get through
- Also what the poop was up with all THE WOMEN HATING EACH OTHER WHY DOES THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN
- The romance was weird as hell ??? there was no connection between her and wei and then all of a sudden another dude gets into the picture and just ugh im over it
- But literally EVERYONE loved this aside from me, so there's a 9/10 % chance you'll like it even tho I really didn't :)

"She was a monster, a bride of the darkness, and she rose to face her destiny as though it were the blood-red sunrise of a new day."

1.5 stars!

~~~~~

**Buddy read** with saunta khalus

idk WHY EVERYONE KEEPS SAYING THIS COVER IS UGLY ITS NOT UGLY ITS PRETTY

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## Riley says

I feel weird saying I relate to the main character because she's clearly the villain but I. FUCKING. RELATE.

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## Sana says

*Forest of a Thousand Lanterns* is a dark and gruesome, !!!East Asian!!! fantasy about Xifeng, a beautiful peasant girl who has always been told that she is destined for greatness.

Xifeng is raised by her abusive aunt/Guma who longs to fulfill Xifeng's destiny, the cards have predicted. They show Xifeng's future full of power and as Empress, but with great power comes great sacrifice and difficult obstacles to pass. Sick of her aunt's abuse, Xifeng ceases the opportunity to run away with her lover, Wei, and fulfill this fucking destiny, yo!!!

The pacing of this book is extremely slow and takes its time in building up to the good stuff. Slow pacing is a hit and miss for me. I'll either love it or quickly go bored with it. In this case, I did have a hard time enjoying this book, but thankfully that lasted for only about 50ish pages. The book started off well but then I got bored and I was going to dnf. But I decided not to and swear to god, the best decision my pathetic ass ever made.

I think the pacing has a lot to do with what's going on in the story as well. As long as you're enjoying what you're reading, you'll enjoy the book.

The world building is so freaking GORGEOUS, y'all I was in awe!!!! Everything is described so beautifully. You know that feeling when your mom makes some real good looking food and doesn't let you eat it so all you can do is take in every detail and your mouth is watering?? That was actually me. World building is hands down the best thing about this book!!

Xifeng is such an amazingly written character. I read some reviews about how Xifeng is supposed to be an anti-hero. You sympathize with her and like her at some point and sometimes things she does make you hate her. This girl knows she's drop dead gorgeous and she knows that using that beauty the right way is going to get her where she wants. (The whole woman and their beauty message also showed some feminism in the book, which was great!!) She hates on other woman and kills one to have the spotlight on her. She's fucking crazy I know and girl hate is annoying, but it's all part of her ugly side. We aren't supposed to like Xifeng sometimes.

Also not to mention she eats the hearts of the dead to get stronger, so that's great!! It's very gory, dark and bloody and you know I'm a sucker for that stuff.

Overall, a very refreshing and beautiful book about how far people are willing to go to fulfill their destinies, v v great sacrifices, selfishness and all the ugly things that go through a woman's mind. Definitely recommend.

?????

this cover is ugly af but it's the inside that should be beautiful and if it's not then you'll find me in a hole i personally dug for myself back in 1669.

also br with Mat the blue eyed sexy Greek god with a six pack but is broke and only has muscles and his hotness to keep himself happy.

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## Hiba says

*She was special, with every bite, every stream of blood spurting from her ravenous mouth. She was a monster, a bride of the darkness, and she rose to face her destiny as though it were the blood-red sunrise of a new day.*

This book is so gloriously BRUTAL. One word of warning, **this book is certainly not for faint hearted**, if you want a glint of hopefulness and happiness then go away because this book is certainly not for you. *Forest of thousand lanterns* follow the story of 18 year old's Xifeng's rise as an empress, as she embraces her own dark destiny.

Xifeng's abusive aunt/Guma had filled her head with promise of great destiny as an Empress of whole Feng lu. The cards shows a powerful future beholds Xifeng but with great powers come great sacrifices, so throughout the book we saw as Xifeng abandon every kind of love to achive her destiny. She left her aunt, who she thought as her mother and abandoned Wei, her childhood sweetheart, to go into the Castle of Emperor Jun and grab her future.

The world building was so beautiful and intricate. The blend of various elements of Chinese culture was done really well. I love court settings and court manoeuvrings so much and the author did splendid job building a court and consperacies within it.

Xifeng's journey to darkness was done so well!!! Xifeng is gorgeous and knows how to use her beauty to survive in this cruel and dark world run by men. Throughout the book, we saw her inner conflicts. She try hard not to let her selfishness and darkness within her take over her but as story progressed she realize that only way to achieve greatness is through embracing her darkness.

*Just as it had the first time Guma had made her kill, Xifeng could hear a piece of her old self pleading: Let me go. Don't make me do this. Her limbs shuddered with her silent prayer for mercy, for her own salvation, but she heard nothing in return except the thundering of her own heart.*

*"Save me," Xifeng uttered aloud, one last time, before she let the darkness take her. She knew nothing now but her uncontrollable hunger*

Xifeng is not the character to love or root for. She is extremely hateful toward every girl at court but her hatred for other and desire to be greater then everyone is the whole point of story. The court life is cruel, and if Xifeng did not become cruel like others, she would have eventually failed.

I know everybody cared more for Xifeng and her conflicts but to be honest, the character I loved most was Empress Lihua. Lihua was the most miserable character in this book despise being Empress and direct descendants of Dragon Lords. Her parents did not deem her fit to rule, her first husband married her to

another person before his death, his second husband, Emperor Jun did not give a shit about her once Xifeng came into view and then in the end everyone forget her. She was not ruthless like Xifeng was, and in the end nobody cared for her. But despite everything, she was still strong. She was clever and saw everything that was happening around her. She loved her daughter dearly. She didn't have physical strength but her love for her child made up for it.

Everytime I think of Lihua, my heart break even more. She did not do anything wrong. She deserved love and in the end she did get love in the form of her daughter, but almost everyone, even the readers too, forget her. I think this was the whole point of this book; be cruel or be forgotten. I just hope there is loads of Princess Jade in the next book. Please!!!

**It's twisted, it's cruel and full of blood.** I felt anger and love for Xifeng, I sympathized with Lihua, I am feeling so protective of baby Jade and I really want to kill Emperor Jun. There were tons of twists and turns that I did not see coming and Xifeng's conflicts would not bore you. So many emotions, so many actions, so many interesting characters, all in all, it's perfection.

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## Beth says

*"In weakness, you find your strength. It takes no small amount of courage to open yourself up"*

## Spoiler Free Review!

Holy shit this was amazing! I have no idea what to think when I went into this... but not THAT! Firstly it's partly a re-telling that has set up the second book **perfectly**, then we have an anti-heroine (which I didn't even know about!), it's dark and twisted but so gripping. The progression of the book moved at a gradual pace, nothing seemed to be rushed. Not only this the writing was so well done. I think what made this book so gripping is that there were many plots going on underneath the surface and you didn't know who you could entirely trust.

*"Your beauty is all you are, and all you have. Your only weapon."*

Our main character is **Xifeng**, when we first meet her character I didn't really know what to think of her, she has something very very dark in her, we see her being abused by her Aunt and wants something better in her life. Her character development was phenomenal, the way in which she thinks and plots and how she overcomes certain aspects was just so well done. We see her flaws and her embrace them, some things were grotesque and at some points I was inwardly screaming.

*Some are given a rope to the moon, and others claw up to the sky.*

What I liked?

- The storytelling we see throughout, it was so gripping and in them they felt like fairytales.
- All of the little references of Snow White
- Her friendship with Kang
- Even though some bad things happened, I kind of felt sorry for Xifeng... I KNOW!
- How dark it was, I didn't expect it to be like this!

There was honestly nothing I **disliked** about this book!

Overall, if you love Fairytale re-tellings I'd highly recommend this. It's set up perfectly for the next book. I honestly can't wait! For the month of November I read books only from Subscription boxes and I'm ridiculously happy I finished with this!

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### **Roshani Chokshi says**

HOLY FREAKING CRAP. THIS. This is the Evil Queen origin story of my dreams.

I was lucky enough to get to blurb this fabulous debut, and here's what I said: "Searing and intense, Dao's debut is an outstanding character exploration of fairytales' most enduring and enigmatic characters: the Evil Queen. Equal parts lush and devastating, this is a tale that will grab you by the throat."

I want to add a little more here because I haven't read a story like this in awhile. This book is catty. Murdery. Cliquey. It's mean. Xifeng is Scarlet O'Hara with blood on her teeth, and I am here for it. This book is a dark mirror, and I cannot wait for readers to be horrified and enamored. I know I am.

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### **Emily May says**

*"Beware, Xifeng, of magic that comes too easily. There is a price for everything, as she learned and you, too, will learn. Some magic requires blood. Other magic requires a piece of your own self and eats away at your soul."*

4 1/2 stars. In short: Forest of a Thousand Lanterns is an East Asia-inspired fantasy in which a young woman chooses ruthless ambition and power over the love of a hot guy. **Halle-freaking-lujah.**

I should probably say this is not for readers who must *like* the protagonist in order to enjoy a book. I almost DNFed it in the beginning when Xifeng hates and/or is jealous of every other woman she encounters. Girl-on-girl hate is one of my all time biggest pet peeves in YA. However, it soon became apparent that this is kind of the point. We're not really supposed to *like* Xifeng. She's a complex antiheroine and, honestly, it worked really well for me.

The story opens with Xifeng living in a small town with her abusive aunt/Guma and secretly longing to fulfil the destiny the cards have predicted for her, again and again. The cards show a future of ultimate power, with Xifeng as the Empress, but there are sacrifices to be made and many obstacles to be overcome. She finally gathers her courage and runs away with her beloved, Wei, searching for a way to plant herself close to the Emperor and achieve what the cards have promised.

**It's nasty, twisted, and kinda gory.** And I loved it! I experienced a whole array of emotions while reading. It's one of those books that gets under your skin until you're not quite sure how you feel about what is happening. On the one hand, Xifeng's dark jealousies and obsession with her own beauty should make you dislike her, and yet it is easy to feel the suffocating, frustrating cage of being a woman in a man's world.

Forest of a Thousand Lanterns goes into a surprising amount of depth, never allowing characters to become one-dimensional stereotypes, and considering the complexities of abuse - how one can love their abuser for

their few kind, gentle moments, despite everything. Even the most despicable character in the book offers us glimpses of her humanity:

*“Life is difficult when you’re born a woman in this world,” the concubine murmured. “You’ve entered a game you can’t win. Men make the rules and we are left to be used by them or claw our way to whatever scraps they’ve left behind. Do you think my father gave me to the Emperor because he loved me? Did he care when he tore me from my mother’s arms? He thrust me into this pit of scorpions to be stung and forgotten.”*

In a strange way, it's something of a feminist tale. Or, at least, a critique of a patriarchal world that can make a woman terrified of losing that which she considers her greatest weapon - her beauty. It may be difficult to like Xifeng, but I truly felt her claustrophobia and pain here:

*“I was Guma’s, and now you want me to be yours. I have my own soul and my own destiny, and I’m tired of belonging to someone else.”*

**It definitely has a very Macbeth-esque feel to it.** The use of prophecy - and how a person can become obsessed with and corrupted by it - reminds me of the Shakespearean tale. I can't say I would want Xifeng for a friend, but I am very interested in where her story is going. I have a feeling things are only going to get darker and nastier from here. I can't wait.

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### **Cece (ProblemsOfaBookNerd) says**

This was definitely slow to start, but I'm already absolutely dying to read the second book. I was invested in this book because I knew the main character was supposed to be ruthless, and I was not misled in any way. If you're looking for an origin story that's dark and twisty, this one is fantastic.

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### **Marie Lu says**

I adore an anti-heroine story, and Julie C. Dao achieves this with flying colors in a lush, richly developed fantasy world of myth, monarchy, and magic. Xifeng is an unusual and wonderfully complex protagonist of ambitious agency--I couldn't stop reading about her journey! Go pre-order this beauty immediately.

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### **Natalie Monroe says**

*"Let no one stand in your way. If they face you, your beauty will entrap them. If they turn away, you will stab them in the back."*



Chalk up 'Snow White retelling from the POV of the wicked queen, set in imperial China' to the list of things I never knew I needed. Forest of a Thousand Lanterns is so vindictive and brilliant and and blade-edged in its message.

*"She touched her face. This is how a woman plays the game. It makes men weak and forget they make the rules. She becomes the player and they the pawns."*

Forest of a Thousand Lanterns chronicles Xifeng's rise, much like Heartless. She is yet the wicked queen, merely a peasant in a tiny village with stunning good looks and burning ambition. We see the steps she takes to secure a place at court, to fulfill the destiny her Guma (aunt) read for her in the cards—Empress of Feng Lu.

In many ways, it's a story about the **weaponization and currency of female beauty in a patriarchy**. Women can't get anywhere based on talent, so they have to rely on their looks. Because of that there's quite a bit of girl-hating, but it never feels misogynistic. Xifeng often feels bad about disparaging her companions, but it's either them or her, and she's not exactly the type to share.

*"She knew her own worth. She would seize her destiny with all the strength and spirit within her, and bend them all to her will: every man kneeling and every woman overshadowed."*

Two men are romantically interested in Xifeng, though I'd bank at calling it a love triangle. Xifeng isn't heavily emotionally invested in either—they're just tools for her on her quest. (view spoiler) All I can say is, if you're after a passionate earth-defying romance, look elsewhere. Shadow and Bone does a great job with the love vs. ambition plot. Xifeng's truest devotion is the crown.

What can I say? I've always liked my heroines with a grey streak.

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**Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says**

October 2017 Fairyloot Box. We got two books. I added a link to all of the stuff in close up under the picture =)

CLOSE UP PICTURES

I thought it was alright.

Happy Reading!

Mel ???

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## Julie says

Guys! This is my book and I am over-the-moon joyful that I get to share it with you all next year!

The story combines everything I love: strong women and the complex relationships that shape them; the struggle between choice and destiny; a lush palace setting and handsome, brooding men; and a powerful, dark, tortured heroine I think of as a combination of Wu Zetian (the first and ONLY \*ruling\* Empress of China), Anne Boleyn, and Scarlett O'Hara.

Please follow my blog and Twitter for the latest updates on a cover reveal, release date, ARCs, and more. Thank you all for adding this to your to-read lists and being so kind and excited. I sure hope some of you out there love it as much as I do!

XOXO

Julie

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## Lola says

More like **Forest of a Thousand Dull Chapters**.

I have nothing against slow-paced books. I think it's alright for some stories to take longer to unfold and be detailed, and consequently, descriptive.

You don't, for example, want to read a mystery novel that is not at all mysterious because you barely had time to guess who the killer was that *BAAAM!* You already finished the book.

But if I'm not interested, it doesn't matter how beautiful your writing is. If I don't care about the characters, it doesn't matter that what they're experiencing is challenging and mentally or physically-exhausting for them. It won't affect me.

And unfortunately, that's what happened here. Retellings fascinate me. We can be deep in conversation, if I hear someone say the word "retelling," I'm going to stop you right there and turn my attention to the one who uttered the magic word. *Come here, you! Let's chat.*

I liked the idea. An East Asian-inspired retelling of The Evil Queen? Hello, how can you *not* be intrigued? I dare you to yawn. It's a premise that you don't hear every day, and originality is necessary in YA fantasy fiction.

NECESSARY.

And yet I did yawn reading this. And yet I did struggle to sparkle *my own* interest in the book, because the latter certainly failed to do that.

But it's not my job to make myself actively interested in a story... right? That's the author's job.

Great concept, dull execution.

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## Jill says

*"She was a monster, a bride of the darkness, and she rose to face her destiny as though it were the blood red sunrise of a new day."*

Ok ok I finally have time to write a review. I'd like to start off with a big loud pterodactyl screech that might convey how unique and amazing this book was. I am thoroughly impressed. The entire plot was so well thought out and the characters were beautifully written (even if some of them were brutal as hell... yeah I'm looking at you Xifeng). Basically, I loved it.

Essentially this story is an Asian inspired twist on the Evil Queen from Snow White. It also seemed to incorporate lots of Asian mythology as well. I adoredddd this aspect because I'm not exposed to Asian culture very often in YA, so it truly was a breath of fresh air. There's also an antiheroine in the story and you have no idea how much I adore antiheroines like YES PLEASE GIVE THEM TO ME.

I can not and will not get over the entire concept of this book. For the first half I would say I thought this book was about a 4 star read. But then something extremely dark and twisted happens and from then I was internally screaming until I finished the book. Now let me emphasize this again... this book gets REAL dark... There are certain violent scenes that are described that were hard to stomach... but they were done SO WELLLLL! I'M STILL INTERNALLY SCREAMING. AHHHHHH THIS CONCEPT.

This story also breaks so many stereotypes and typical YA tropes... FABULOUS in that regard

Next, the characters. Now, uh, as I mentioned before I adore antiheroines and LET ME TELL YOU... YOU DON'T THINK THIS PERSON WILL BE AN ANTIHERO UNTIL THIS THING HAPPENS AND AFTER THAT OH MY \*cackles\* sorry... was that too much? I just really love antiheroes don't @ me... Anyway... I enjoyed reading about all of the characters except for Wei... honestly I hated him the entire time oml...

I will say the romance was a low point for me and what made me seriously consider whether this was a 5 star or a 4.5 because the romance in this book annoyed me to no end. However, I do understand why it was there and I respect it... That respect is as far as I will go.

I feel like I already emphasized this but THE SECOND HALF OF THIS BOOK. The second half totally turns into a pre Snow White story and the ending HOLY SHIT I NEED THE SEQUEL. Now, I will say this is NOT a Snow White retelling... it's more of a PRE Snow White retelling and it seems as if the sequel may be more of a Snow White retelling. Don't go into this expecting Snow White... there were just so many hints and clues that point toward that story and it made me so giddy. And that second half man... it felt like a different book. When this book is released and if you aren't feeling the first part... I BEG YOU TO STICK WITH IT.

This story had politics, demons, murder, gods, kingdoms, and a splendid world full of magic and darkness. I enjoyed it immensely. For sure pick this one up come October so I can have someone to freak out with! (:

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## Fables&Wren says

### WrensReads Review:

*An East Asian fantasy reimagining of The Evil Queen legend about one peasant girl's quest to become Empress--and the darkness she must unleash to achieve her destiny.*

How could I not fall under the spell of this book? **HOLY BATMAN** I cannot express how beautifully dark this book is. This book is a typical-folklore fairy: beautiful and hypnotizing and just brings you in with your words... but it's *super creepy* and probably going to kill you.

Xifeng is a victim of abuse. Her aunt took her in once her mother was out of the picture and looked into her future. She saw that Xifeng was destined for greatness and that she could even become Empress of Feng Lu, if she played her cards right; those cards being completely dark and doing whatever she needs to do to get to her destined throne.

*"She would bloom where she was planted and let her roots close around the throats of her enemies."*

The character building for Xifeng is literally out-of-this-world. She is so meek in the beginning and believes the horrible things her aunt tells her. She believes her beauty is the only thing she has going for her and she must protect her face at all cost. But then she realizes she doesn't have to do things her aunt's way... she can do things without her. **And then she does** and things get really complex and abstract from there.

She wasn't confident in herself. But as the story goes on, she becomes more and more confident that she can do anything and that is what makes her the most threatening person in this book. **She is an anti-hero**; if you don't know what that is, it is when the main character is not a good person but you find yourself loving and cheering for them anyway. And I had my pom-poms out the whole time in this book.

*"If my beauty is my greatest weapon, vanity is the shield that protects me."*

The world building in this is so beautifully woven into the story. There is no world-vomit and there is no confusion. The East Asian setting was just jaw-dropping and vivid to the mind. I wish more authors would take this way instead for settings more often. I don't really know a lot about this culture, but this has really peaked my interest.

I don't want to give things away, but things like heart-eating and step-mothers and clawing anyone who threatens her being *the fairest of them all* are a part of this story. She goes about getting the throne in a completely different way than I thought she would, which was really refreshing.

If you love creepy, unexpected, anti-heroes and surprisingly well-done retellings: this is for you.

WrensReads | Goodreads | Twitter | Instagram

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I did not expect this to be the prettiest most dark book of my 2017 reads. Heck, I forgot it was a retelling and jaw-dropped when I reread the synopsis and then I died. RTC.

- - -

36% | This slow burn intro is everything I don't want but everything I have needed. I'm going to be wrecked and I'm so ready.

- - -

I heard this was antihero... and it just came in on my overdrive/library... I need this to be my most favorite read of 2017 please.

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