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Forbidden Tales: Sword

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Chen, Da. *Forbidden Tales: Sword*. HarperCollins, 2008. ISBN 9780061447587. \$17.89. 240 p.

Reviewer: Rachel Wadham

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Adventure stories;

Subject: China--Juvenile fiction; Revenge--Juvenile fiction; Books--Reviews;

On her fifteenth birthday, Miu Miu finds she is not to be wed like most girls, but is to avenge the death of her father who died by the hands of the emperor. Her betrothed, Tong Ting, who was pledged at birth to assist Miu Miu on her mission, joins her in exacting revenge. Using all their courage, luck, and cunning, the pair face their enemy but are ultimately outmatched in martial arts skills. Failing in their quest, the two are prepared to die, but they are saved by mystic forces that give them another chance at life.

Full of beautiful language and stunning cultural details, this novel is filled with lots martial arts action that will certainly appeal to many readers. Overall, however the story lacks cohesion. The author frames the narrative as a story within a story. The beginning is told by an unrelated storyteller, which is traditional but peculiar in this case since these characters are never mentioned again. Additionally, the main story's plot jumps around so fast readers feel a sense of whiplash making the events very hard to follow. Lastly, there is no motivation for the characters beyond traditional cultural norms, which are abandoned so quickly in the end that no emotional link is formed between book and reader. Even with these flaws, this novel's beautifully rendered setting and the eloquent descriptions of Kung Fu action make this novel a fun, appealing, fast paced read.

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