

Graceling

Author: Kristin Cashore

Full-Text Reviews

Booklist starred (October 1, 2008 (Vol. 105, No. 3))

Grades 9-12. Feared as a killer since her childhood, Lady Katsa uses her unusual Grace (superhuman gift) in the service of her uncle, King Randa. She is beginning to rebel against his orders to kill or maim his more disloyal subjects when her path crosses that of Po. A young foreign prince with a mysterious Grace as well as wisdom beyond his years, Po convinces Katsa that she can stand up to the brutal king and put her gift to better uses. When Katsa joins Po on a quest, she throws herself headlong into a rescue mission and finds romance, self-knowledge, and justice along the way. Although many fantasy writers create intriguing alternate worlds and worthy adventures, as Cashore does in this well-imagined novel, she also offers believable characters with enough depth, subtlety, and experience to satisfy older readers. Katsa is a heroine who can physically overpower most men she meets, yet her strength is not achieved by becoming manlike. She may care little for fine clothes, but from her first kill to her first experience of lovemaking, Katsa's womanhood is integral to her character. An impressive first novel, this well-crafted and rewarding fantasy will leave readers hoping for more.

Horn Book Magazine (November/December, 2008)

Lady Katsa of the Middluns, the most central of the Seven Kingdoms, was born with a terrifying Grace (the Seven Kingdoms term for the hyper-developed talents that occasionally surface in their populations). Katsa's seems to be for killing, and her thuggish uncle, the king, makes her his brute squad. She rebels by forming the Council, a sort of social justice league, and it is through this affiliation that she is drawn into a mystery involving the kidnapping of an elderly cross-kingdom prince, the secret Grace of the king of nearby Monsea, and the kidnapped royal's wicked cute, super-sensitive grandson Po – also, like Katsa, a Graceling. Katsa's assertion of her independence, and her harnessing of her Grace as subservient to her humanity, form the philosophical skeleton of the narrative, but for the most part this is a straightforward journey-adventure with a hearty dose of too-good-to-be-true romance. Creepy villains aside, Graceling is light fare, anchored in Katsa and Po's fairly simple relationship; with a butt-kicking but emotionally vulnerable heroine, it should appeal to fans of recent girl-power urban fantasies as well as readers who've graduated from Tamora Pierce's Tortall series.

Kirkus Reviews starred (September 1, 2008)

An assured fantasy debut grapples with questions of identity, authenticity and autonomy. Lady Katsa is a Graceling, with an inborn magical gift marking her as both feared outcast and exploitable resource. While her peculiar Grace--the unsurpassed ability to kill--has been honed over the years by her uncle the king to bully and punish, Katsa has also secretly used it to bring a measure of justice to the Seven Kingdoms. When she encounters a strange prince whose mysterious Grace may just be a match for her own, she learns the corrosive seduction of power corrupted, but also the courage to trust others--and herself. Katsa is an ideal adolescent heroine, simultaneously confident of her strengths yet unsure of her place in the world. Every character is crafted with the same meticulous devotion to human comprehensibility, making the villain all the more appalling in his understated, twisted madness. In a tale filled with graphic violence

and subtle heartbreak, gentle passion and savage kindness, matter-of-fact heroics and bleak beauty, no defeat is ever total and no triumph comes without cost. Grace-full, in every sense. (Fantasy. YA)

Library Journal - web only (December 23, 2008)

Lady Katsa killed her first man, a would-be groper, at the tender age of eight. In her world, those who are so "graced" with talent are visible to all, recognized by their differently colored eyes. By day, Lady Katsa is her noble uncle's enforcer; by night, she leads a secret SWAT team dedicated to righting wrongs. On one of its mercy missions, she meets Po, a noble from another kingdom who is every bit the match for her talent and her heart. *Cold Weather Appeal*: At one point, Katsa risks a treacherous mountain pass to deliver a threatened noble to her family. *Why It Is for Us*: This debut fantasy features a troubled heroine, a sexy romance, and a complex political world. Adult fans of the genre cannot ask for more. -Angelina Benedetti Copyright 2008 Reed Business Information.

Library Media Connection (March/April 2009)

Throughout the Seven Kingdoms there are individuals, identified by their mismatched eyes, who are "Graced" with special abilities. For some their graces may be insignificant things like swimming impossibly long distances, but Lady Katsa's gift is as a killer. Her uncle, the king, sees the potential use of her as his enforcer. Despite the violence of her grace, Katsa is a young woman who sees beyond the court intrigues and is determined to make a difference. Alongside the prince of a neighboring kingdom, she breaks free from her uncle's dominance and joins Po in his quest to rescue his cousin, Princess Bitterblue. Katsa's conflict as she tries to reconcile her perspective of how others see her with who she wants to be adds to the quest storyline. Both the primary and supporting characters are well-drawn with interwoven storylines. The author has created a fresh fantasy situation by mixing a physically strong protagonist with a coming-of-age story of a girl insecure in her own identity. This will appeal to readers who have enjoyed Tamora Pierce's writings, but this book is more mature in some content. Highly Recommended. Melissa Bergin, NBCT Library Media Specialist, Niskayuna (New York) High School

Publishers Weekly (July 21, 2008)

In a land of seven kingdoms, people with special talents, called Gracelings, are identified by their eyes--Katsa's are green and blue, one of each--although she's eight before her specific Grace is identified as a talent for killing. (While in the court of her uncle, King Randa, she swiped at a man attempting to grope her and struck him dead.) By 18 she's King Randa's henchwoman, dispatched to knock heads and lop off appendages when subjects disobey, but she hates the job. As an antidote, she leads a secret council whose members work against corrupt power, and in this role, while rescuing a kidnapped royal, she meets the silver-and-gold-eyed Po, the Graced seventh son of the Lienid king. That these two are destined to be lovers is obvious, though beautiful, defiant Katsa convincingly claims no man will control her. Their exquisitely drawn romance (the sex is offstage) will slake the thirst of Twilight fans, but one measure of this novel's achievements lies in its broad appeal. Tamora Pierce fans will embrace the take-charge heroine; there's also enough political intrigue to recommend it to readers of Megan Whalen Turner's *Attolia* trilogy. And while adult readers, too, will enjoy the author's originality, the writing is perfectly pitched at teens struggling to put their own talents to good use. With this riveting debut, Cashore has set the bar exceedingly high. Ages 14-up. (Oct.) Copyright 2008 Reed Business Information.

School Library Journal (October 1, 2008)

Gr 8 Up-In this debut fantasy novel, Cashore treats readers to compelling and eminently likable characters and a story that draws them in from the first paragraph. In Katsa's world, the "Graced," those gifted in a particular way, are marked by eyes that are different colors. Katsa's Grace is that she is a gifted fighter, and, as such, she is virtually invincible. She is in the service of her tyrannical uncle, king of one of the seven kingdoms, and she is forced to torture people for infractions against him. She has

secretly formed the Council, which acts in the service of justice and fairness for those who have been accused and abused. Readers meet her as she is rescuing the father of the Lienid king, who has been abducted. The reasons for his capture are part of a tightening plot that Katsa unravels and resolves, with the help of Prince Po, the captive's grandson. He has his own particular Grace, and he becomes Katsa's lover and partner in what becomes a mortally dangerous mission. Cashore's style is exemplary: while each detail helps to paint a picture, the description is always in the service of the story, always helping readers to a greater understanding of what is happening and why. This is gorgeous storytelling: exciting, stirring, and accessible. Fantasy and romance readers will be thrilled. -Sue Giffard, Ethical Culture Fieldston School, New York City Copyright 2008 Reed Business Information.