



Steelflower

Lilith Saintcrow

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Picking the wrong pocket can get a girl in trouble...

First of the Steelflower Chronicles

Thief, assassin, sellsword—Kaia Steelflower is famous. Well, mostly famous, and mostly for the wrong reasons. She's made a good life for herself, despite being kicked out of her homeland for having no magic. She's saving up for her retirement, when she can settle down, run an inn, and leave the excitement for others.

Then she picks the wrong pocket, wakes up with a hangover, and gets far more than she bargained for. Now she has a huge, furry barbarian to look after, a princeling from her homeland to fend off, and an old debt to fulfill. And for some reason, the God-Emperor's assassins want to kill her.

It's never easy being an elvish sellsword, and this time it just might be fatal...

Steelflower Details

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Author : Lilith Saintcrow

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From Reader Review Steelflower for online ebook

Lori says

*NOTE: Speed read only.

So where to start this review?

The book is called "Steelflower," but the ballads mentioned in the book itself call the main character "Iron Flower."

And that's pretty much how the rest of it goes.

Why would a society that reveres all females throw out one who has serious issues after her mother dies?

Why would a main character immediately start killing guards in the opening scene when they aren't even there for her and she's supposedly a thief and assassin (e.g., someone who would want to avoid attention from the law)?

Why would said character go out of her way to honor a nearly forgotten promise but dismiss others' attempts to bind themselves to her via their particular cultures' honor system?

This title has serious issues that a good edit would have handled.

Skip it (and any future volumes that have been predicted).

Kathy Davie says

First in the fantasy Steelflower Chronicles...and most likely the last.

My Take

Kaia, a shunned elf who believes she never manifested any of her expected elfin powers, left home to seek her fortune as a mercenary. We first encounter a hungover Kaia doing battle while still half asleep only to find she's fighting on behalf of the man whose pocket she picked the night before.

In general, I really like Saintcrow as an author and the idea of this story is intriguing. But, must Kaia whine so much??

I got the message — she doesn't believe she has any power!! In spite of all the indications she's receiving to the contrary?!?

Then Kaia talks about Rikyat being gods-touched. Well, thank god, Saintcrow keeps telling us because I sure am not getting it from his actions. Stop telling! Start showing!

Really, a lot of good ideas desperately in need of some depth! And lots less whining...

The Cover and Title

It has a great cover...it's too bad the cover artist didn't do the illustrations!

The title is all about Kaia. She's the *Steelflower* elf shunned for her lack of power.

CAROLYN says

I really liked this. It reminded me of the older style sword and sorcery books. Kinda like Jennifer Roberson's "Sword Dancing" but not quite as in depth. In this day and age to find a new author who writes an entertaining tale such as this that does not involve heaving bosoms or rampant masculinity is a treat. I look forward to more.

Brielle says

i love lilith saintcrow's style - she gives a kind of well-hidden fragility to her protagonists that makes them likable, real and gives them good depth. in this case, kaia was shunned because she thought she lacked powers (which, well, yes.) i cannot stop delighting myself with the strong bonds that miss saintcrow forms between the boy and the girl in her books. it's endearing. i liked the band of people she collected, and how firmly she embraced her honor and her debt. the story, the gods, and the intensity with which all was narrated made it a warm read. this is one of lilith's best, as kaia isn't actively suffering (which i fear will change if she ever writes the rest of the series), but that's expected because, i think, in her first books she merely shows her character, points at worldbuilding and sets the footing. an enjoyable read.

TSN says

This book is a: "Read it at your own risk" book.

You might hate it or you might love it. I don't really think that there are going to be many who are in-between that.

I found it great, even though I admit that the first few chapters was "hard" to get through.

While the book doesn't end with a true cliffhanger, it sure is a "to be continued" ending.

Wyrddness says

I primarily read this because I really needed a break from UF titles and it felt like an age since I'd last read a proper fantasy novel. I have to say it was a great relief to get a change of pace and fall in to a story I really enjoyed. In fact I enjoyed it so much that I'm rather sad to discover that the author has yet to get around to continuing the series.

If there was one thing that really annoyed me, it was the heroine's constant denial of basic facts backed up with *undeniable* proof. I understand that it's not easy to address a faulty worldview you've believed all your life with a wave of the hand, but she was also a capable sellsword, thief and assassin and *still* her self-worth was rock bottom because she *chose* to believe the worst. It was absolutely maddening.

As a final note I have no idea why some people have tagged this "Young Adult". The main character is not a

young adult (she has to be *at least* 25) and the story is chock full of murder, assassination, battles, and just general death. There's no sex, but that doesn't make the rest of it aimed for a Young Adult audience (though if they were anything like my 13 year old self they'll be all for death and betrayal).

Meghan says

Updated upon rereading. i had to add a star. i liked this novel even better the second time around.

This was fun. No excess world building, with a witty, fun dialogue. The author expects u to be able to piece together the terminology and story line for yourself with the tidbits of what is given. I LOVE that! If u need to be spoon feed every tiny piece of history and terminology and love endless descriptions of everything- this book is not for u! If u like to figure the stuff the narrator knows, but u clearly don't as u go along with the story and have enough brain juice to pay attention and clip bits here and there together on ur own- u will love it.

I like how the fantasy allows for a world with a race of people who have instalove with soulmate and obsessed 'twilight'ish over protective type love as the norm and our girl is all -bump that sh--! Stay away from me freak. or i will kill u and im not just saying that. Like, for reals.- AWESOME!

The story plays out pretty smooth from one scene to the next in a believable chain of events. And no one is taken hostage for ransom or exchange or some dumb crap like 20 other books I have read recently. That stuff gets old real quick.

Lot of stuff is left unexplained or hinted at. If u can't handle those random bits of info shoved into the script u- u will not like this book. But like me, if u like to have permission from the author to let your imagination fill in the blanks- u will love it.

P.s. I think this could be tween friendly. There is some chatter about pillow play of a gender preference ambivalence. Which could bug u if u are a bit of a prude, but no harlequin elements at all and the relationships that develop are more about trust/understanding than touch feely stuff. -- but let's hope book 2 steams it up a bit. That leading man is smokin!

Teea says

Drudgery. Repetitive, irritating, and immature.

Rebecca says

I picked this up on a whim, knowing that Lilith Saintcrow was one of those authors that could be hit-or-miss about me. Uusually she's in the group of fantastic worldbuilding but the characters tend to make me want to slap them sometimes. I also occasionally have problems wiht her romance.

I have a weakness for sword and sorcery that is compounded by my insistence on interesting and varied female characters. (What can I say? For all it's flaws, I cut my teeth on Mercedes Lackey's Vows and Honor duology.) Consequently, I'll be a bit more daring about that than the fifty-million Urban Fantasy books I

read.

I did like Kaia as a character. Her world sounded interesting, but I had some problems with immersion -- too many countries too quickly. I like that there actually seemed to be non-Europeans in her world, even discounting the G'mai. I like the fact she was competent, though I wished we could have more development of the other female characters (Kaia's innkeeper friend, for instance, or the G'mai woman that joins them in the second half of the book.)

There are some nitty-gritty things as well. The book also suffers from Fantasy Apostrophe Syndrome, mitigated by the fact that at least the apostrophe is signaled to mean something (the glottal stop). On the other hand, I still have problems pronouncing the names. That and the food and drink appears to be a case of 'call a rabbit a smeerp'. To some extent I can tolerate this, but when I start to remember all of this, it's a problem.

And about halfway through, the book switches from calling the female lead 'Kaia the Iron Flower' to 'Kaia Steelflower'. That and other changes make me wonder if Ms. Saintcrow wrote two novellas and stitched them together for this book. It could be that both are used by different sets of people, but I couldn't tell the difference.

With that, I segue into the plot. I enjoyed the first bits of the book, where Kaia and Redfist were being chased by someone unknown for reasons unknown, and the last bits of the book where the business about the God-Emperor from the back of the book comes in. The middle bits not so much, for something I've heard called 'the banality of pain'. Basically, Kaia believes she was abandoned by her people for being without magic* and not undergoing some kind of spiffy soubond with a guy who was her True Love. When a G'mai dude shows up and starts following her around and telling her she's got magic, she goes into denial. For half the book.

* Okay, anyone older than 15 and/or who has read fantasy books for over a year knows how this plot will turn out. Me, I was hoping for an inversion...

Now, >TMI< I've suffered from an anxiety disorder </TMI<, and have listened to friends who are depressed. Yeah, it does kind of sound like that -- the same thoughts keep circling around in your head over and over, no matter how many times you try to balance them. Fighting your way out of such thoughts are HARD. However, this might be a case of 'the terrible boredom of pain' (gratuitous Ursula LeGuin quote here) -- being psychologically hurt, doesn't make one angsty and deep, just hurting. Hard to portray without making me depressed though.

>spoilers<

A nice touch was that Kaia's perception was shown as being flawed, rather than the Evil Relatives thing. But, it did make me question G'mai parenting practices if Kaia's extended family couldn't find a way to bring her out of her depression or even figure out what was wrong with her, even if her magic was hindering communications. At the least, they had ten years to bring in an expert to get through to her.

>/spoilers<

So, I'd have to say I recommend this for people who can tolerate a bit of Angst in their books. I'll be looking for the next book in the series, but I'll probably wait until it comes in trade paperback, or pick it up used.

Linda says

3.5 stars

Melissa says

I changed this from "currently reading" to "read" because I have read as much of as I possibly can. The main character is insufferable and the action is slow. There is a lot of fantasy culture references with no explanation so I spent a lot of time reading and hoping that maybe the story would make sense later on. Maybe it does but there is nothing compelling enough to make me care.

Darcy says

This author is very hit or miss for me. Two of her series I really like, two others I couldn't finish the first book. Sad to say that this book fell into the later category for me. I made it about 20 pages in when I gave it up. There was something about the language that just bugged me, the shorted drawl, that you aren't sure what the characters are saying. This one just wasn't for me.

Alice says

Oh how I love a sword and sorcery tale! Love Lilith Saintcrow's writing, all her worlds are very well drawn and her writing style is very distinctive (makes me think of Simon R. Green).

Kaia Steelflower is a mercenary who insists on working alone. However, she soon finds herself unwillingly collecting travelling companions and possibly embroiled in two separate issues of 'succession', both of which may get her killed.

***A word of warning though, this is supposed to be the first book in a series / trilogy? While the book doesn't end with a cliffhanger, it's obvious that the companions are only partway into their travels together. There may be two more books to come, but they have not been written/finished and must fit around Saintcrow's busy writing schedule.

Trip says

Fantasy with samurai elves and extraneous apostrophes, entertaining but not actually good. It's copyright 2008, but feels like an early novel; maybe a trunk novel?

Debrac2014 says

Good read! Too bad there isn't a sequel! Interesting world and nice mix of characters!
