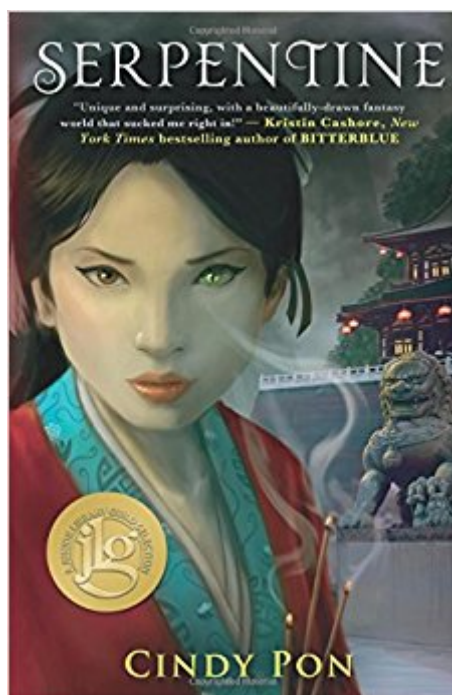


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Serpentine



Synopsis

Inspired by the rich history of Chinese mythology, this sweeping fantasy is set in the ancient Kingdom of Xia and tells the coming of age story of Skybright, a young girl who worries about her growing otherness. As she turns 16, Skybright notices troubling changes. By day, she is a companion and handmaid to the youngest daughter of a very wealthy family. But nighttime brings with it a darkness that not even daybreak can quell. When her plight can no longer be denied, Skybright learns that despite a dark destiny, she must struggle to retain her sense of self even as she falls in love for the first time.

Book Information

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Series: Serpentine

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Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 59 customer reviews

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Historical Fiction > Asia #678 in Books > Teens > Romance > Historical #972 in Books > Teens > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > Coming of Age

Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up • Skybright never knew her parents. She was raised by an affluent Chinese family who took her into their home to be a handmaid to their daughter, Zhen Ni. The two grew up as close as sisters, best friends and confidants who shared everything. Skybright loves her mistress, but as both girls grow up, changes start to occur. While Zhen Ni finds love in a new friendship, Skybright discovers a new side of herself, one filled with darkness. She fights to balance her duties, the love she has for another, and this evil within herself. Skybright struggles to maintain her true self, as well as to hide what she is becoming from her closest friend. The teen doesn't know who she is

anymore. Is she a servant, a friend, a lover, or a demon? Could she be all of these things, or must she choose one? This coming-of-age story takes readers on a fantastical journey through friendship and Chinese mythology. YA fans will love Pon's storytelling ability and the immersion into a world filled with love, danger, and fantasy. VERDICT Readers will be begging for a sequel to find out what happens to these intriguing characters. — Jessica Strefling, US Court of Appeals, Federal Circuit Library (starred review)

"This fast-paced fantasy adventure is set in an ancient China of folklore, the same land as Pon's previous books. Pon's descriptive writing conjures precise images, as in when describing Skybright's transformation from human to serpent: "Smooth scales rippled over her human flesh, like dragonfly wings fluttering their way from her feet to cover her abdomen." At its core, the novel is about friendship, loyalty, and self-acceptance, with characters as delightfully real as any in the realm of young adult literature." — Diane Colson, VOYA Magazine (starred review) — "The economical narrative conjures an entire world, drenched in color and texture and scent, rich in evocative mythology and heady action, and filled with vivid characters . . . A fast-paced and engrossing read for anyone weary of the same old hackneyed storylines." — Kirkus Reviews "Serpentine's world oozes with lush details and rich lore, and the characters crackle with life. This is one story that you'll want to lose yourself in." — Marie Lu, author, Prodigy — "Vivid worldbuilding, incendiary romance, heart-pounding action, and characters that will win you over—I highly recommend Serpentine." — Cinda Williams Chima, author, The Warrior Heir "Serpentine is unique and surprising, with a beautifully-drawn fantasy world that sucked me right in! I love Skybright's transformative power, and how she learns to take charge of it." — Kristin Cashore, author, Bitterblue — "YA fans will love Pon's storytelling ability and the immersion into a world filled with love, danger, and fantasy. Readers will be begging for a sequel to find out what happens to these intriguing characters." — School Library Journal (starred review)

This is a beautiful coming-of-age book. Cindy Pon perfectly captures the difficult, often emotional transition from child to woman. Skybright, the protagonist, sees her mistress getting her period and developing a romantic interest, and all Skybright wants is for everything to remain the same as it always was. The nuances in their shifting, changing relationship are reflected literally - but also metaphorically - in the change Skybright experiences... not from child to woman, but from child to...

serpent demon?! It sounds ridiculous but the metaphor here is perfect, as Skybright attempts to deal with shame, confusion, and estrangement from her own body which is both unique to her struggle but so common to girls undergoing the transition to womanhood. I think most girls will recognize some of themselves in Skybright as she struggles to find her new voice. I really loved the relationship between Skybright and Zhen Ni. It was unique and interesting and definitely counter to what one would expect. Skybright is Zhen Ni's handmaiden, which basically means she's her lifetime servant. Some might call her a slave. Most narratives would have played this off as a relationship inherently fraught with conflict and cast Zhen Ni as the villain - but such is not the case here. In this Asian fantasy, it is clear that this is the expected order of the world, and Skybright accepts her place in it as part of a community. She sees Zhen Ni honestly-- as a bit spoiled and needing to have her own way-- but she also loves her deeply, and takes ownership of her mistress's appearance and accomplishments. I really appreciated this - it felt much more authentic, and Pon really steered away from imposing our own cultural expectations on the narrative. It allows the reader to appreciate that other social structures are not "evil" or "oppressive" simply because they do not reflect our expectations. I also loved the contrast between her servant-master relationship with Zhen Ni and that between her and Stone. I also loved the pantheon of gods and demons. They were very authentically "Asian" in the sense that they are very removed and aloof, so ancient and perfect that the concerns of mortals are fairly irrelevant to them. My one criticism is minor: people and events happen way too conveniently. Skybright wonders about demons or Kai Sen, and the instant she goes into the forest she sees them appear. Or she travels a long time to get somewhere, and Kai Sen is also magically there. It's something that bugged me, but honestly I doubt any kid reading this is going to mind. I should say that although this book is ideally suited for girls around, say, 10-16, it definitely has broader appeal. I "read" it via audio book, and my 7 year old son caught snippets here and there in the car. He was soon begging me to let him listen along, and I finally just bought him his own paper copy, which he is reading now. I mean, serpent demons and fighting monks. What's not to love?

I bought this on my kindle when this one and the sequel were both on sale after the author had promoted it on her twitter. I had no idea what it was about but I love a good sale book so I thought I'd give it a try. The story is about Skybright a human coming of age, handmaid set in historical china, orphaned at birth living with her best friend and mistress Zhen Ni. It starts out as a very strong friendship story between the two girls as they grown and learn more about themselves more so than each other. Zhen Ni likes girls and she keeps that from Skybright but sky has the biggest

secret since she's half demon. Now one complaint I had was the story went by so damn fast. One minute she's human the next she's not then the next she's in love with someone she hardly just met. Those stories tend to drive me crazy because you need to build a relationship and there was literally no building here. The rest I really enjoyed. Skybright was an interesting character, she was loyal, and caring, I liked reading from her perspective. Zhen Ni was fantastic as in she was head strong and felt she needed to do what was best for her before she grew up and no longer could. I hope her story is resolved in the next book?!? Kai Sen got on my nerves, I don't know how I feel about him. I can't tell who's the big villain of the story yet and that's annoying, there's several but no clear distinction of who it is. Overall I really enjoyed it for a faster, no commitment read that doesn't really sink you to deep into the story.

Serpentine had been on my radar for awhile and wow. This is one of those books I'm upset that I waited so long to read. This was fantastic. When the story begins, we get a good feel for Skybright's life as handmaid (aka servant) to Zhen Ni, the youngest daughter in the Yuan home. I loved how this dynamic set up for the rest of the book. Zhen Ni considers Skybright like a sister since Skybright has been with the family her entire life, the two have never spent a day apart and bonded on a level that's not so typical given the power dynamic here. That said, while Skybright is treated very well as a handmaid, she's still a handmaid. And that fact is made even more clear to her when Zhen Ni has her friend, Lan over for an extended visit. I really loved the dynamics here. Skybright is threatened by Lan because if Lan is more of a companion than Skybright could ever be, Sky really could just be knocked down to just the handmaid that she's always been. Zhen Ni assures her that this isn't the case and it's up to Sky to accept this truth, what's as close to unconditional love as Zhen Ni can provide to her. Sisterhood for the win! But change is intimidating and Sky's emotions about the situation are not assured easily and do not become level overnight which was heartwarming to see because it was so tender and realistic in its approach. I really appreciated this so much. A moment on Zhen Ni's relationship with Lan. Because Zhen Ni comes from a wealthy, respectable family, she's expected to marry off shortly after she "comes into womanhood" aka gets her period. Well, Zhen Ni gets her period but she is in love with a girl and that girl's name is Lan. You don't have to imagine how this goes over with her mother because it happens in the book. In all of this, I love that Zhen Ni fights every step of the way for happiness instead of

accepting what she "must" do, accepting her "duty" as a female in her position. Zhen Ni knows her worth in the position that she's in and she also knows what's worth fighting for and her own peace of mind. She doesn't apologize for liking Lan and she does all that she can to find her way back to her. She defies society's standards and that is beautiful. I loved it. Zhen Ni and Lan aren't the only two cozying up. Sky finds herself in quite a timid romance between a young man she meets in the forest, Kai Sen and I say timid because Sky has enough going on without adding a romance into the mix. Needless to say, she's hesitant to fully committing to Kai Sen. To trusting him fully. To defying society's standards when she's already stuck between a rock and a hard place being a handmaid who can never marry and having the newfound secret that she can shape shift into a serpentine and is a demon. There's a lot on Sky's shoulders and I really enjoyed watching the weight slowly get heavier and heavier and see how she handled it all. The story flowed seamlessly as Sky and Kai Sen tried to figure out what their differences to the rest of the world meant for them especially during a time when the door to the underworld was open. And then the story really picked up as Zhen Ni left her home without telling anyone after a certain incident involving Lan. So Sky must not only figure out how to embrace her serpentine side but figure out what her role is in closing the door between the human world and the underworld, as well as search for Zhen Ni since ultimately, Zhen Ni is her responsibility and without Zhen Ni, Sky believes she doesn't have a place in the Yuan home. It's a lot but as the reader, it never feels like the journey is overwhelming. This isn't easy to do so bravo for the wonderful pacing and layering here. I also really enjoyed the setting, the world building, and the Chinese mythology that breathed life into all of the above. I'm not as familiar with the Chinese mythology that this story was inspired by as I should be and I'm inspired now more than ever to do my research and learn more. Also, I can't remember the last time I read a fantasy that wasn't inspired by European mythology so refreshing is putting it lightly. Talk about a winner. Serpentine is such a riveting tale about secrets and sacrifice and stepping away from society's standards to embrace all that we are and all that we have to offer. It's a thought provoking tale about what happens when people aren't given a chance to show that they're against the grain and on your side, what happens when people are punished for being against the grain. It's quite a dance on both sides of the floor,

that's for sure. Serpentine is a fully immersive reading experience, so grab your snacks and prepare to sit down with this baby until you reach the very end.

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