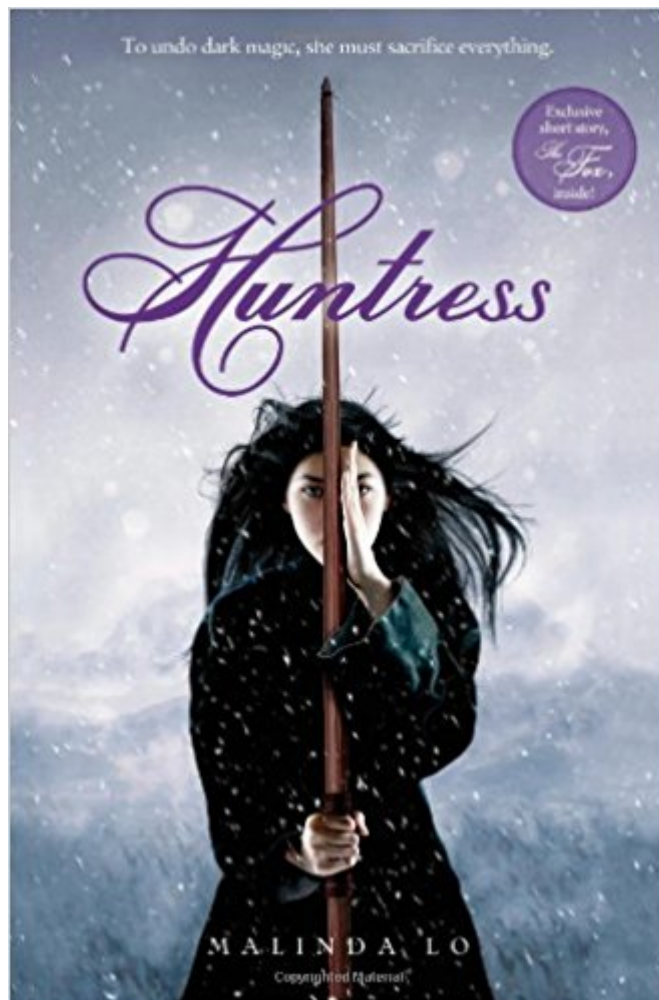


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# Huntress



## Synopsis

Nature is out of balance in the human world. The sun hasn't shone in years, and crops are failing. Worse yet, strange and hostile creatures have begun to appear. The people's survival hangs in the balance. To solve the crisis, the oracle stones are cast, and Kaede and Taisin, two seventeen-year-old girls, are picked to go on a dangerous and unheard-of journey to Tanlili, the city of the Fairy Queen. Taisin is a sage, thrumming with magic, and Kaede is of the earth, without a speck of the otherworldly. And yet the two girls' destinies are drawn together during the mission. As members of their party succumb to unearthly attacks and fairy tricks, the two come to rely on each other and even begin to fall in love. But the Kingdom needs only one huntress to save it, and what it takes could tear Kaede and Taisin apart forever. The exciting adventure prequel to Malinda Lo's highly acclaimed novel *Ash* is overflowing with lush Chinese influences and details inspired by the *I Ching*, and is filled with action and romance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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Huntress is a low stress, fairly simple young adult book about two girls who go on a quest to save their kingdom and happen to fall in love with each other along the way. The book starts with Taisin, a seventeen year old training to be a sage, having a vision. She sees herself watching a girl she loves deeply row away to what's probably her death. Taisin's vision is proven to be crucial

to a journey to visit the Fairy Queen, a visit that the kingdom hoped to save the kingdom from starvation and the strange and dangerous creatures that have started to appear along the border. Taisin, Kaede, the king's son, and three guards are thus packed off on this dangerous quest. *Huntress* has both its good points and bad points, but I'll start with the good points. For one, I liked the atmosphere of the world. Lo was able to communicate well the threat the kingdom was under, the coldness, the perpetually grey sky | the Great Woods really evoked a sense of darkness and malevolence. I also liked how the magic was set up and tied into the world. I liked the major characters all right, even if they never really came alive to me. Taisin, Kaede, and Con (the prince) all had basic personalities and were at least distinguishable from one another. *Huntress* also benefits from being something different than the normal YA fantasy fare " how many books are there in an Asian based setting where the two female protagonists fall in love? I also liked how the drama between Taisin and Kaede wasn't because they were both girls. The world Lo created doesn't seem to have any homophobia, and the drama instead due to Taisin wanting to become a sage, which means taking a vow of chastity. Also, Con wasn't in unrequited love with one of the lesbian protagonists. So kudos for that. For the bad points | *Huntress* has third person omniscient POV that shifts around constantly. I actually didn't find it annoying in here as I have in other books. As a result of the vision that Taisin has in the beginning, there's a sort of paradoxical instalove. Taisin has feelings for Kaede before she even knows Kaede. At least on Kaede's part things were more gradual. The villain was incredibly weak and underdeveloped. Plus, there was a long monologue near the end. Urgh. Speaking of the end, the climatic Grand Confrontation felt very brief. It needed more depth and time spent on it. Most of the book was spent on characters traveling to the climatic Grand Confrontation, which also was pretty vague and mystical " sort of like what Robin McKinley writes for her confrontation scenes. This next paragraph is vague but might be considered spoilers, so read at your own risk. I wasn't happy with the ending. I get that it was realistic in the the future is uncertain, I think. A choice may have been made at the end, but the character's decision was not explained, which leaves me confused to as if there even was a decision. I also feel like the idea of a possible third choice was being set up, but it was not explored. Overall, I would have liked the ending to be more wrapped up. I would recommend this to people looking for a romance subplot between two girls, non-white characters, or girls going on an adventure.

This is the prequel to *Ash*, which I have shorthanded as "the bisexual Cinderella story". My mental

title for this book was "Ask More Questions". We have two viewpoint characters: Taisin, a farmgirl with magical talent, and Kaede, a nobleman's daughter fighting against her conventional marriage-of-convenience fate because she is not attracted to men and because she wants to decide her own destiny. They set off on a journey to meet the Queen of the Fairies and try to save their world from an endless killing winter. The quest narrative rolls on, but there are some unexpected turns. They lose members of their party. Kaede, in particular, has to come to terms with her calling to kill fae. She is a reluctant killer, and it bothers her, but I think the book could have benefited from Kaede deciding whether she was going to be used for other people's purposes, or because she is making reasoned decisions. She seems unduly trusting of the Fairy Queen's word about what's going on in the world. She never seems to want confirmation that the people she is sent after need to be killed. There is a sweet star-crossed lovers romance, and I applaud Lo for not going with some lazy love-conquers-all ending. There are more complications than that, even though both women acknowledge they love each other. They are not having problems because of some contrived miscommunication, they have real and legitimate conflicting interests. I like how they appear to be resolving it. In the end, Kaede goes on a quest with the Queen's Huntsman. I wanted to know more about the Huntsman, and how he came to love the queen, and what he thinks of his job. One of the problems with YA is that there is not usually room in the books for three extra chapters to develop a minor character. I thought about Robin McKinley while I was reading this book. I thought it shared some common flavors, while going in a different direction. I think if McKinley had written it, there would have been only one viewpoint character. I don't know if that would make it less rich or more direct. There is a lot of room in this story for us to write our own outcomes, and the world, although lightly sketched, is a place that seems easy to populate. I like books that don't answer all the questions. The world is a tiny bit asian-flavored, instead of being vaguely medieval-european. They cook rice while traveling, and the important mythical animals are phoenixes and unicorns, not lions and dragons. A special note on the cover: As opposed to *Ash*, which had a very vulnerable-looking girl on the cover, the cover for *Huntress* delights me. It is fierce, direct, strong. I assume it's Kaede, and she looks ready to take on all comers. Read if: You like a good quest story. You are tired of relentlessly heteronormative stories. You enjoy watching people play with fairy tale tropes like Legos. Skip if: You like your protagonists wary. You like your endings tidy. You are looking for an in-depth interrogation of fairy.

*Huntress* is a solid YA fantasy with the added interest of a lesbian relationship between the two main characters. I always appreciate encountering diversity in the books I read, so this element was

a big plus. I feel it was handled well. Overall, the first 2/3 of the book were quite strong and compelling. Unfortunately the final 1/3 fell flat, for me. My pet peeves of phrase repetitions, passive voice, and head hopping seemed to become more frustrating as the story line faltered. Nevertheless, the better aspects of this novel (unique relationships, detailed world-building, and strong female characters) earn it four stars.

I read Ash a few weeks ago and was so in love with the universe, tone, and the characters that I had to immediately order Huntress. I am so unbelievably pleased that I did!! Like in Ash, there's absolutely stunning world-building in Huntress. The characters are beautifully written and they instantly worm their way into your heart, refusing to ever leave. I am convinced that the fantasy and magic described in the story itself are actually woven into the words on the page at hand. Quite honestly Malinda Lo has ruined me for all other new authors. Seriously. Where else can I go to find breath-taking, LGBT, feminist, sci-fi/fantasy coming-of-age tales??? POINT ME IN THE DIRECTION AND I WILL GLADLY DEVOUR ANY AND ALL OTHER STUNNING STORIES FROM OTHER AUTHORS! RIGHT NOW, I ONLY HAVE EYES FOR MALINDA LO, THOUGH!!! While it's not in the same universe, I am looking forward to reading Adaptation ASAP! I just know I am going to adore everything it chooses to be. ;-)

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