

The Hyldr Chronicles 1: Bride of Lightning

by Lachesis Helwood

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Book Review By Michael Orlando Yaccarino

Misty forests wherein spectral contact is made...gargantuan, viridescent snakes equipped with venom-dripping fangs...dangerously deadly warlords content to employ familicide with similar ease as quaffing a goblet of smoky, honeyed mead. This is the world of *The Hyldr Chronicles*. Author Lachesis Helwood describes the writer's first full-length work as a "Grimdark Mythological Horror Romance injected with Sci-Fi mystery." Helwood's is also known as Lady IX, who provides galvanizing compositions and vocals for the Euro-based gothic metal band Hyldr, as well as more recently on solo and collaborative projects. And quite fascinatingly, unlike the band's other members, Helwood's identity is wrapped—literally—in mystery, appearing on stage with half facemask and Asian-style robes.

The projected series' inaugural volume of *The Hyldr Chronicles* tracks the perilous adventures of Kyōko. Possessed of an innate ability to connect with the dead, she is a self-reliant lone wolf surviving largely without allies in a brutally predatory universe. The remarkable fusion of Nordic-Japanese folklore of this ever-evolving odyssey was first launched and established through Lady IX's Hyldr discography. So while this book is a standalone work, the text and the band's output most certainly illuminate each other with flickering blue torchlight.

Most assuredly, admirers of the Grimdark subgenre will be well sated by *Bride of Lightning's* bloody banquet offering a toothsome variety of its most intriguing characteristics. The reader is absorbed into a doomed universe unruled by moral codes of any kind and filled with nearly hyper realistic violence. But Helwood reshapes the Grimdark formula by darkly adorning the tragic tale with fantastical creatures and the merging of the experiential realities of its characters to include communication with those occupying other dimensions. The author also applies a deft hand with deliciously idiosyncratic twists of sardonic humor throughout. And overall, *Bride of Lightning* is remarkable for its masterfully rendered poetic writing. Following is a passage among countless others exemplifying an author adept with the uncommon ability to construct exceptional language equally worthy of being sung or read:

The black swan travelled through the incandescent soil and splashed out of the lava that was about to drape Hilda's bones. Time had frozen around Hilda and she was trapped within a shrinking egg of stifling air. Nearly all Hilda's skin had melted. Dark weeds sprouted from her shoulder blades and four slender wings floated Hilda over the well. Fangs of fire curled out of the Howling Cauldron and a green gloss returned once more on both of Hilda's bulging eyes.

The Hyldr Chronicles 1: Bride of Lightning is a laudable artistic achievement, especially as the first book in an author's output. Surely, now the waiting begins for Book 2. Helwood should be congratulated—perhaps most appropriately by a murder of ebony ravens and pack of snarling wolves.

—Michael Orlando Yaccarino, genre film journalist and author of *Heart Vision: Tarot's Inner Path*