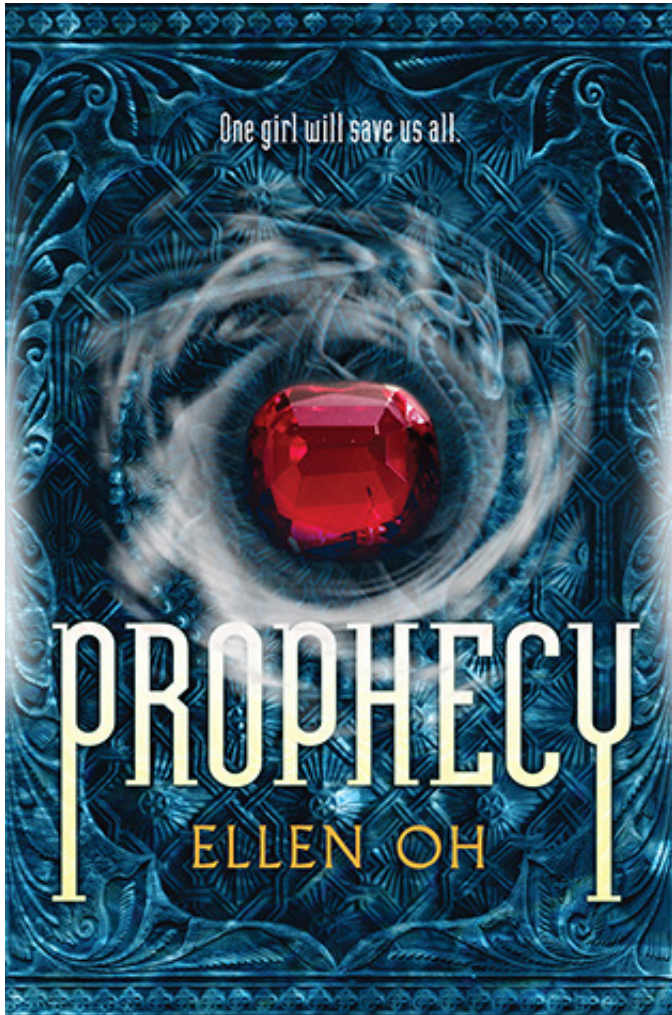


Review: Prophecy by Ellen Oh



Kira's the only female in the king's army, and she's also the prince's bodyguard. A demon slayer and an outcast, she's hated by nearly everyone in her home city of Hansong. And she's their only hope. . . .

Murdered kings and discovered traitors point to a demon invasion, sending Kira on the run with the young prince. He may be the savior predicted in the Dragon King's prophecy, but the legendary lost ruby treasure just might be the true key to victory. With only the guidance of the cryptic prophecy, Kira must battle demon soldiers, an evil shaman, and the Demon Lord himself to find what was once lost, while raising a prince into a king.

Another fantasy read, this time set in an Asian-inspired world. *Prophecy* is the first installment in the *Dragon King Chronicles* trilogy.

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I was drawn to this book by the setting. Most of the high fantasy novels I've read take place in worlds inspired by medieval Europe. While these settings can certainly be enjoyable (I happen to be a huge fan of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series), they're a dime a dozen, so it's always nice to see some variety.

Hansong, home of the protagonist, Kira, is inspired by medieval Korea. Interestingly, rather than inventing her own language for the people of Hansong, Oh opts to use Korean words to refer to various parts of their culture, such as "hanbok" (a traditional Korean garment). Because Kira is a demon slayer, the novel features or mentions several creatures from Korean mythology including the haetae (fire-eating dog), the imoogi (dragon/snake hybrid), and the kumiho (nine-tailed fox demon, which Kira is often mistaken for because of her strange yellow eyes).

I quite liked Kira. She's strong and courageous, but lonely and deeply insecure -- the type of character I've always had a soft spot for. However, I found the reason for her loneliness and insecurity a bit confusing. All the demons she slays have possessed human bodies, and Kira alone is able to recognize them as demons; to everyone else, they appear to be ordinary humans, so Kira is feared and despised as a murderer. This would make sense if not for the second line of the novel: "They called her the Demon Slayer to her face and much worse behind her back." This implies that the people of Hansong know Kira is killing demons, not humans. If this is the case, why do they hate her so much? Adding to the confusion is the scene where Kira first slays a demon and the onlookers, who had been jeering her moments before, thank her and bow their heads in unison.

Nonetheless, I found Kira's strength, compassion, and fierce loyalty to her family, particularly her cousin Prince Taejo, quite endearing. Taejo himself is also a well-written character -- a bit of a brat, but this is understandable considering he's only twelve years old, and it's balanced out with likable traits that made me want to protect him as much as Kira did. He matures quite a bit throughout the book, ultimately emerging as the deuteragonist. I also enjoyed the characters of Kira's father, her older brother Kwan, and Jaewon, a boy she meets on her journey with a secret tragic past. Kira and Jaewon's relationship has romantic undertones, but they're subtle, and Kira's focus never strays from her duty to protect Taejo.

Along with my confusion over the people's hatred of Kira, I found the lack of important female characters somewhat troubling. I would have liked to see more of Kira's relationships with her mother and aunt. But overall, this is a solid debut novel, worth reading for the intriguing Asian-inspired setting, likable characters, and emphasis on familial love.

Rating: Three and a half out of five stars