

## WHY WE LOVE *Monstress Vol. 1: Awakening*

*Monstress Vol. 1: The Awakening*, written by Marjorie Liu and beautifully illustrated by Sana Takeda, takes readers on a gripping journey through a war-torn, alternate fantasy realm that blends steampunk and Asian mythology. The story delves into profound themes of prejudice and feminism in a world shattered by a devastating war between the Arcanics, magical beings, and the oppressive Cumaea, sorceresses who exploit their powers.

Set in a postwar wasteland of slavery and segregation, the story follows Maika Halfwolf, a mysterious and powerful Arcanic seeking to unravel the secrets of her past. As she embarks on her perilous quest, Maika faces betrayals and discovers hidden truths about the world's intricate history, and her own. Battling with her dark powers and the allure of vengeance, she grapples with her identity and purpose.

*Monstress* impresses with its rich world-building, incorporating diverse races, various sources of magic, and gods and demons that shape the protagonist's destiny. The narrative effortlessly weaves complex mythology reminiscent of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* while maintaining a swift pace that captivates readers.

Despite its fantastical nature, *Monstress* draws parallels with reality. It explores a brewing war and the manipulation of information, resonating with contemporary issues. The story prompts readers to contemplate violence, prejudice, and the dangers of demonizing others, urging us to value loyalty, trust, and open-mindedness.

Liu's own experiences growing up as a person with a mixed heritage influenced the story. Maika's struggles as an outsider echo the author's feelings of not fitting into any specific group. Maika may even gain her power from her marginal position. There is a literal monster slumbering inside her body, and when the monster emerges, terrible things happen. Her connection with a monstrous power raises the question: is her power one she can control, or does it control her?

*Monstress* holds a strong political message, encouraging readers to rethink gender and race norms. It challenges the notion of resolving differences through violence and narrow-mindedness, emphasizing the importance of friendship, loyalty, and perseverance to combat looming chaos.

With its visually stunning illustrations and emotionally charged storytelling, *Monstress Vol. 1: The Awakening* masterfully blends epic fantasy, dark magic, and themes of identity and prejudice. Its intricate myths, dense history, intricate myths, dense history, and gripping political relationships, culminating in an immersive world that fantasy enthusiasts will love. It's thought-provoking narrative urges readers to contemplate important societal issues, making it a must-read for those seeking both entertainment and enlightenment.

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