


## Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	<b>A Voice that Thunders</b>
Author	<b>Cully Mack</b>
Date	<b>June 2020</b>
Stars	

'A Voice That Thunders' by Cully Mack is an ambitious debut into adult fantasy fiction. On one level it is a love story set against war. On another it introduces beings from another realm who behave like powerful gods. We also encounter a young man destined to become a saviour who might end the cruelty and evil that pervades this dislocated world. There is magic too, in the form of elemental manipulation which brings its own dangers.

It's a lot to handle, certainly for a first-time author. For the most part, Cully Mack succeeds with passion and sensitivity. The story is well written, it has a pleasing, simple style which doesn't impose on the flow of events.

The story leads us through a world dominated by the god-like Shemyaza, who gathers tithes – in the form of young women - who serve him as warriors. The story follows Mirah, one of the tithes, and the other girls abducted from their homes by the giant Nephilim and Nate, Shemyaza's stepson to whom Mirah finds herself attracted.

Nothing is as it seems though. As the story progresses what Mirah believes to be true is slowly shown to be a lie. She also develops into something more than the helpless young woman abducted from her home. It's a means to keep the reader guessing as the second half of the story unfolds into a complex narrative told from different points of view.

There are a couple of factors that spoiled the story for me though. First of all, is Mirah's readiness to forgive the man who led the annihilation of her family and friends. It's a case of Stockholm Syndrome, where the hostage falls in love with the abductor. I didn't find it credible. It was too much of a plot device for me. Her initial distrust and subsequent anguish is too readily dismissed. The second half of the story only compounds this issue as the person Mirah has apparently given up on, as she accepts her new home, reappears.

Secondly, the second half of the story is too rushed. Mirah's brother, Gabe, has a huge role to play in the story yet we see little of him. We meet him in the opening chapter and then he disappears for half the story. Yet his role is crucial. When we meet him again, he is a different person, he's grown and changed yet we discover this entirely through exposition. He has the role of a joint protagonist but isn't treated as such.

The story lacks balance for this reason; the first half indulges too long in Mirah's development and her relationship with Nate. This happens at the expense of Gabe's character. It's a shame because the second half is exciting, ambitious and offers lots of potential for the series. This book is also an entry into SPFB06.