



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	Wrath of Storms
Author	Steven McKinnon
Date	July 2019
Stars	

I loved *Symphony of the Wind*, in my view it should have been the winner in SPFBO4. But *Wrath of Storms* is even better. It is a masterpiece in storytelling and establishes Steven McKinnon as the heir to Joe Abercrombie's throne. So, why a masterpiece in storytelling?

First of all, the characters. Without them being vulnerable, without caring for them deeply, without them being real, you cannot create tension. The threat level won't be high enough. In Book 1 we got to know Serena, Gallows, Damien and the others, understood some of what drove them. Now, Serena and Damien are forced to confront those motivations head on. They are dangerous, destructive and have the power to destroy many others. Yet they are lost if they don't confront them. It's a wonderful, terrible ethical conundrum.

People who were minor characters before are given more of the spotlight this time. Characters like Buzz, Valentine, Tiera are flawed in different ways but also normal in their attempts to do what seems right at the time, often finding those priorities change as the world changes around them. And then having to deal with the consequences of those actions. These are character studies of people suffering trauma – and we see it through their eyes. Trauma that is always visceral.

Then there's the world building. What some might label a steampunk genre (I don't think it is but what do I know?) has, at its foundation, geology. We're introduced to variations on the ignicite mineral and discover they represent greater dangers but also potential benefits. Except the ambitious and powerful are using it for all the wrong reasons – where have we heard that before? The filaments of these resources stretch and penetrate all aspects of society, not just in Dalthea, where Book 1 began, either.

I mentioned threat levels earlier and this is where the world building ramps up the storytelling by introducing so many more threats to all the characters mentioned here. The best stories have strong, powerful villains who are evil, ruthless, cruel and without any ethical dilemmas in committing crime. Steven McKinnon has cornered the market in Villain Making. Here's an example, where the mayhem, murder and misfortune prompts Korvan to say, "I'll sit upon the throne until I get bored, which won't be for *at least* a fortnight."

Put these things together and you have a story that never eases up, the foot remains firmly pressed down on the accelerator. To give you some idea, the final 25% of the book is the climax. Where an action set piece a third of the way through is what other writers would use as a climax! It is relentless, visceral, exciting beyond words. What more could you want?