



Drift

M.K. Hutchins

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Tenjat lives on the shores of Hell, an ocean filled with ravenous naga monsters. His island, a massive Turtle, is slowed by the people living on its back. Only those poor enough to need children to support themselves in old age condescend to the shame of marriage. Tenjat is poor as poor gets, but he has a plan.

In the center of the island rises a giant Tree, where the Handlers—those who defend and rule the island—live. Against his sister's wishes, Tenjat joins the Handlers. He couldn't have picked a more dangerous time. The Turtle is nearing a coral reef where it desperately needs to feed, but the naga will swarm just before they reach it. Even novices like Tenjat are needed for the battle.

Can Tenjat discover his sister's secrets in time? Will the possibility of love derail all his plans for a richer, marriage-free life? Long-held secrets will at last be revealed in this breathtaking debut from M. K. Hutchins.

Drift Details

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Lucy says

This book. I swear, I don't know whether I wanted to finish the book or throw it across the room at various points while I was reading it.

First of all, let's start off with the good parts. The cover is gorgeous, I loved the premise of worlds on the back of giant sea turtles and the twist at the end where we find out where the turtles came from and how the people came to be was completely unexpected and I loved it. Yes, the revelations could have been spread out more rather than chunked in the last quarter of the book but I liked the info.

Now it's rant time.

- Tenjat. Why such an asshole? Not even the good kind where you can see why and then he grows and becomes better. And love interest, Avi, isn't that much better especially when she talks about hubs getting what they deserve (i.e. beatings and death) and it wasn't called out. There was one point of the book where I thought Tenjat would go 'that's my sister you're talking about' and leave her for good but it never happened and Avi never properly apologised for it.

- Tenjat's sister whose name I cannot remember. Literally there to hold back information until the 'right' time and to cause Tenjat several shocks. Not saying Tenjat didn't deserve it but it didn't seem like his sister liked him very much at all and the relationship felt very unequal.

- worldbuilding. I said this is a bit I liked but that's mostly because of the premise. In this world of *Drift*, those who have children are slowing down the turtle. Too many people on the turtle means the turtle starves and they all die. This taboo against having children was so interesting but then it was done in such a way that it became far more frustrating than anything else.

First of all, why are no gay/lesbian relationships mentioned? Two women having sex, two men having sex, don't result in children. It's just assumed that anyone having sex is having children and it's never really thought of outside of there.

Second of all, everyone on the turtle came from a parent. Why didn't Hutchins base his worldbuilding on real-life events like China's One Child Policy? Why did he make people with children so demonised that the fact everyone was born from someone is never even mentioned?

Thirdly, if Handlers and Tenders were so rare, why not go the whole dystopia route and just draft people into the Tree?

Fourthly, why is there no mention of any way of stopping pregnancy? I mean, later revelations explain it but before that there is no mention of contraception, abortion or casual sex even. You can't just skip over these and expect people not to notice!

- evil bad guy on evil turtle. I can't remember his name either but he wasn't mentioned as a possible villain until the last 50 pages it felt like. If you're going to have a villain like that, you have to mention it earlier and build up to it.

Okay, I'm done. I found this book incredibly slow and I probably wouldn't recommend it to anyone. 2 stars!

Constance says

I got this from the library on a whim. I didn't expect much from it. I ended up loving it. A wonderful world and surprising plot twists. Did I always love the characters? No. Was it a bit simplistic in some ways? Yes. But I'm really glad I read it. It was really unique from a lot of the run of the mill YA out there, and that counted for a lot to me, because I've been missing unique.

Katie says

The World Turtle exists in several cultures, namely the Mayan and Hindu cultures. The idea is that the world rests on the back of a giant, space-faring turtle. I first heard this myth about two and a half years ago, and was intrigued by the idea. It wasn't until I picked up a copy of *Drift* at the library and saw the beautiful cover, featuring a sea turtle with an island on its back, that the story came back to me, and I knew I just had to read this book.

Drift is a tough book to rate. On the one hand, once I started reading, I knew I wanted to finish, but there were some parts that made me squirm. Allow me to extrapolate my meaning.

The concept is certainly original and fresh. Inspired by Mayan mythology, villages exist on the backs of giant sea turtles, with one enormous tree growing out of the center of the turtle's back. Each turtle swims on the surface of Hell (in naga-infested waters) from coral reef to coral reef, grazing and feeding. If the turtle is eating well and often, crops are abundant on the island, and all is well. However, if a warring island's turtle is already at a reef, or if reefs are few and far in between, a turtle can go too long without proper sustenance, and then the crops on the island start to fail and the turtle becomes slower and weaker, making it vulnerable for a hostile take-over by another island.

The turtle island is tended by Handlers, Tenders, and artisans, all of whom live in or around the main Tree. Spread out across the island are cassava farmers, many of which are also "hubs" or "husbands." In *this* world, it is a shame for a man to marry and bear children; one, because it means he did not have the talent or skill to make it as an island care-taker, and two, because bearing children means the turtle has a heavier load to carry, thereby slowing it down, affecting both the health of the crops and the safety of the island.

Tenjat and his sister, Eflet, are orphans. Though Tenjat is a farmer, he is determined to do more; never would he condescend himself to become a filthy hub. Against Eflet's wishes, he enters training at the Tree to become a Handler. Then, life gets complicated. Island Guaji is starving, an approaching island seeks a hostile take-over, and the root-eating, blood-thirsty nagas are making matters worse. In the middle of this, Tenjat must deal with his growing attraction to Avi, his mentor, and his discovery of a life-changing family secret that Eflet holds. Can the island be saved? What is Eflet hiding? Does love have any place in a world where marriage and children are symbols of shame?

I do not typically choose to write a synopsis of the book in my review, but I feel the cover synopsis didn't quite do the job. There is, of course, a lot more to the story, but it's not my story to tell. On to my review...

The world-building in *Drift* was pretty darn wonderful in most parts, and lacking in others. As I read further, I could almost feel the Tree swaying with each stroke of the turtle's fins, smell the decaying cassava fields, and glimpse the fangs of the nagas in the swirling darkness of Hell. I *almost* wish I lived in a village on the back of a giant turtle (minus the nagas!) One disappointment was the logic behind the disgust towards those who chose to marry and bear children. It makes sense that more weight would slow the turtle down, but why were only farmers having children? If everyone in and around the Tree was so talented, why didn't *they* have children, to carry on the superior gene pool and further secure the protection of the island? Also, not everyone who marries has children. Why the disgust, then, towards *everyone* who married? Finally, where did all of these people think they came from?!

Unfortunately for this character fangirl, the characters in *Drift* left a lot to be desired. There's not one specific thing I can put my finger on, but I think I felt the characters to be too one-dimensional. Tenjat's constant hub-hating was grating on my nerves, especially since he was taken in by a "hub" when he was orphaned, and Efler's unwavering goodness was too saccharine for my digestive system. I also felt that none of the characters, with the exception of a certain farmer and a certain little boy, ever went through any real heartache or trauma. I was happy to see the mindset of the community changing by the end of the book, but do feel that the ending was buttoned up rather nicely, and it all just felt a bit convenient.

There is definitely an odd religious feel to the plot, with Handlers and Tenders claiming their "treasures" from Deep Hell. The explanation for the existence of the nagas and imps is, actually, a little disturbing and rather confusing. And don't get me started on the "sacrifice" that both Efler and Tenjat make when dealing with the nagas toward the end of the book. Suffice it to say that if anyone has suffered a miscarriage or stillborn baby, you may want to avoid this book purely for emotion-triggering reasons.

After reading my review, it may seem that I didn't like *Drift* enough to give it even three stars, but it does earn bonus points for originality and world-building, and for keeping me reading until the end with sustained interest. I say, you may want to give this one a try, even if just from a curiosity aspect. Many readers loved this book, and you may, too!

Beth Cato says

Hutchins has created an incredibly unique fantasy setting for her Young Adult debut. The vibe reminds me a lot of Diana Wynne Jones--fantastical to a weird, creepy extreme. Some of the inspiration comes from Mayan mythology, with islands set on turtles. The concept of "tending to the land" takes on new meaning when your land is a turtle that needs to feed itself and the giant world tree on its back.

Tenjat is a teenage boy who is utterly devoted to his sister. He's a bit like Luke in Star Wars Episode IV--impetuous, whiny, but with good intentions at heart. He wants to be a Handler for his island and assist in fighting off nagas. The protagonist of the book might be a young man, but the wisdom and fighting prowess is demonstrated by the young women of the cast, namely his sister Efler and trainer Avi.

The tension in the story increases dramatically about halfway through; I didn't want to put the book down! The biggest criticism I have is that the shame of marriage within the world feels heavy-handed at times. There were some crazy, weird revelations as the plot develops, the kind that take you aback but make sense in retrospect. It's the kind of edgy world-building that keeps you from getting complacent. Good stuff.

Erik says

I was somewhat disappointed with this book. There's some interesting world-building and mythology-building going on here, but the pacing, the characters, and the writing just don't do the world justice.

We learn a little bit of how the world works at the beginning of the book, but the rest of the details are hidden from the main character for a large part of the story. Those secrets aren't slowly uncovered, but instead just dumped on the reader in a couple large blocks of explanation. The first infodump happens about halfway through the book, and without the full explanation (which only happens just before the final climax), what you get seems weirdly arbitrary and kind of awkward.

I find the central premise (a world where having a family is a social taboo) intriguing, but Hutchins doesn't quite sell it, as far as I'm concerned. All the characters seem to equate child-bearing with sex and romantic love, as if it never occurred to anyone that sexual activity could happen without having children, that two people could be in love without having children, or that sex might ever happen outside of a monogamous relationship. And while I understand that this is supposed to be a young adult novel, every reference to sex feels like it was written by a young child who's only conception of sex is that it's something mommies and daddies do to make babies.

Much of the world feels like it wasn't fully fleshed out. Hutchins came up with the idea of turning the word "husband" into the derogatory term "hub", and while that's a nice touch, it seems to be the only insult anyone in the world ever uses. All the farmers seem to have only one crop most of the time. And every person who violates the taboo on having sex/children seems to have done so for the exact same reason.

If Hutchins has any experience with the way boys bully each other, it didn't really make it into the book. Refusing to talk to someone is certainly no small thing, but if you put a bunch of teenage boys into a school where they're being trained to fight, I guarantee it's not going to be the only ostracization strategy in use.

And it's really a shame because the world Hutchins has imagined is a pretty unique one, and there's almost no chance to explore it at all in the book because it's completely hidden until the book is almost over.

Hannah Givens says

In the world of subsistence farming, children are valuable as extra work. Poorer families have more kids, rather than fewer. Drift throws a wrench in the works by making the land a scarce resource -- her people live on the backs of enormous turtles, and if there are too many kids, the turtle could be overfarmed and even sink. The upper classes don't have children because they can support themselves in their old age, or if they're artisans, they have apprentices to do that. Even the subsistence farmers are shunned if they have more than a few kids. So, there's a really interesting class dynamic where there's a pressure to have kids, but also a pressure not to have them. However, even though the writing is generally good, we're beaten over the head with the premise, and every time something is mentioned, it's described AGAIN.

What bothers me more are the gender roles in the book. Celibacy is challenged, but the gender roles aren't, and that bothers me. There are men's roles and women's roles, both magically and in day-to-day farming. There are "hubs" or husbands, and then also their wives... "hub" is a derogatory term for men, but women who marry are just "hub-makers." It's all about the man's shame in marrying, the women are secondary.

I did like that we have a bigoted main character who learns not to be prejudiced against the poor and married. However, the message of the book is that it's normal and desirable for everyone to marry and have kids. Sure, people shouldn't be shamed when they do that, or forced not to, and I appreciate the message of peace and negotiation allowing for family life instead of warriors, but is "it's okay to get married and have kids!" really a message kids desperately need to hear in this day and age? No. They need to hear that their value ISN'T solely in marriage and kids, and that if they choose something else, that's fine. This book never addresses characters who just DON'T want to have kids for their own reasons that have nothing to do with status. That bothers me too.

And what happens to LGBT people in this culture? One can surmise they have secret relationships like the secret marriage in the book, but that's just a surmise, even with all the extensive descriptions of the culture and who's reviled and who's not, there's no mention of any LGBT people existing at all. That bothers a lot.

Basically, it's a book with interesting worldbuilding and good YA-level writing, but the underlying assumptions are concerning.

Scott Walker says

Let me first say, that I judge books purely by the enjoyment I get from reading them. I read the whole thing in less than 24 hours, so I would definitely give it a 5/5. I hope I can convince you to find a copy yourself without giving anything away. (This review contains no spoilers!)

I got this shiny new book after my mother recommended it. (As a side note, I was pleasantly surprised by how cheap it was on Amazon). The cover is beautiful, but the world inside is truly amazing.

The characters and plot certainly have a lot of depth. The story comes from a simpler time where working hard for food consumed the majority of people's time. The societal structure has many similar elements to Mayan culture. For instance, most people farm, but warriors and artisans are the most respected positions. This social hierarchy becomes the basis of the conflict in the book. While some plots rely on truly evil characters who are evil for evil's sake (think of almost every Disney movie), Drift has characters and enemies with a variety of motivations. Conflict comes across realistically instead of contrived.

I mentioned the word realistic in my review of a book based on a community living on the back of a giant turtle? MK Hutchins makes her world real. There are economics, religion, social structures, and also magic. Unlike Harry Potter or Rick Riordan's novels, this world is not built on a modern 1st world country's alternative high school. Drift unfolds a reality as a completely unique and fascinating as our own with a different set of rules.

At one point in the novel, I almost stopped reading the book and yelled at the book, "No, not another Hunger Games!!" While Hutchins could have gone in that direction, she didn't. Drift doesn't ride on the success of a current fad like Divergent rides on the Hunger Games. In fact, I can't think of a good comparison. The plot has its own unique elements.

Ok, I do have a few complaints. If I read the word "hub" one more time, I'm going to smack someone. Seriously, these people have 20 different types of magic users and types of food, but one insult. If you've seen just a few episodes of Battlestar Galactica, you probably feel the same about the word "frack." It's just

as bad with "hub."

On a more neutral note, the author is LDS and it does shine through. Hutchins has nothing remotely dirty in this book. If a character curses, Hutchins says, "he cursed." Even violence is shoved to the side. While my favorite LDS author, Brandon Sanderson, would describe a battle or torture in gory detail, Hutchins would mention the event after it had passed. This book is written for young adults and any parent would be pleased by the contents.

Some people might say that the romance in the novel lacked development. I would argue that the romance fits the setting. Finding a spouse meant something very different to ancient Mayans than it does today. Hutchins makes no effort to make her character's lives similar to the modern teenager's lives for which it's written.

In conclusion, I recommend it. If you're reading this review and you know me personally - I might buy it for you. Seriously, I enjoyed it that much. If you're looking for something fresh, this book is for you.

Carolyn says

I got an Advance Reader Copy of this gorgeous book last week and was not disappointed. The story is as satisfying as the cover promises; I couldn't put it down! When this book is released in May, I'm buying a copy for everyone I know! (But if you are someone I know, then you should be aware that the previous statement was hyperbole so ... buy your own copy!)

I especially enjoyed the world building in this book. Discovering the truths of Tenjat's home along with him was magical. The ecology of a world built on the back of a giant turtle, as well as the deeper secrets of the universe, were explored masterfully. M.K. Hutchins put her imagination to work and created a setting that is both intriguing and carefully considered, then parcelled out its secrets at a delightful pace.

I adored the cast of characters; they were multi-dimensional and fun to read about. Many of them seem like good friends to me now and some of them have become mentors that will inspire me as I continue thinking about this book.

Of course, what I loved best was the exploration of marriage and childrearing. I'm a sucker for books about the importance of the family. It was interesting to read about a (fantasy) culture that strives for zero population growth because of a measurable ecological imperative and then to watch that conflict play out in the pages of the novel. Mini spoiler alert!!! I loved the way this conflict was resolved: with childrearing re-enforced as a sacred work rather than a distasteful prospect.

Good soul food.

Jessica Banfield says

I really, really love this book, and I honestly think not enough people know about it. I couldn't put it down. The world is so amazing to find out more and more about as the story continues, and the storyline is captivating. M.K Hutchins is so creative, and I encourage everyone who likes adventure/fantasy to read it.

Laurie Walker says

I couldn't put it down! I cared about the characters right from the first page. I like to guess at possible plot developments, but I don't like books to be too predictable. Drift did not disappoint! I loved the world setting. I am a diver and I love turtles and coral reefs. I liked how the turtle's health was connected to the health of the Island, the soil and the Island's people. I liked the novel's balance of relationships vs. adventure and great plot development. Tenjat grows up in a society with prejudice and bigotry; it takes a crisis for him to see that the world and people in it may not be what he has always thought they were. Tenjat finds out life really is what happens while you are making other plans...Just when you think you have your life map figured out you get a whole new atlas. I love fantasy fiction and I am so excited to find a new author that I love.

Hattie Woods says

It seems the world of young adult fiction has turned into a rat race for authors to contribute their own slightly different takes on the same ideas. No matter how interesting the original idea was, few authors are bringing anything fresh to the table.

Well, I can confidently say that Drift is wholly original and fresh. The world of the turtles, islands, and trees is such a strange one, and it was so fun to explore it with the characters! I can't say much about it without giving things away, but it's a fascinating, well-built place. Strangest of all, (and this isn't much of a spoiler) is the shame of marrying and having children. This is such an interesting conflict because it is an inherent standard of our own culture. To watch characters struggle with this as a "necessary evil" is one I've never seen before in a book.

The first third of the book sets us up in the world, knowing enough to be interested and get a taste of foreshadowing. Once our character, Tenjat, leaves for the Tree, there is twist after twist, reveal after reveal. I was impressed with the pacing and variety, how each twist enriched the setting and changed the characters and their opportunities. An unpredictable foreigner of a book, it was a joy to read!

Cillian says

1.5

Oi, it seems that YA lit was celebrating Saint Asshole's day and it brought them all together to play in this book.

Dear turtle on the cover,
Go fuck yourself.

As soon as I recovered from the nose bleeding seizure I was overcome with after seeing such an astonishingly beautiful cover, I was socked into another nose bleeding seizure after reading the fabulous

summary.

I vowed to myself that I would stop at nothing to get an ARC of this book. No matter the cost, no matter who or what I had to kill.

I believe in being purpose-driven.

So, my wish came true. I got the blessed ARC.

I read the damn ARC.

I have an opinion.

The world.

Gorgeous. Fabulous, competent world-building; a creative setting that includes certain aspects of Norse mythology and incredible magic system. It is due to the setting that I rounded my rating to 2 stars.

The islands were giant, live turtles that had to feed off coral reefs. The more populated the turtle, the slower it got; the slower it got, the more difficult it was for it to drift to the next coral reef to feed. And the longer it took to feed, the more the land suffered, especially for farmers who had no other means to support themselves and their families.

So, yeah, the concept was boss.

Along with the turtles, the ocean was plagued by ugly, bloodthirsty monsters which made it impossible to go anywhere near the water and there was also a huge tree in the middle of the island that was pretty much inspired by the Norse Yggdrasil tree which added a nice flavour to the world-building.

The writing.

Is Hutchins a good writer?

No.

Her writing can only be compared with chewing a piece of Styrofoam, without the thrill of having to scrape it off your mouth roof.

It was dry, passionless, and the dialogues were awkward and stiff.

There were many logic farts, too

The characters.

Well, this is when my praise over the the world building and cover goes to shit.

I said this before (view spoiler): main characters don't necessarily have to be nice, virtuous people we're all supposed to adore and admire. Even if all the characters in a book are nothing but a bunch of shitsacks, the author can still make it work.

I don't care to "connect" with the ALL the characters, and truthfully, there's no way I would ever be able to connect with a 17 year old boy who lives on a huge turtle and wants to become a Handler to spear sea monsters, right?

But, it is one thing to have imperfect, morally ambiguous characters and another to have these mockery of human beings that were portrayed as the heroes.

Tenjat was an asshole, a hypocrite, a bigot, an immature, phobic. douchebag idiot.

Oh, and he also loved repeating himself. I heard how much he hated "the hubs" probably a hundred times.

There was nothing remotely likeable in that guy, zero redeeming qualities and nothing worth giving a shit about.

He was a turd. Plain and simple.

And a very annoying one, too, since I had to spend 350+ pages trapped inside his head reading his endless, hateful speeches in which he never let decency and basic human qualities get in the way.

His love interest, Avi, was another piece of shit. I was bullied by Tenjat into liking this shell of a girl for about 300 pages. I mean, of course, telling and not showing is all we get, and I was supposed to *love* and admire this disgusting "heroine" because Tenjat said so.

In the end, Avi was even *worse* than Tenjat.

Avi was the reason why the Spanish Boots were invented: she was probably the most hateful, repulsive, sorry excuse for a person I've read about in YA as of late. If she and her hub-wannabe boyfriend would have died in the end--preferably painfully and slowly--my rating would have been 4 stars...never 5. I deserve to knock a star for all the mental suffering Tenjat's constant whining put me through, no?

I'm not sorry I read this; I know, could've fooled you, but I expected a lot, lot more.

Well, let that be a lesson to y'all, a book's amazing cover doesn't guarantee the quality of its content.

Thank you Tenjat and Avi for being over for ever. Please don't ever come back in the shape of a sequel or anything else other than two shrivelled corpses inside a recyclable plastic bag.

Over and out.

Koori no hi says

It was difficult to get into at the beginning. This was mostly because the setting was just so foreign that it took some time to wrap my head around. Once I had figured out how the setting played into the plot points of the story the whole thing flowed so much more easily and turned out to be a brilliant story. I give it four stars despite the slow start because it is so original.

Ninian Smith says

Great read I love the turtle island it was amazing and really well written

Dan Schwent says

On an ocean world where communities live on the backs of gargantuan sea turtles and survival is key, orphan farmer Tenjat finds his lands ruined and takes the test to become a Handler, one of the warriors that defends the Turtle. But with another Turtle heading in their direction, will the new crop of Handlers be ready to defend it in time?

I saw this on John Scalzi's The Big Idea and just had to read it. Villages on the backs of giant sea turtles? What's not to like?

The worldbuilding is both my favorite part of this book and the part that kept me from really enjoying it. Allow me to elaborate.

As I said above, I loved the idea of villages on the backs of sea turtles warring with each other and with the nagas, the creatures that harried the Turtles at every turn. I also thought the idea of Handlers and Tenders taking care of the rest of the islanders by protecting them was also very cool. The magic system was fairly unique.

Here's the part I didn't like: As with some other Young Adult books, I found some logical flaws in the

worldbuilding. Just as I found the faction system in Divergent to be illogical and the fact that the other three houses allowed Slitheren to exist among them knowing what buttheads they are, I just didn't buy the culture of the Turtles.

Survival is key on the Turtles and people become Handlers, Tenders, or Artisans if they have the aptitude and pass the test. Everyone else becomes farmers and are the only caste that breeds and they are looked down upon because of it. Huh? If survival is key, wouldn't you want the people with the talent breeding? Where do the inhabitants of the Turtles think babies come from? Also, this takes place in the chaste world of YA so there is no thought given to casual sex. Even if people on an island looked down on getting married, I guarantee there would still be people giving in to their throbbing biological urges.

All that aside, I still enjoyed the story of Tenjat rising from his orphan roots to become a handler. The romance with Avi was predictable and seemed bolted on but wasn't nauseating so I gave it a pass. I found the world refreshingly original, despite my problems with it. The ending was satisfying, if a bit pat.

The good and the bad balance out and since I liked it more than I disliked it, I'm giving it a three. It had to work for it, though.
