



# The Summer Goddess

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## **The Summer Goddess** Joanne Hall

When Asta's nephew is taken by slavers, she pledges to her brother that she will find him, or die trying. Her search takes her from the fading islands of the Scattering, a nation in thrall to a powerful enemy, to the port city of Abonnae. There she finds a people dominated by a sinister cult, thirsty for blood to feed their hungry god.

Haunted by the spirit of her brother, forced into an uncertain alliance with a pair of assassins, Asta faces a deadly choice – save the people of two nations, or save her brother's only son.

Coming Autumn 2016 from Kristell Ink!

## **The Summer Goddess Details**

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Author : Joanne Hall

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# From Reader Review The Summer Goddess for online ebook

## Dan says

Asta is a strong warrior and leader whose family and tribe is ripped apart when slavers make a bloody descent on their coastal settlement. Despite a public vow to recover the missing, she is soon betrayed and set on her mission in a way very different from her expectations. The book follows her as she struggles to find her nephew, accompanied by the echo of her murdered brother in her mind. The voyage takes her to many different places and she falls in with various characters for a few chapters at a time along the way. I wouldn't have minded spending more time with some of these people and places, but Asta isn't one to hang about. Her need to complete her task is the engine that drives the book, and Asta is relentless in her desire to accomplish it. This is a fast moving, incident packed novel, with a convincing picture of a preindustrial world scarred by slavery. Joanne Hall's previous novel made it onto the Gemmell Award longlist earlier this year, and David Gemmell's brand of story driven secondary world fantasy with the grit left in isn't a bad reference point for this at all. Here's to the shortlist next year!

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## Anindita, A Bohemian Mind at Work says

This review originally appeared in A bohemian mind at work

I received this free copy of ARC from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

A complicated plot is not everybody's cup of tea. This book progresses with the adventures of a female warrior, who is also the leader of her tribe. Asta is a protagonist who can roam around with her brother in the spirit world, takes on slavery, fake Gods, priests, and others abusing their position of power and exploiting the vulnerability of the starved and helpless. A group of assassins hired by the emperor of a distant land befriends Asta, the protagonist. With help from unexpected sources, against all odds, Asta achieves her goal of returning home with her nephew.

Ms. Hall has kept the pace of this book moderate but consistent. The reader will not lose interest, at the same time, will not be confused with the numerous events occurring within a short span.

Slavery is the focus of this book. Betrayal by Asta's fellow tribe member, greed leading to cruelty and abuse of power, are countered by Asta's love for her brother and her nephew, her faith in her brother's spirit, and staying true to her goal, no matter what.

The characters (one major, few significant supporting and many minor) develop gradually. The completeness of each character leaves the reader satisfied in the end. I have particularly liked the way Ms. Hall has handled the weak characters. By nature, their loyalty dangles in the tip of a sword, swaying with the wind of power. The antagonists either consider themselves helpless, or they exploit the powerless.

One can easily feel Asta's emotions as the story grows. From being the leader of her tribe, Asta becomes an unwilling goddess for her captors, voluntarily enters into the service of a mysterious and sinister priestess of a foreign temple, befriends assassins, escapes enslavement with their help, enters the temple again, willingly, and succeeds in overthrowing the evil power. The character of God, whom Asta bestows no faith, is suggestively some animal, who is forced to live in confinement within the temple and fed young children/adults bought from the slave market. I would have liked to have a clearer picture of this God, but the

air of suspense and mystery competently keeps up the fear factor. So can't complain much.

Rhodan, being still a child, throws tantrums, Finn is moody but protective, Illu is straight out of The Dark Brotherhood from Elder Scrolls games.

I must point out one aspect which is uncommon with female fantasy writers. There is no hero, or a male protagonist, even a supporting one. The only male characters appearing in Asta's life are dead or betray her in some way or are too insignificant. Romance is not the theme. While the author does explore tender feelings, she lets them die a natural death. The focus never shifts from the primary goal of Asta, to find her nephew and if possible, save her enslaved tribal subjects.

Ms. Hall has created the world different from the usual magical fantasy. In this book, we live with Asta in a tribal village in the seaside. The sea plays an important part in Asta's adventure. We cross the sea with Asta after our enslavement and become the goddess or a mere puppet in manipulative politician's hands. We cross the sea again and reach a foreign land where Asta faces the greatest threat of her life, almost reaches her goal but experiences a temporary failure, makes new friends and shows us how she keeps her promise.

Ms. Hall has not given us a lush, beautiful, romantic countryside. She has not spent pages of describing how extraordinary this fantasy world is. Instead, her locations are minimalistic, appropriate for each sequence of events and just descriptive enough to give us a clear understanding of the surroundings. The author makes sure we can correctly visualize the buildings where a majority of Asta's unfortunate experiences have happened, for e.g. the manse in Scattering, the temple in Abonnae, slave market and the house on the hill. This book is about human misery and helplessness, so pastures and waterfalls and gentle streams do not fit in this story.

Please read this. If you don't, you will miss something wonderful. If you like adventures, grimdark but not exceptionally gory or violent, if you don't care much about romance in fantasy, this is your book.

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## **Steven Poore says**

There's a reason Joanne Hall won Grimdark Magazine's inaugural Battle-Off Contest last year. And that, ironically, is because of the qualities of hope and perseverance that define her characters and stories. They're not numbed or drowned by the terrors and relentless grind of the world (Bakker), nor are they needlessly arch and flip in the face of danger (although that can be tremendous fun when done well - see KT Davies' Breed). Grimdark doesn't have to mean massive weights of metal and whirling pointy things and blood on every page either, but without that quality of hope, which Joanne imbues in the hearts of her protagonists and dangles in front of the reader across whole seas and continents, Grimdark fiction will always struggle to rise above the churn of the battlefield.

But: The Summer Goddess. There's so much packed into this standalone epic that it could easily have been another duology at least. With half her tribe seized by slave raiders, and betrayed by those who remain, Asta's vow to rescue her nephew and bring him home looks doomed from the very beginning. But despite the many distractions - deification on the barren isles of The Scattering, pregnancy, escape to Abonnae, enrolment as a temple novitiate - Asta's sight is firmly fixed on her goal. She never gives up, it's the one thing that sustains her. Sometimes she's so focused on her quest that events conspire to pull her back down

towards failure, and you'll be screaming at her in frustration when that happens, but Asta drives through failure and the fleeting successes she achieves throughout the book provide much-needed breathing spaces.

As I said, there's a lot packed into these pages. Not just *The Scattering* and *Abonnae*, but a distant Emperor tired of church domination, slave markets, cloaked assassins, and a hungry, insane god. Characters drop in and fly out, and there's a body count that will satisfy even the Grimmest of readers. Joanne weaves apparently disconnected episodes together into a grand break-in and battle set against a siege and does so with skill that tops last year's *Spark & Carousel*.

I say *The Summer Goddess* is a standalone, but there's more satisfaction to be had if you've read *The Art of Forgetting* first, because there's a lot of history tied into Asta's story. But even so, if you've not read Joanne Hall before, you can easily start here - this is the work of one of Britain's best modern fantasists entirely on top her game.

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### **Angelique Pacheco says**

I loved everything about this book. It was so beautifully descriptive that I really just took my time to savour it. I enjoyed the pace, the characters were richly woven and the world creation superb. I would honestly suggest this book to anyone who wants a good read that doesn't fall into a specific type of genre. This book has it all: Drama, Romance, Parenting, Action, Adventure and a little bit of Dystopian, all rolled into one. A fantastic read.

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### **Kate says**

This review was originally published at [writingandcoe](#), and I was given a free copy of the book in exchange for an honest review. That said, I say what I think!

*The Summer Goddess* isn't a *nice* story; it's gritty and hard and tough. No-one in *The Summer Goddess* ever catches much of a break – there's so much going on in the world that as soon as one crisis is starting to resolve, something else turns up, and then there's this god, and a mad sect, and slavers, and she's still got problems from previously, and she needs to find Rhodan...

The story didn't go where I expected it to from the first half, which was nice; it's not a particularly surprising twist, but rather one of those life-takes-you-on-strange-paths moves as Asta goes from *The Scattering* to *Abonnae*. The search for her nephew always stays at Asta's core, but the other problems pile on it, and we end up as torn as Asta is; trying to solve as many as possible, without knowing who to trust or where to turn. The plot never really follows the big decisions, which I also like – it's the small decisions, the little moments of conversation and of trust, that are the ones that make the larger calls. I like the lack of epicness and drama, and I loved that it's a story about one person that gets caught up in a wider tangle.

There's other stories lurking amongst the one that we follow, and I love that the wider world is always referenced. I felt that the other stories could easily have been followed – not that I wanted them to be, but it's nice when you get hints that the wider world is out there, and that the other characters have lives of their own. They all have their own motivations, which lends a nice depth. The other bonus is that *The Summer*

Goddess is set in the same universe as *The Art of Forgetting: Rider and Nomad*; it's actually the same family if you've previously read *The Art of Forgetting* and want to know more! But you don't need the history, and don't have to have read them – the story is easy to get. I loved the detail, too. The worldbuilding is wonderful as always, and I love the strangeness – no spoilers, but the temple and the God...urgh!

Overall? Like I said, it's not a nice story. There are sweet moments, and happy moments – but Asta's struggling, making decisions that she doesn't know will solve anything, and just trying to get back something that's important to her and her brother. It's tense, and exciting, and dramatic – but it's the small moments that catch at your heart, and it's the small decisions that make all the difference. Read it to be swept along and wanting to know what happens next; it'll tug at your heart and pull you into the world.

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### **Joel Cornah says**

I've read quite a few of Joanne Hall's books now and can definitely say she gets better with every one.

*The Summer Goddess* is an ambitious, audacious, and something-else-beginning-with-a book! Drawing on a number of different cultural traditions and settings, she breathes new life into her fantasy world and gives us a glimpse of the wider world she has created. What is more, she has a very strong set of characters populating it.

This is a much more serious story than the last of her books I read - *Spark and Carousel* - but there are still the occasional laughs. There was also a very neat reference back to *The Hobbit* - a very blink and you'll miss it line. But in tone and depth, this was a darker, more sinister tale, filled with some cruel moments as well as some heartstopping ones.

If I had to find a negative it would be that Asta, the protagonist' rarely acts of her own accord - she is either in prison, in slavery, or running to or from such a fate. Towards the end she gets more agency, though, and when she does she's pretty badass.

Overall, a great book from a great writer!

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### **R.B. Watkinson says**

This is a story about a woman called Asta, chief of her village after her father's death. She vows to her dead brother, now a spirit who piggy-backs within her, that she will find his son, six-year old Rhodan, taken by slavers in a raid, along with half of the village, and bring him home. But she is betrayed and taken by the raiders before her search begins.

On her journey from one land to another, she discovers that the world is vast, strange, and filled with beliefs other than the one Asta knows. One where Summer Goddess' are worshipped in hope of deliverance from famine, another where a hungry God requires regular sacrifices and its oppressive priesthood subjugates the people.

Asta is strong, fragile, intelligent, stupid, brave, reckless, focused, and bewildered. In other words, a normal human being. No perfect hero, just someone trying her best to find her way through one problem after another to find her nephew and her people and bring them home.

The world is populated by many other characters, none of whom are all good or all bad. Each are multi-faceted, each bear their troubles, each pursue what they believe to be the right course for their people. Some help Asta, some use her, some she uses, some she must kill to survive.

It is a well written story, but there were times when I got annoyed by Asta's choices, thinking that perhaps a woman in that particular situation would not have made them. Too reactive to perceived wrongs rather than adding together the information she had already received. Yet, exhausted and confused, there are times and situations when thinking things through was not something Asta could do. I understand what Joanne Hall was doing here.

The story had an ancient world flavour to it, but was written with a visceral, modern, and fairly pithy voice.

Overall a good and enjoyable read.

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## **Ana says**

<https://anaslair.wordpress.com/2016/1...>

For me personally it was not an easy book; since it was extremely descriptive, I felt my attention wandering much too often, and I prefer concepts to be more thoroughly explained than just be moved from one place to the next frequently. However, if you are a fan of this style and are able to fully dedicate yourself to the book, I believe you will be able to enjoy the experience, certainly much more than I did.

There were other things that threw me off. For one, I never really took to the main character. I felt she never questioned much and was just pushed from place to place. She is presented to us as a warrior and I never really saw that in her until towards the end. I saw intent, sure, but it felt like all bark and no bite. Whatever situations occurred where she could have proven herself, I felt she succeeded more out of luck than skill. That goes for everything, really. In a world full of so many dangers and ruthless people she always found someone to help her and it all just felt too lucky.

But what really bothered me was that she kept putting herself in danger despite her condition. Other practical matters nagged at me, like the fact she barely ate. The book does explain all that, especially towards the end, but it felt like an easy escape to the situation.

There was sex, violence and swearing, but for some reason I was never really shocked. Things did get especially exciting particularly towards the last 15% or so of the book and the ending was expected but I felt content.

Bottom line is I felt there was a lot going on, every place was described in detail, and I never really got a sense of the big picture or the interesting concepts the story did contain were not explored to my satisfaction.

Again, I am sure other people will love it, especially based on other reviews. If you want to get fully lost in an adventure full of beautiful descriptions, I do recommend this.

*Disclaimer: I would like to thank the publisher and Netgalley for providing me a free copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.*

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## **Kitvaria Sarene says**

This one was something quite different!

I loved the diversity, the different POV, the female lead and the cultures. Asta is a great main character, who can be both strong and weak, filled with rage and love.

The story progressed from a small village where quite some of the people are taken for slaves, and takes off across the sea and two different lands. Asta promises to get them back - and we join her on the long hard journey that follows.

At times I thought the characters a bit too naive (there surely is good in almost anyone!) for the hardships they did live through - and some of the troubles were resolved too easily it felt artificial in the story, but overall the plot and characters kept me well immersed in the world and story.

The plot is bloody and brutal in some places - but not just for the sake of it, but because it does fit the story. The balance between family bonds, friendship, blood and revenge was just right for my taste. It didn't feel overly emotional, or gorey - and the different cultures were explored in a way that didn't feel like a moral that was meant to come across, but leaves the reader to ponder, reflect and take away different things from the book.

Definitely recommended, especially if you want to read a fantasy away from the "white male protagonist" for a change!

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## **Claire says**

This review originally appeared on BrizzleLass Books.

We meet Asta as the strong, warrior leader of her tribe on the day raiders arrive and take the women and children and kill many of the warriors, including her brother. When she is betrayed, her journey to find her missing people is undertaken in a way she couldn't have imagined.

Joanne Hall has created a harsh and brutal world, a world of slavery, unforgiving gods, and even less forgiving people who are desperate to believe in anything which might make their lives fractionally better. This is a book about resilience in the face of adversity.

Asta's journey isn't one of hope it is one of despair, every time it seems she gains some control of her journey the situation just turns and slaps her in the face, every time you think things can't get worse for her, they do. Despite this Asta keeps going, she never gives up on the mission she set out on, she never stops fighting. Even when she believes there is no hope she continues on.

Asta is full of strength, and her journey is one which takes you through the full emotional spectrum. She is an inspirational character who fights hard, really hard and will do anything to save her family and her people. Nothing will break her spirit.



A huge thanks to Joanne Hall and Kristell Ink for the ARC so that I could read and honestly review this book.

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