

*Six Crimson Cranes*, By Elizabeth Lim

Reviewed by Aria Bernhardt (Literary Arts 2024)

If you're looking for a captivating and adventurous read, look no further than the duology, *Six Crimson Cranes*. This tale follows the journey of Princess Shiori'anma, a young heroine who faces unimaginable challenges that forever change her life. As I was drawn further into the story, I couldn't help but be captivated by the relatable and flawed nature of the Princess and supporting characters. Their intricate relationships with each other and the symbolic elements that form the backbone of the story added an extra layer of depth and intrigue to the narrative. In this book review, I'll dive deeper into what makes *Six Crimson Cranes* such a must-read for fans of fantasy and adventure.

The story of Shiori and her brothers not only captivates from beginning to end, but it also delves deep into the character's emotional and psychological development. As they face various challenges and dangers, each character undergoes a unique transformation. Once known for her rebellious and impulsive nature, Shiori emerges as a natural leader, driven by her unwavering commitment to her family and empire. Her brothers, too, demonstrate their own brand of strength and resilience, each facing their own internal struggles and emerging stronger and more united than ever before.

Through their experiences, the characters learn valuable lessons about trust, loyalty, and the power of greed. They are forced to confront their fears, their weaknesses, and their past mistakes, emerging stronger and more resilient as a result. Shiori, in particular, learns to embrace her magic and use it not just for causing mischief, but as a tool she can use to protect herself and those she loves.

The characters in this story face incredible challenges that put their development to the test. However, despite the adversity they encounter, they show remarkable growth, learning from their mistakes and becoming stronger in the process. Their journeys serve as a potent reminder that determination, resilience, and the power of teamwork can help us overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles and achieve our goals.

What I appreciated most about *Six Crimson Cranes* is the author's ability to weave together multiple layers of tropes and themes. The stepmother's character, for

instance, was multi-faceted and revealed surprising layers as the story progressed. The eventual revelation of the reason behind her curse gave the story a greater sense of depth and meaning. I found the book to be exceptional in its ability to challenge readers to reflect on the tropes and themes that pervade our culture, making it a fresh and thought-provoking take on the fairy tale genre.

One of the most captivating aspects of *Six Crimson Cranes* is the depth and complexity of Shiori's stepmother, Raikama. Despite initially appearing as an antagonist, Raikama's character is revealed to have good intentions: she only wants to protect Shiori and her brothers from danger. Her actions, such as banishing them from the kingdom and disguising Shiori's identity, are motivated by a deep desire to keep them all safe. It's refreshing to see a stepmother character who isn't portrayed as purely evil, as is often the case in fairy tales like *Cinderella*.

As the story progresses, we witness Raikama's character evolve and grow. She begins to question her actions and the impact they have had on her family. She even risks her own life to help Shiori and her brothers escape from danger. By the end of the book, Raikama's character has become one of the most complex and interesting in the story, and her relationship with Shiori has evolved into something much deeper than that of a simple stepmother and stepdaughter.

The book also subverts other commonly held fairy tale tropes. For example, the idea that princesses have tiny appetites can be harmful to young women who are constantly pressured by society to worry about their weight. However, Shiori defies this stereotype by having a great love for food. This was a refreshing departure from the norm and added another unique dimension to the story.

The symbolism in *Six Crimson Cranes* is one of the book's most fascinating aspects. The author has woven in a variety of cultural stories, symbols, and metaphors, each adding an extra layer of depth and meaning to the story.

One of the most prominent symbols in the book is the crane. Highly symbolic in Chinese and Japanese culture, cranes represent longevity and immortality. In *Six Crimson Cranes*, Shiori and her brothers were named after the first six stars of the Crane constellation, with Shiori being the "knot" that holds them all together. This symbolizes the importance of family and the unbreakable bond between siblings, despite the challenges they face.

Another symbol in the book is the red string. This connects the fates of people, and in the book, it represents the interconnectedness of the characters' lives. Shiori, whose name means "knot", was named to symbolize her being the last child born in their family and the one who ties them all together.

The dragons in the book carry significant symbolism, especially in Chinese folklore where they are regarded as powerful and majestic creatures. In the story of Six Crimson Cranes, dragons symbolize values of strength, courage, and loyalty. They also represent power as Shiori and her brothers join forces with a dragon prince to defeat their enemies. In contrast, snakes, described as "cousins to dragons" in the book, are associated with cunning attributes and deceit. However, in this tale, dragons embody these characteristics more than the snakes themselves. Across folklore, mythology, and fairy tales from around the world, snakes are often depicted as stealthy and subtle. In Six Crimson Cranes, these cold-blooded creatures serve as a symbol of betrayal and greed.

After reading Six Crimson Cranes, I was completely captivated by the story. Elizabeth Lim has done a remarkable job of creating a world that is both enchanting and thrilling. The characters are complex and their emotional and psychological development is beautifully portrayed. I was impressed by how Lim reimaged traditional fairy tale tropes and seamlessly incorporated intricate symbolism throughout the book. The lessons about trust, loyalty, and teamwork that the characters learn on their journeys are both poignant and valuable. Additionally, the book prompts readers to reflect on the tropes and themes that are often prevalent in our culture, making it a fresh and thought-provoking take on the fairy tale genre. Overall, Six Crimson Cranes is a must-read for anyone who loves a well-crafted and compelling story that will leave them both satisfied and yearning for more.