



[*The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*](#) by Maggie Tokuda-Hall

Candlewick Press, 2020

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*Age Range: 14+

Grade Range: 9+ (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

The pirate Florian, born Flora, has always done whatever it takes to survive—including sailing under false flag on the *Dove* as a marauder, thief, and worse. Lady Evelyn Hasegawa, a highborn Imperial daughter, is on board as well—accompanied by her own casket. But Evelyn’s one-way voyage to an arranged marriage in the Floating Islands is interrupted when the captain and crew show their true colors and enslave their wealthy passengers.

Both Florian and Evelyn have lived their lives by the rules, and whims, of others. But when they fall in love, they decide to take fate into their own hands—no matter the cost.

Maggie Tokuda-Hall’s sweeping fantasy debut, full of stolen memories, illicit mermaid’s blood, double agents, and haunting mythical creatures conjures an extraordinary cast of characters and the unforgettable story of a couple striving to stay together in the face of myriad forces wishing to control their identities and destinies.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ “Careful prose juxtaposes gentleness and brutality, contrasting the tender emotions between Flora/Florian and Evelyn and the violence of a pirate’s life. Set against the backdrop of colonial expansion, this nautical fantasy goes beyond mere swashbuckling to examine the impacts of imperialism and misogyny on a diverse cast of varying ethnicities, sexualities, and gender identities. Witches, mermaids, and secret operatives add layers of magic and intrigue to the queer romance at the heart of this book. . . . Absolutely enthralling.” —[Kirkus Reviews](#), **starred review**

★ “This intriguing premise blooms into an enchanting, complex tale that explores politics, piracy, and the magic of storytelling itself. . . . Queer and gender nonconforming characters are everywhere, and their normalization within the world of the book is remarkable and praiseworthy. A strikingly original and accomplished debut, *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* reads like an undiscovered classic with impressively modern flair.” —[BookPage](#), **starred review**

★ “Maggie Tokuda-Hall (*Also an Octopus*) has crafted a brooding, magical adventure with a healthy dose of intrigue. Her prose is delightful, by turns delicate and brutal, as her plot demands. At the heart of this tale about

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learning when to stand out and when to blend in, lies the importance, imparted by first mate Rake, of ‘know[ing] your truth, not your story.’” —[Shelf Awareness](#), **starred review**

“*The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* will take you on the journey of a lifetime. Maggie Tokuda-Hall has created characters I’ve never seen before, then put them in an adventure that feels more real than real life and twice as unpredictable. I wanted to live in the world of this book forever, and I can’t stop obsessing about the rich tapestry of pirates, mermaids, witches, and conniving nobles who inhabit it. *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* might just remind you of why you fell in love with adventure in the first place and change how you think about the genre forever. I envy anyone who’s getting to experience this incredible book for the first time.” —Charlie Jane Anders, author of the Nebula Award–winning novel *All the Birds in the Sky*

“An utterly romantic and breathless adventure that wouldn’t let me sleep until I’d devoured every last word. It’s a journey of love, magic, and self-discovery unlike any I’ve ever read.” —Dahlia Adler, author of *Under the Lights* and editor of *His Hideous Heart*

“Arrrrr you ready for the swashbuckling, gorgeous, action-packed world of *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea*? I’ve been in love with Maggie Tokuda-Hall’s writing for a long time, and I’m thrilled that you get to fall in love with it, too. A stunning fantasy that breaks all the rules—and hearts—in the best of ways.” —Sara Farizan, author of *Here to Stay* and *If You Could Be Mine*

“*The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* is a beautiful confrontation of a book. Maggie Tokuda-Hall explores the cost of violence from every conceivable angle, trusting the reader to follow her intricate story and the complicated characters who inhabit it. Everything has a price, and every adventure takes its toll. *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* asks what parts of ourselves we’re willing to sacrifice, and who we’re willing to sacrifice them for.” —Sarah Gailey, author of *Magic for Liars* and *When We Were Magic*

“Tokuda-Hall aptly explores themes of gender identity and misogyny while illustrating colonialism’s horrors, in which even children must steal from and harm each other to survive. Interstitials by the sea lend a global viewpoint that ripples through the story without disrupting the narrative.” —[Publishers Weekly](#)

“The non-Western-centric orientation is refreshing, and Tokuda-Hall’s stinging critiques of colonialism and toxic masculinity hit home. Readers willing to stick with the story will be well rewarded.” —[Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books](#)

“Told from the point-of-view of several characters, teachers could use this book as a springboard to talk about perspective in writing. It would also work well in a unit on fairy tales since the structure is riddled with small details and side tales that move the plot forward.” —[School Library Connection](#)

“Full of swashbuckling, magic, and queer romance, but also sharp-eyed examinations of imperialism and gender dynamics, *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* will suck you into a world you’ll never get tired of exploring.” —[BuzzFeed](#)

“This book features queer pirates, blood-drinking mermaids, a runaway royal, and a witch whose magic is one of the most unique forms of spell casting I’ve seen in recent years. . . . Tokuda-Hall tells the reader that the most powerful magic is stories, especially the ones we tell about ourselves.” —[Literary Hub](#)

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“[A]n unexpected delight. . . . One of my favorite YA novels of the year. The setting is immersive yet intimate, the characters multifaceted and messy, the themes engrossing and emotional. Tokuda-Hall looked at all those other white cishet YA pirate stories that failed to tackle the larger issues of colonialism and patriarchy that seem part and parcel with the narrative and took those loose threads and stitched together a masterful tapestry.”

—Tor.com

“Queer, diverse pirate romance with mermaids and magic is pretty much everything you could want from a summer read in 2020. . . . It’s an imaginative and adventurous debut that leaves enough questions and loose ends to make one hope for another story set in this world.” —NPR

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- *A School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
- *A Kirkus Reviews* Best Young Adult Book of the Year
- *A BookPage* Best Book
- An American Library Association Rainbow List Selection
- A Northern California Book Award Winner
- A Cooperative Children’s Book Center Choices List Selection
- A Locus Award Finalist
- An Otherwise Honor List Selection

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [School Library Journal Interview](#)
- [Los Angeles Public Library Blog Interview](#)
- [F\(r\)iction Interview](#)
- [Utopia State of Mind Interview](#)
- [Discussion Guide](#)
- [Author’s Note](#)

AUTHOR STATEMENT

I have received countless letters from kids who have read this and seen themselves for the first time in a book. For once, they do not feel alone. For once, they feel not only that they are worthy of being loved for exactly who they are, but that they already ARE loved. Banning this book is the same as telling those children that they are not worthy of love.

*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.