

A New YA Fantasy Series Worth a Quick Dive

FATIUL HUQ SUJOY

I was introduced to the Summoner series in a time when I was craving to read and delve into a new world with very little time to spare. While the tagline "Harry Potter meets Lord of the Rings meets Pokémon" really intrigued me, I feared it might turn out to be an elaborate fanfic trying to fit in all the tropes. But in the end its epic and well thought out world trumped its small set of flaws and made way for a very interesting read.

Summoner is a Young Adult High Fantasy trilogy by 26-year-old newcomer Taran Matharu. The first two instalments of the series, *The Novice* and *The Inquisition* have already been published with the latter getting published earlier this year.

The story revolves around Fletcher, an orphan raised as a lowly blacksmith apprentice. Fletcher's story as a protagonist is something we're all too familiar with – orphan boy with good heart and bravery but no social standing suddenly finds latent abilities, goes off on an adventure, makes a trusty band of friends and becomes somebody heroic and important. But don't let this cliché dishearten you



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because like me you'd probably be busier with the fast paced plot and well-built world that surrounds our protagonist.

The plot gains momentum after Fletcher accidentally summons a demon, a feat only possible by the human nobles. This new discovery along with the local thugs hunting him down forces Fletcher to flee his northern isolated village and journey to the capital. Eventually he gets

admitted to the Vocans Academy, a school for young Summoners to master their magic.

Vocans teaches Fletcher to control his demon Ignatius, a cute little Salamander. Don't be misled by the word "demon," they're not shadowy manifestations of evil sent from hell. Demons in this story are based on many mythical creatures like Golems and Griffins. The demon and the

Summoner become part of each other's consciousness and hence the Summoner can control his demon in battle. It's much like Pokémon but minus the move screams and Pokéballs.

Along with the abilities and sciences of summoning, Fletcher learns at Vocans the prejudices of the noble, the evils of slavery of the Dwarves and most importantly the politics and conspiracies of the rich and powerful. And over all of this looms the war with the Orcs, a conflict so vicious it joined the warring races of Humans and Elves and put at halt the Dwarves' near civil war.

The Summoner books aren't just YA tropes glued to fantasy gibberish. It's a smart story with a complex plot and a compelling world. It is a wonderful mix of the humour and drama of YA and the politics, magic and fictional elements of a fantasy.

Fatiul Huq Sujoy is a tired soul (mostly because of his frail body) who's patiently waiting for Hagrid to appear and tell him, "Ye're a saiyan, lord commander." Suggest him places to travel and food-ventures to take at fb.com/SyedSujoy.

A Timely Portrayal of a Classic Scholastica presents a Bangla rendition of Orwell's Animal Farm

SARAH ANJUM BARI

Scholastica's senior students of the Senior Campus Uttara showcased *Animal Farm* through a Bangla lens at their annual production on October 27-28, 2016. Put together by 9-12th grade students of the music, dance and drama clubs, the performance showed how George Orwell's masterpiece is still relevant today.

Brig. Gen. Kaiser Ahmed (Retd.), Principal, welcomed the audience and shared the intent behind the concept. "Orwell's portrayal of social injustice is a timeless phenomenon, and very prevalent today. Through this performance, our students will break through the prejudice that English medium students are disconnected from Bangla language and culture," he stated to cheers from his students.

The show opened with the bleating, neighing and clucking of Mr. Jones' farm animals dancing in the joy of their equality. Familiar scenes from the novel fol-

lowed as they rose in the revolution known as the Battle of the Cowshed. "Shobai bhai bhai! Shob jontu shoman!" they chanted. Dancing in revelry, they sang a song titled *Bidroho* and fiercely chased their employers right through the audience, down the aisle and out the back exit of the STM Hall auditorium.

"We perfected our performance right until two days before the show," shared 12th grader Rynel Hasan, one of the singers. "Two of our classmates composed three songs and the third song was a Warfaze track. Each vocalist had to be individually assessed," he said.

The animals scrawled up the commandments to the choruses of "*England Ireland er poshu*", with Snowball and Napoleon perched up on a higher platform than others, as if in foreshadowing of what was to come. Sure enough, conflicts materialised as the pigs' ideals began to deviate from the revolution's mantra - from sleeping in beds to drinking alcohol - until a new ideal was reached: All ani-

mals are equal, but some are more equal than others. The audience watched in awe; some even jumped in alarm as Mr. Jones and other characters advanced stealthily through the audience and roared unexpectedly. The show ended with Napoleon celebrating with the humans as the animals stood trapped in a tiny cage.

Despite being long, the play held our attention in its clean structure and timely use of songs and dance numbers. Mare Mollie narrated the farm's miseries, and paused just when we wanted to know more, leaving us in suspense. Vivid lighting, dance sequences choreographed by Shahinoor Akhter with music by Gazi Munnaf and an authentic-looking set designed by Fareha Zeba made it a visual treat. The actors did an excellent job as both humans and animals, right down to the quivering ears of the horses.

Director and drama teacher Kazi Toufikul Islam Emon explained the process that went behind the production.

"Every year, we struggle to find a script that is appropriate for all students. I thought of choosing *Animal Farm* because it would be interesting for senior students to work with elements of world politics, and the fight between antagonists versus protagonists."

Actress Suborna Mustafa and eminent theatre personality Ramendu Majumdar graced the event on each day as chief guests. Majumdar lauded the impressive performance, adding that, "Culture can combat terrorism, and the responsibility to promote that falls onto educational institutes. I hope to see more of this kind of endeavour in other events."

Nearly a decade ago, Scholastica taught me to understand the brilliance of *Animal Farm* in Grade 7. It was amazing to experience that again, this time as a visitor.

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