

Emperor of the Eight Islands: The Tale of Shikanoko, Book 1

by Lian Hearn



About the Book

An ambitious warlord leaves his nephew for dead and seizes his land. A stubborn father forces his younger son to give up his wife to his older brother. A seductive woman of the Old People seeks five fathers for her five children. A powerful priest meddles in the succession to the Lotus Throne.

These are the threads of an intricate tapestry in which the laws of destiny play out against a backdrop of wild forest, elegant court and savage battlefield. Set in a mythical medieval Japan inhabited by warriors and assassins, ghosts and guardian spirits, *EMPEROR OF THE EIGHT ISLANDS* is a brilliantly imagined novel, full of drama and intrigue --- and it is just the beginning of an enthralling, epic adventure: *The Tale of Shikanoko*.

Discussion Guide

1. Lian Hearn began writing *The Tale of Shikanoko* after a visit to Iwate, Japan, where she saw young men rehearsing dances for festivals --- the *oni* sword dances and the deer dances. "The thing that made the greatest impression on me," she recalls, "was the resonance of a vanished world, where the lives of people and animals were more closely entwined and where the supernatural was an accepted element of life." How did Book 1 affect your perception of the natural world? Are the novel's supernatural creatures morally superior to humanity?
2. How did you react to the scheme proposed by Kiyomasa, requiring Lady Tama to leave Masachika and become Kiyoyori's wife? Was there a better alternative, or is love a weakness that should be overlooked when war is looming? Are the characters' situations driven primarily by fate or by choice?
3. What are the advantages and vulnerabilities of being a woman in the society of *EMPEROR OF THE EIGHT ISLANDS*? How does Tama's strength compare to that of Aki, the Autumn Princess? Would you want to have Lady

Tora's powers of enchantment?

4. Taro offers to take Kiyoyori's place when they face the Judge of Hell. How are roles defined for the servant class? What spurs their loyalty?

5. Discuss the scene in which Sesshin loses his sight. What does his story illustrate about vision being spiritual as well as physical?

6. If you had been Aki, how would you have responded to Lady Shinmei'in (Yoshi's mother), who says she and her husband and her son should die together? What do you predict for Yoshi's future? How do they do that? And why?

Author Bio

Lian Hearn is the pseudonym of a writer --- born in England, educated at Oxford, currently living in Australia --- who has had a lifelong interest in Japan, has lived there, and studies Japanese. She is the author of the bestselling series *Tales of the Otori*.

For an interview with the author, suggestions for further reading, and more, visit www.lianhearn.com.

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