



## Heroine Complex

*Sarah Kuhn*

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**Being a superheroine is hard. Working for one is even harder.**

Evie Tanaka is the put-upon personal assistant to Aveda Jupiter, her childhood best friend and San Francisco's most beloved superheroine. She's great at her job—blending into the background, handling her boss's epic diva tantrums, and getting demon blood out of leather pants.

Unfortunately, she's not nearly as together when it comes to running her own life, standing up for herself, or raising her tempestuous teenage sister, Bea.

But everything changes when Evie's forced to pose as her glamorous boss for one night, and her darkest secret comes out: she has powers, too. Now it's up to her to contend with murderous cupcakes, nosy gossip bloggers, and supernatural karaoke battles—all while juggling unexpected romance and Aveda's increasingly outrageous demands. And when a larger threat emerges, Evie must finally take charge and become a superheroine in her own right... or see her city fall to a full-on demonic invasion.

## **Heroine Complex Details**

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Author : Sarah Kuhn

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## From Reader Review Heroine Complex for online ebook

### Sue (Hollywood News Source) says

I just realized I've never rated Heroine Complex upon reading it last year. I'm completely blown away by this book. In our age where superhero is the new pop-culture, it's quite difficult to find a series featuring women of color as the center of heroic resistance. There's a few representations for POC in comics and other media content but that's only a scrap if we're going to compare it on how white people dominate every single genre. This is why Heroine Complex is equally refreshing. It frames a different kind of norm in the superhero universe while simultaneously providing an entertaining, swoony story.

The book follows Evie Tanaka, the best friend and assistant of San Francisco's most reveled superheroine Aveda Jupiter. Their usual dynamic is about to change when Evie must pose as her best friend for a night. All hell breaks loose when she summoned a fire just using her hands.

I love a story that has a fun and lively tone. Only a few authors could manage to deliver that. Heroine Complex certainly fit that bill. The history, build-up of the plot is relatively easy to get into. I'd highly recommend it to comic readers or to anyone who loves a superhero.

Though, what really amaze me is the characterization of the Aveda Jupiter and Evie. The dynamics between characters are one of my favorite kinks while reading, it's not a surprise I will focus on that element! Props to Kuhn because this book focuses on a heroine who's usually the sidekick. Evie doesn't have a flair for dramatics, she's level-headed, passionate, and reliable. She's been the assistant of Aveda since her best friend donned her costume. Unfortunately, their friendship isn't all sunshine and rainbows. Her boss is demanding, manipulative, and so self-consumed. There's a power imbalance between them, and Aveda just knows what the right words to say to Evie to make her do something. She sounds so awful, that's because she is. The narrative didn't excuse how she's been unappreciative. Instead, there's an emphasis on repairing the friendship between them and there's self-love and healing.

My frigid heart couldn't help but to be swayed with Aveda's arc. Everyone seems to love her, but nobody really knows the true *her*. She's hardworking, she has visions for herself. She's not naturally born with talents (whatever that means,) she has to work hard for it. The tragedy, someone can do it better than her. On the outside, she seems to have everything, she's untouchable; but truly she's just another girl who's are still stuck by her insecurities and inadequacies. I can't wait to see her progress in Heroine Worship.

I promise, I'll also talk about the heroine in my full review. This is a mess. You can expect hate to love otp and beautiful characters.

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### CW (The Quiet Pond) ? says

I wish I had this book when I was a teen. This book is bloody fantastic.

- ASIAN!!! SUPERHEROINES!!!

- I loved how fun this book was. Nothing wholly serious, though there are some very serious moments, but it was just so entertaining. I haven't had so much fun reading in awhile.

- In between solving demon mysteries and kicking demon butt, it's also a great book about friendship, love, finding yourself, and courage.
- The humour in this book is so refreshing and wonderful. There were some moments where I genuinely laughed - and it was mostly because of Aveda's diva complex!
- I adored Nate and really related to him. GIVE ME FACTS AND SCIENCE AND SPREADSHEETS. I am here for Nate's dorky scientific mode.

**Full review to come.**

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### **Sherwood Smith says**

Copy received courtesy of NetGalley

If you, like me, crack up when a couple of nerds tumble into bed for some hot sex— preceded by one placing a fire extinguisher within reach—grab this book!

Evie Tanaka is our first person narrator, assistant to the super-heroine Aveda Jupiter, protector of San Francisco, which suffered the opening of a demon portal eight years previous. The only upside was that a number of people gained mild powers, including Aveda; her true skill is speed and martial arts ability honed by determined and constant work. She hides the fact that her demon portal power is abysmally useless.

Aveda is dedicated to protecting San Francisco against the occasional portals that still appear and spew demons, which means working on her social media, appearance, and publicity as well as constant workouts. Evie is the unthanked assistant who takes care of the unglamorous side of Aveda's life as Aveda does the demon-fighting and garners all the kudos. The rest of Aveda's team are Lucy, her martial arts instructor, and Nate, her physician and science geek, who lives in the basement working on his lab experiments.

Nate is all about the science, which irritates Evie to no end. The two of them snipe constantly. Meanwhile Scott, who—like Evie and Aveda—go all the way back to grammar school is reluctantly sort of part of the team. He can't stand Aveda in her new persona, but his healing spells are necessary, and he likes Evie, so he cooperates.

Finally there is Bea, Evie's sixteen-year-old sister, who Evie is trying with diminishing success to raise, but Bea is rebelling more each day.

All these exasperations test Evie to the max because she is determined to keep her emotions locked down behind her Dead-Inside-o-Tron. If not . . . she refuses to think of *if not*.

But we all know what happens when pressure cookers blow.

This is a fast-paced, imaginative, wise-cracking, fun novel about demon cupcakes, zombie statues, other-dimensional portals, Karaoke bars, blog feuds, martial arts movies, various kinds of geekdom—and female friendship, diversity, romance, and family. I hope this will be the first of many.

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## **Lata says**

I wanted to like this. And though I read the entire book, I found it tough going:

-I loved the concept of two Asian American superheroes, who have known each other all their lives and are friends. One's Chinese, the other half Japanese. So *5 points* for that.

-The main characters, Evie and Annie/Aveda, are in their mid-20s, but I found they seemed much younger, like 16-17 years old. *2 points*.

-The general tone of the book was light and fast and I imagined everything in bright colours, much like a comic book. But this also got kind of tiring as the book progressed. *2 points*.

-Characterization was weak. No character had depth. Though the central relationship was based on a longstanding bond of being outsiders in kindergarten thanks to their races and foods, and personalities (all of which I could relate to) I didn't find either young woman was particularly interesting. And neither were any of the characters surrounding them. *1.5 points*.

-I figured out who the baddie was really quickly, and thought the baddie's plot and methods to be really dumb. *1 point*.

-The demons infiltrating our dimension weren't particularly interesting. *1 point*.

-Too much teenage angst and melodrama between the characters. *0.5 point*.

-The sex was handled well, and was respectful and positive, though the way the relationship was built up felt boring and conventional and held no surprises. *2.5 points*

-I loved the cover art! *4 points*.

Total: 2 points

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## **Eve Recinella (Between The Bookends) says**

**ARC provided by NetGalley in exchange for an honest review**

WOW, so this book was a really awesome surprise..

Aveda Jupiter is San Francisco's most loved super heroine. Swooping in to vanquish all sorts of demonic baddies. Alas, she doesn't prove indestructible and ends up being hurt and needing to take some time off. In steps her much put-upon PA and best friend Evie (awesome name choice)

What ensues is a fast-paced, humorous and absolting entertaining ride. Demon cupcakes with fangs, animated statues, THING like hands that attack, and karaoke offs, are just a few of the things Aveda, Evie and a plethora of amazingly written side characters have to face off against. It even had a nice little dose of sex and romance.

**I LOVED this one. It was just plain FUN**

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## All Things Urban Fantasy says

Review courtesy of All Things Urban Fantasy.

Action-packed and fun, HEROINE COMPLEX is the superheroine story that I've been waiting for. Full of fun and action, HEROINE COMPLEX has it all - demon fighting, a dramatic superhero, and a dab of romance to top it off!

One of the best things about HEROINE COMPLEX is its portrayal of female relationships. There's Evie and Aveda's relationship, that of boss and employee as well as best friends for years, there's Evie and Bea's relationship, that of sisters, as well as many others. This book definitely does a good job of showing females interacting without having to talk about guys (though the guys are sometimes the subject of conversation as well). What I liked best about it was that they all felt realistic, and it is nice to see, because even though there are a lot of strong female protagonists in urban fantasy, they are not frequently surrounded by women, like Evie is.

The other aspect of characterization that shone was the fact that the characters were all multi-faceted. Aveda was sometimes a bit of a drama queen, but she had her positives as well. She's kind of like that friend who you know has your back, even if sometimes they drive you up a wall. Kuhn did such a good job of giving those nuances to Aveda that it was totally believable.

Also, I just wanted to note: Evie's inner monologue while drunk was hysterical. That's all.

The overall plot arc, of fighting off the demons about to invade San Francisco, came off a bit thin. The big reveal at the end was somewhat ridiculous, but it still surprised me. In this case, it almost felt like the author was trying to make the book stretch longer, since the more dramatic climax had happened a chapter or so earlier. The sense of urgency was lost by the end and overall I was a little dissatisfied.

However, despite my complaints, overall I felt HEROINE COMPLEX is a great start to a series, and I can't wait to see who or what Evie and Aveda take on next!

Sexual content: Several mildly explicit sex scenes

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## Nikki says

I got this to review at some point, but I also bought a copy... a fact which I now regret. Okay, there's a lot of cool things about it: female Asian protagonists who kick ass in different ways, a casually queer character, bitey flying cupcakes, the main character talks frankly about anxiety... And for quite a while I was enjoying it a lot.

It's just, I don't like reading books where people like me are called dead inside, even in jest. I'm sure the main character isn't intended to be read as asexual — it's mostly that she's forced herself not to feel in order to control her powers (let it go, let it go, can't hold it back anymore...) — but the lack of sexual attraction to people she describes is my every day and whole life. And I'm okay with that; it doesn't bother me or my partner, and I don't think I'm broken because of it (anymore). It's just the way I'm made.

It's not my "Dead-Inside-O-Tron".

Yes, that's what Evie calls her lack of sexual attraction — her "Dead-Inside-O-Tron". Neatly calls up two stereotypes about people who aren't interested in sex: that we're robots, and that we're dead inside. And before you protest that nobody says that, I saw it twice on my twitter the day I was reading this book.

I kept going for a while with the book, but when I put it down to go out and came back, I found that I was just tired of it. Tired of the romance scenes punctuated by Evie wondering why her "Dead-Inside-O-Tron" had stopped working. I can get a person feeling that way and calling it that; I can understand that it's not targeted to hurt people like me by reiterating the whole "you're dead inside" meme. It doesn't mean I can keep enjoying the book.

Reader, I put it down. I have plenty of books to read that don't remind me constantly that people think I'm a dead-inside robot.

The flying bitey cupcakes are still a cool image, though.

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

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### **Miranda (MrsLeif's Two Fangs About It) says**

4.5 / 5 Fangs

**Heroine Complex** was such a unique and addictive book! I truly have never read an urban fantasy book quite like this one. I loved how the author really made this her own book with interesting fantasy elements. **Heroine Complex** was the perfect combination of humor, action, romance, and drama. I never felt bored while reading this book, and I never wanted it to end!

OKAY, I WANT TO MENTION HOW MUCH I LOVED THE DIVERSITY IN THIS BOOK. PLUS, THE FEMALES IN THIS BOOK KICKED MAJOR BOOTY AND I LOVED IT.

The main character, Evie, was fabulous. She was so sassy and easy to relate to. I loved how real she felt and how I could truly see myself in her shoes. Evie made me laugh out loud numerous times and she made me so proud with her badassery. I really like the journey she went on to discover self-acceptance in regards to superpowers.

There were a lot of side characters that were just as lovable as Evie. I liked that each side character served a role and they weren't just pushed to the side. They all had a presence and helped Evie out when she needed it.

Evie's boss and best friend, Aveda, was a little hard to warm up to. She seemed really self-absorbed and narcissistic. It was nice to see her open up and show her true feelings for Evie and some other characters throughout the book. Her showing compassion made her seem more human and easier to like.

The romance in this book was adorable and very well paced. The romance never took away from the plot and it was never the main focus of the book. It was perfectly balanced. Also, I shipped Evie and the male that she had a romance with SO FREAKING HARD. From their first interaction where they started arguing, I knew I

was going to ship it. Their romance was so swoon-worthy and full of banter. I LOVED IT SO MUCH. I WANT MORE OF THEM, PLEASE?

Overall, this was an extremely entertaining and interesting book. The plot of this book was unique and it kept me glued to the pages. If you want to read an urban fantasy about kick-ass women, then this is the book for you!!!

4.5 / 5 Fangs

*\*This book was given to me in exchange for an honest review. \**

MrsLeif's Two Fangs About It  
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### **Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

2 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2016/07/10/...>

I badly wanted to like this book, but its style was just completely wrong for my tastes, a model example of the classic “It’s not you, book—it’s me.” In these cases I always struggle to write my reviews, because I know what I perceive as flaws are in fact really selling points that will be very attractive to others. They say good content will always have an audience though, which is why I’m not too concerned about this book’s chances of finding success with readers everywhere, but I confess it didn’t really work as well for me, in spite of its huge charisma.

First, a little bit about Heroine Complex: The book tells the story of two best friends—one is a flashy superheroine, and the other is her quiet personal assistant. Ever since they were five years old, our protagonist Evelyn Tanaka has always found herself in Annie Chang’s shadow, and that’s become especially true now that Annie has become Aveda Jupiter, savior of San Francisco. It isn’t easy keeping up with a superheroine, or putting up with her epic tantrums whenever things don’t go her way, but Evie always tells herself she doesn’t mind the work. After all, Annie-now-Aveda is her oldest, most loyal friend. She’s been there for Evie through all the bad times, rescuing her whenever she needed the help and emotional support. Evie figures the least she can do to repay Aveda is to give her boss anything she wants, and do whatever she commands.

But then one day, Aveda injures herself while fighting cupcake demons, suffering a sprain which would put her out of commission for at least four to six weeks. Refusing to accept being out of the spotlight for that long, Aveda convinces Evie to act as her double and make public appearances in her stead. True to form, Evie caves spectacularly to her friend’s demands, never mind that she has no experience schmoozing at glitzy events, or fighting portal demons for that matter. In fact, Evie has spent most of her adult life actually trying to hide her own superpower, which she fears would be dangerous if she ever let it out.

What can I say? The whole superheroes meets The Devil Wears Prada premise wrapped up in an urban fantasy package was certainly irresistible to me, and at first I genuinely thought Heroine Complex would be

right up my alley. And indeed, I would have loved it, I think, if some of the elements which first attracted me to this book—the humor, the action, the snark, etc.—hadn’t been so exaggerated and over-the-top. Another key problem I had with this book was how cartoonish the setting felt. UF has always been one of my favorite genres because I love the way it reimagines our world with supernatural aspects in it, while still maintaining the realism and believability of the setting. In contrast, Sarah Kuhn’s *San Francisco* and all the characters populating it are more like comic caricatures, and her writing style also reflects this general vibe.

By the way, I use descriptions like “cartoonish” and “comic” because I believe none of this is by accident. I get the feeling that this is exactly what the author is aiming for, but I really have to be in the right mood for this tongue-in-cheek style, and I guess I just wasn’t.

Not surprisingly then, story and characters are also ultra-predictable. Again, I know all that is part and parcel of this particular narrative style, but it still nettled. Evie, despite her quirkiness and ebullience, comes across too bland and two-dimensional. She and her friends are like walking clichés playing their assigned roles and speaking their hammy lines. The romance also felt a bit tacked on and flat, since whenever Evie and her love interest Nate shared a scene, their relationship only seemed to have two settings: sniping-at-each-other mode, or can’t-keep-our-hands-off-each-other mode. I did think the story was fast-paced and fun though, and the plot had its flashes of brilliance every now and then, but it simply wasn’t enough to keep me energized for nearly 400 pages.

Major kudos for the Asian American superheroine protagonists though, even if I could have done without a couple of the stereotypes, like how Asian parents only care about their kids’ grades and would disavow us if we didn’t get into med school, and my eyes just about bugged out of my head when I read that part where Evie said she was used to not letting herself feel because she’s Asian and knows all about emotional repression. Yes, I realize there’s usually a nugget of truth to stereotypes and I’m aware this is all done in the spirit of good fun, but seeing them propagate even for the sake of humor still makes me a tad uncomfortable especially since I’ve had to face many of these same misconceptions in my life (“You’ll want your daughters to be doctors, right?” Even when said in jest, this one is my own personal bane.)

Overall, I know I’m in the minority with my lukewarm reaction, so if you think you’ll enjoy the story’s style or the type of humor I described, then you should definitely give this book a try. *Heroine Complex* accomplishes what it sets out to do, and it does all of it very well, even if it did turn out not to be the kind of book for me.

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### **Jacob Proffitt says**

This story had some charm. And a bit of humor. And an interesting background. If it hadn’t stumbled into some of my more frustrating pet peeves, it might have reached awesome. As it is, it’s good but not great.

The best of the setup is Evie and Aveda and their friendship that has extended from childhood. The story starts with that relationship having deteriorated under the pressures of the demon invasion of San Francisco but even so, there’s a foundation there that Kuhn does an outstanding job of expressing. The re-exploration of that relationship really stands out as a highlight of the book and adding the demon-fighting team dynamic enhanced that even more with a strong cast of secondary characters.

Unfortunately, there are also a lot of things that felt stuck in default setting or where the plot thins to near transparency. Biggest of those, for me, was Evie’s complete ambition being bound up in “being

normal"—like that's something great to aspire to. You know, all those parents of exceptional kids warning them before leaving the house "now mind, dear, that you be as normal as you can." Even when someone has handicaps or afflictions that make normal an aspiration know better than to make mere normal their goal because everybody has aspects of themselves that can shine. Plus, "being normal" is the wimpiest negative motivation\* I can think of and that's just lamer than lame.

And unfortunately, Kuhn also stuck one of my very least favorite tropes into the romance. It happens after the relationship is established pretty strongly, too, which served to maximize my pain (and make this a spoiler, sadly). The whole (view spoiler).

Add some really over-the-top scene chewing by multiple villains and some situations that are obviously being mined for situational (read slapstick) humor and there was enough cheese to offset the strengths of the core relationships. Which is sad because I really wanted to like this much more than I ended up doing.

**A note about Steamy:** There are enough explicit sex scenes to put this in the middle of my steam tolerance. I lost exact count, but three or four of moderate length. They didn't really stand out, or anything, but I can't decide if that's a plus or minus...

\* **Negative Motivations:** I kind of hate that the term "negative motivation" isn't widespread, yet. Since it isn't, I'm going to save off this little jag to append to my reviews that feature the term. Jennifer Crusie blogged about it a bit back and it changed how I understand story. The problem with the term is that if you've never heard it before, you'd assume it meant motivations that are harmful or immoral. Not so. What it refers to is motivations *not to do something*. The thing is that many of us are motivated to not do things for a lot of different, perfectly valid and reasonable, reasons. The problem is that *in a story* motivations to not do things are a huge drag on the plot—particularly considering the fact that most negative motivations are overcome by the character simply deciding they don't care any more (or, rather, that they *do care* and are now motivated to do the thing). So not only do you have a counter to action but you also have a situation where to overcome it, all a character has to do is change their mind. Which means eventually, the reader is rooting for the character to get over him/herself already and do the thing we want them to do. Conflict drives story. Conflict between a reader and a main character drives readers away from story.

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### Charlie Anders says

This book is so much fun. It's a really neat take on the superhero/sidekick relationship -- first of all, there's a whole Devil Wears Prada thing where the sidekick is sort of the bullied personal assistant to a Type A personality hero who wants everything to be Perfect. But then you find out they were actually childhood friends and they have a much more complicated relationship. Add the fact that the superhero gets injured and the sidekick has to take her place for a while, and you've got a crazy entertaining ride.

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### Brooke says

I found this one when io9 raved about it, but at 30% through I was not sharing their love for it. The writing style is annoyingly perky, and the characters have ridiculous isn't-that-so-cute quirks (the main character apparently eats only Lucky Charms for every meal). The infodumpy conversations are unnatural (imagine turning to your coworker and loudly saying, "So, fellow co-worker who I have worked alongside for the last

5 years, can you please remind me how we do this task that we do regularly?"). There's a scene where the main character is eavesdropping on villain-y types monologuing about their motivations and evil plans, and it was so stilted and awkward.

At the 60% mark I found myself not believing in Aveda and Evie's supposed friendship, at ALL. There are lots of anecdotes that Evie shares about how Aveda was a great friend in the past, but all of their interactions in the present time make Aveda seem like such an unpleasant, selfish asshole. Their friends stage an intervention to discuss the destructive nature of Aveda and Evie's bickering, and only Evie apologizes, while Aveda stands by silently, and no one seemed to think this was bitchy.

The plot had a number of points that didn't make sense. For example, they fight demons for a living, but for some reason when Evie sees a demon when she's by herself, everyone chalks it up to a hallucination without any good reason given for this assumption.

The characters are either bland or sloppy - Lucy doesn't seem to have a personality except for calling everyone "Love" or "Darling" every other sentence, and Evie's little sister goes through about three different personalities as the plot requires it.

Urban fantasy can be done very well (ie - Kelley Armstrong's Bitten and Stolen, Richelle Mead's Vampire Academy series), or it can be pretty painful (the rest of Armstrong's Women of the Otherworld series, Mead's Bloodlines series). Heroine Complex unfortunately falls into the latter category. I had really expected to enjoy it, but ultimately found the writing entirely unconvincing.

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### **Book Riot Community says**

I LOVED this book. Asian lady superheroes are my jam, and every page of Sarah Kuhn's novel delighted me immensely. Evie Tanaka is best friends with and the much-beleaguered personal assistant to superheroine Aveda Jupiter, who destroys demons tearing up San Francisco. Their friendship is a bit uneven, with Evie catering to Aveda's whims and caprices, even as she deals with her own emerging superpowers. Seeing the way both women deal with those hard moments in both constructive and selfish ways was a welcome surprise, because women don't often get to be both things and grow. Kuhn's writing is bouncy and engaging, and Evie is very clearly spun into a captivating character. I also have to give Kuhn props for balancing romance and humour and L drama, and making me wish that Heroine Complex would go on just a little bit longer.

— Angel Cruz

from The Best Books We Read In May 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/06/01/riot-r...>

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I've had this book on my to-read list since the moment I laid eyes on that amazing superhero cover. The actual stuff behind the cover did not disappoint. It's a high-energy superhero adventure from start to finish with compelling (read: funny and snarky) narration courtesy of Evie Tanaka, superhero assistant

extraordinaire. If you want some sweet Asian representation mixed in with superpowers, get this book. But don't be misled by the cover art – this is definitely not YA lit.

— Jessica Yang

from The Best Books We Read In July 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/08/01/riot-roundup-best-books-read-july-2016/>

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### **The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says**

Urban fantasy done RIGHT! None of that typically whitewashed crap that thinks a multicultural city is made up of nothing but straight white people (you know what I'm talking about). Better still, two feisty Asian American women as superheroes and lots of strong female friendships.

The romance I could do without, because I'm actually one of those "crazy" female readers who believes a story featuring women having awesome adventures doesn't always need to fall back on making sure at least one of them falls in love with a man. Thankfully it didn't become the focus, though the hints were there that the hero was a lot more than he seemed.

I loved the San Francisco setting and it made me feel all the more saddened that the real life SF of today is nothing like this. In fact, I miss my City By the Bay of the 80's and 90's.

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### **Wendi Lee says**

On the surface, this book has everything going for it: Asian American main characters, super heroines (yay!), a diverse supporting cast, and a snappy plot. It should have been a fun, light fantasy read, but instead I plodded through it. Even telling myself, "Pretend it's Buffy the Vampire Slayer, only in book form!" didn't help. Because the truth is, Buffy the Vampire Slayer had a lot of substance behind the fighting, vampires, and quirky dialogue. This book, not so much.

I knew a few details about each character (Evie, for example, has a younger sister she's taking care of, loves Lucky Charms, was inspired by a Michelle Yeoh martial arts film). But it never went beyond the surface, and I think that's what made this a struggle. If I had more of a connection with the characters, I would have been more invested in their story.

It does get a thumbs up for the romance aspect, because I did feel Nate was 100% perfect for Evie, so there is that.

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