



# Beasts of Tabat

*Cat Rambo*

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When countryboy Teo arrives in the coastal city of Tabat, he finds it a hostile place, particularly to a boy hiding an enormous secret. It's also a city in turmoil, thanks to an ancient accord to change governments and the rising demands of Beasts, the Unicorns, Dryads, Minotaurs and other magical creature on whose labor and bodies Tabat depends. And worst of all, it's a city dedicated to killing Shifters, the race whose blood Teo bears.

When his fate becomes woven with that of Tabat's most famous gladiator, Bella Kanto, his existence becomes even more imperiled. Kanto's magical battle determines the weather each year, and the wealthy merchants are tired of the long winters she's brought. Can Teo and Bella save each other from the plots that are closing in on them from all sides?

Nominated for the 2016 Compton Crook Award for First Novel.

## Beasts of Tabat Details

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Author : Cat Rambo

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# From Reader Review Beasts of Tabat for online ebook

## Warren Dunham says

an interesting book. A young boy fleeing a life of servitude under the church, and a female gladiator who keeps winning for winter and now people want her to learn. in the background beat men suffer from abuse and slavery.

There are a lot of odd choices first in the book first Bella is told in the first person But Teo is told in third person. also this book is the first in a series but none of the issues are really resolved the climax only brings more issues.

I did like reading the book while it was going, and i think i might enjoy if i read it as part of the series but only 2 of the 4 books have been released.

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## Just A. Bean says

I'm trying to figure out why I disliked this book as much as I did.

It didn't really have a plot, so much as a series of events, and I kept waiting for there to be a twist to retroactively shape it into a plot; it never happened. There was a twist, but it felt more like another event in the series than any kind of structural element. The twist was followed by a chapter of graphic torture and then a cliffhanger ending, which didn't *endear* me to the book, but I like Master and Commander books, and they're notorious for lack of plot and abrupt endings.

I think it was mostly that the book was remarkably free of kindness. Both point of view characters were extremely self-centred so even when they were nice it was to further their own ends, and they responded to screwing up other people's lives by running away and trying not to think about it. The secondary characters were either as bad or worse, and I just wasn't up for an entire novel of mean. Not my thing.

The world building was interesting, though horrifying, and I liked having an older bisexual heroine (even if there were some Tragic Queer elements), but that's all I got on this one. Won't bother with the next.

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## Sable says

Read for the Women of Genre Fiction Challenge.

I read this book in part because I've come to know Cat Rambo through my work with the SFWA YouTube channel (for those who don't know, she's the current President of SFWA.) I heard she had a new book coming out, hadn't read her stuff yet, and wanted to check it out. This book was the first in the series, so I decided to check it out first.

Of course, that's a bit of a misnomer, to say it's the first book in the series. She has said herself that she's written parallel stories about different people, so either this one or the "sequel," Hearts of Tabat, would make a good entrypoint into her world.

It was excellent, but hard to read, so it took me a long time. I felt like I was hiding under the blankets and trying to cover my eyes at intervals. This is a *dark* world Rambo has created. And I mean *dark*. I told her the cover was not entirely fair to the reader. What she needs is a severed unicorn head lying on a cobblestone street in the rain.

Tabat is a magical fantasy kingdom at about a tech level that's around the Enlightenment, perhaps? Just pre-Georgian, maybe. It is also a world where humans hate magical creatures - called "Beasts," - and they not only enslave them, they inflict horrible atrocities upon them, such as burning Dryad trees (which kills the Dryad in a slow and agonizing way) to power vast rail systems and artificial lights. But it's made clear that they are sentient creatures, with their own thoughts and hopes and dreams, who think like humans but aren't human (just like Campbell asked for.) Rambo does not spare us any of the horror, either. She *wants* you to feel their pain, so that you will get angry and want to fight for them.

Neither Beasts nor Humans trust Shapeshifters. Shapeshifters are, of course, technically Beasts, but Beasts in disguise, so not easily marked as such and so Humans have trouble finding them. Hence, they'll just kill them when they are discovered. Beasts resent shapeshifters because they can "pass" and are liable to beat them senseless when they find them. As a bisexual woman who came out in the early 90s, I am old enough to remember how that sort of resentment was once levied upon us by the gay and lesbian community, who thought we ought to bug off and stick with the opposite gender so we would stop drawing from their limited pool of potential partners. Of course, the resentment was not nearly as violent as it is towards Shapeshifters in Tabat. And to be fair, as long as they're willing to subject themselves to the erasure, Shapeshifters are in a much better position than other Beasts in Tabat, because they won't usually be killed or enslaved on sight. So just like bisexual people who happen to be in a relationship with someone of the opposite gender, they can (and sometimes do) benefit from their invisibility.

The political situation is tenuous because the hereditary Duke is required by ancient fiat to give up his power to a democratic government very soon. New parties are forming and advancing their agendas, and interplay between the parties is not only background, but a story element and plot point. In the meantime, there are of course forces who wish to take advantage of the instability to liberate the Beasts, and some are prepared to go to greater lengths than others.

Rambo is brilliant at painting shades of grey. There are no real "good guys" or "bad guys" here, and sometimes even the people whom you want to support because you know their cause is the right one, are so invested in the idea that the ends justify the means to them, and she shows us the evils of that path too. If you're looking for a muscle-bound white knight making things right by the power of his sword, you have come to the wrong place.

Actually, much of the action is character-driven. There is almost no real "action," as we understand it in modern fantasy. The action is mostly personal and political. Does this mean it's a less compelling story? Not on your life.

The tale follows two protagonists, each of whom are given equal page-time; a young late-blooming shapeshifter named Teo, and a middle-aged, tough-as-nails gladiatrix named Bella Canto. This approach is good writing, but I found it also creates a strange flip-flop in tone between an Ursula K. Le Guin style of YA that reminded me very much of *A Wizard of Earthsea* when I was reading about Teo, and a more backbiting, adult, *A Game of Thrones* style when I was reading about Bella. It took a few chapters to get into the rhythm. At first it left me feeling weird and off-base. By the end of the book, however, I understood perfectly why she felt she had to tell the story that way, but in the beginning I found it pulled me out of the story in places. So, there's one point of criticism, if I had to nitpick.

Another is that the protagonists are both hampered by deep-seated flaws that leave you conflicted about them. I found myself getting very frustrated with Teo, because he had very little agency and exercised almost none. The story basically swept him along with it and in many places, he felt more like a narrator than a participant. I don't know if that was intentional; I'm waiting to read the other books to see. On the other hand, he's just a genuinely nice, innocent person, and often nice, innocent people are swept along by the course of events, so I can't say it's unrealistic. I just kept wanting him to do more. Maybe he will in future stories. This is, after all, intended to be a series, and sometimes you can't tell a whole overarching story in one book (else, why write a series?)

Bella has much to like about her. She strong, confident, fearless, and cheerfully bisexual and promiscuous (you're not given the gory details, it's not that kind of book.) Her bisexuality is not intrinsic to the plot because nobody seems to care about such things in Tabat, so yay, thank you for representation! She is also emotionally distant (that's why affairs and not romances) and almost painfully self-absorbed. I won't say self-centered because she does care about other people, but she has difficulty showing it, and maybe I found her challenging because I'm a lot like that IRL. (I might be self-absorbed too. Not willing to weigh in on that one right now.) Her back story totally explains why, and the deep damage and emotional wounds that cause her to be that way, and I hope her overall character arc, if we revisit her in other books, will be to develop more empathy. I'll say she's been given an opportunity; I won't tell you why because that would be a spoiler. She also unconsciously benefits from a privileged position, and her unconscious privilege is rendered with painstaking detail in Rambo's writing.

So again, because we see their flaws before we see their merits, I found the book difficult to get into. This is the thing that gives it four stars in my rating and not five.

Because otherwise, it's amazing. This is a book that does exactly what I think fantasy is uniquely equipped to do; it examines the way we live by giving it some distance in a fantastical setting. The book ends where it needs to, but I now find myself on the edge of my seat, wanting to know what happens next. So much is going on all at once, and I can't wait to find out how it evolves.

Not an easy read. But it's worth it. Looking forward to Hearts of Tabat!

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## Frances says

(Full disclosure: I've taken writing classes from Cat. That said, I have liked her work since before I knew to even recognize her name--may I recommend the lovely Events at Fort Plentitude, which I first read in *Weird Tales*--and I think my review fairly reflects the fact that, dammit, she's *good*.)

Short summary: this is a secondary-world fantasy primarily set in the great strange port city of Tabat, which is about to have the Duke step down and hold elections. It revolves around two characters: Teo, a young country boy indentured into servitude at the temple of the Moons, and Bella Kanto, the gladiator whose unbroken string of triumphs in the annual Winter-vs-Spring battle have led to twenty years of long winters and late springs.

(This isn't a children's book, by the way. In case anyone was wondering. It's not gratuitous, but my niephlets aren't going to be getting this one for a few more years.)

I was expecting a straight-up secondary world fantasy--an adventure, or what you'd traditionally call a

romance. There is some of that here; I think you see it most strongly in Teo. But there's more life than there is just adventure, if that makes sense.

Second, a lot of the fantasy adventures I mentioned are about solving a problem. *Beasts of Tabat* is so much more than this. There are problems, yes, and some of them get resolved, but this is not a book where the Tour goes around collecting Plot Coupons and applying them to a Clearly Defined Problem. This is coming into a world in flux--on a personal level, a professional level, a social level, a magical level--and watching it turn into something new and wonderful.

(This is perhaps an excellent time to remind people of the origins of words such as "wonderful", "fantastic", and "terrific". Terry Pratchett said it best.)

I think this works because of the attention paid to the characters and the small details. There's Bella Kanto and Teo, but the characters moving around them and affected by them (I'm particularly engaged by Eloquence Seaborn and Leonoa, but you can take your pick) feel so distinct that those two feel pleasantly more like windows to the world than heroes in it. (I grant Bella Kanto *is* of heroic stature, but it's not because of how she's framed in the text.)

The growing unrest, the prejudice against the Beasts, the changes coming--this is the kind of thing that could get handwaved into a simple didactic dichotomy, and instead the depiction of what living in a world like this is *like* makes it interesting and involving. I am having *opinions* about this world, dammit, and I love it.

(There are several other stories set in Tabat, which are listed at the bottom of the page here; I've read half a dozen of them, and am going to go read more now that I've finished the novel. Just figured I should mention (1) you don't need to have read them and (2) they're worth checking out.)

I want to see where this goes. I need to see how it comes out. And it will be wonderful.

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### **Travis says**

An interesting read. A bit like Andre Norton's Beastmaster series, I liked it. Animals, Magic, Shapeshifters, swordplay, and plenty of action. What's not to like. Throw in the typical smalltown boy trying to make his way in the big city, and it all comes together to make a rather enjoyable tale, even if it is one that has been often told. It's unique enough to keep things interesting, and not so predictable as to get boring. A good all around read.

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### **Tony Peak says**

A delightful steampunk fantasy novel of shapeshifters, betrayal, and intrigue.

Teo, an adolescent Shifter who is unable to change shape, is taken from his village to the grand city of Tabat where he will be trained as a priest. Though he doesn't want to live in a temple for the rest of his life, he yearns to see the metropolis where the heroine of his penny-wise books, the gladiator Bella Kanto, reigns supreme in the arena. With a swipe of her sword Bella has been champion for twenty years, battling before the gods to decide whether or not Winter lingers or Spring comes early. Given Bella's unmatched skill,

Winter shadows Tabat, where Beasts are enslaved to their human masters—and where magical beings are burned to feed the very street lights. Such callousness is not without price, for Tabat is a powder keg...with Bella the fuse and Teo the spark.

Cat Rambo has crafted an engrossing tale split between two points of view: Teo's, written in third person, past tense; and Bella's, shown in first person, present tense. Both contain stylistic differences, often subtle, that highlight two alternate views of Tabat. Her descriptions are unique and lush, while her characters' dialogue feels natural. Physical sensations, such as smell as taste, are well done, but I really like how Cat describes body language—she manages to infer so much without delving into clichés. Most of all, I'm impressed with the emotional depth she imparts into each scene. It is so easy to empathize with Teo's anxieties of harboring a secret while trying to survive on the streets. It's engrossing to witness the raw hurt and longing beneath Bella's arrogant exterior. I will say, of the two main characters, Bella is my favorite in this novel, but I suspect we've only been shown a peek of what Teo will undergo.

The story gets underway quickly as Teo and Bella's paths intersect while tensions rise in Tabat. Abolitionists seek the freedom of captive Beasts. Citizens riot in the streets, wanting Winter to end while despising Bella for not stepping down as champion. The Duke will be displaced in Tabat's first election soon, but he doesn't want to relinquish power. Change is coming, but not as much as it comes to Teo and Bella. Both will see their illusions shattered as the beasts within them—real or emotional—threatens to devour their hearts.

As you can guess, I loved this book. I connected with the characters, the setting, and the conflict between master and slave shown on various levels. I will definitely read the rest of the books in this series. If you like well-written fantasy, read *Beasts of Tabat*.

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## **Thistle says**

Don't judge a book by its cover. For me, it's usually in the opposite way: I fall for a cool cover hiding a horrible book. In the case of *Beasts of Tabat*, it's the opposite: That cover is just awful! And what does it tell you about the story? Nothing!

There was so so so much good about this story. Set in some other world, the planet was populated by every mythical creature you can think of, as well as by humans. Every non-human, non-animal mythical creature was classified as a Beast, and other than some free ones deep in wild areas, they were all slaves to humans. Many of these Beasts were thinking creatures, many were as intelligent if not more so than humans. As humans tend to do to slaves, Beasts were generally not treated very well, and in many cases, were abused. (Seriously disturbingly, when an intelligent Beast couldn't be tamed or otherwise rebelled, it was "dulled" -- lobotomized. Though it hadn't been described in detail at all, a scene about that being done to a Beast bothered me so much!)

As interesting as they were, the Beasts were just background information, part of the wonderful worldbuilding of this story (though in coming books are going to be a major part of the plot). This book centered around Bella and Teo. Bella is a gladiator, the star of the most popular "penny-wides" (graphic novel-type of book, read by adults and kids alike). In a city where seasons are represented by gladiator, Bella has extended winter an unnaturally long time because she just keeps winning. Teo is a "shifter" (were-animal, a Beast), but unable to shift. His village thinks him unlucky for being unable to change into his animal shape, so send him off to the city to work for the church. Teo, a big fan of penny-wides, seeks out Bella, and the two eventually cross paths.

There was nothing at all I disliked about this book (well, other than the cover...). The worldbuilding was deliciously good. I loved the characters, major and minor. I LOVED the idea of Beasts. I believed every single character's motivations.

Happily the second book should be coming out soon-ish, and the series is intended to be four books long.

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### **Laura says**

[and was saddened but not exactly surprised by her ultimate fate. I hope she survives and gets herself some sweet-ass revenge (hide spoiler)]

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### **R R (Bob) Angell says**

Cat Rambo has imagined a compelling fantasy world full of intrigue and conflict. I usually wait until a series is complete before diving in, but the characters and city are so compelling that I jumped right in. The interweaving of the main characters' stories, young Teo and the fearsome Gladiator Bella Kanto is well done and I'm excited to start the second book in this four book series right away!

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### **Samuel Lubell says**

This is an interesting fantasy novel, flawed by being obviously the setup for a trilogy. But the first half is really nice, if a bit too leisurely with an interesting main character Bella Kanto, a famous gladiator whose annual fight determines if winter will last an additional six weeks (that's right, she's the groundhog!) The city's rulers and business leaders have grown tired of her constant victories, they want an earlier Spring. The other main character is the son of a Shifter clan who doesn't have the ability to shift into an animal form. This world has magical beasts, unicorns, fairies and the like who don't have rights and are slaves.

After a nice leisurely pace and a developing love affair between Bella and one of her (female) gladiator students, the book rushes things to upset the status quo to set up the next book. Still, the language of the writing is very well done. Don't be put off that this is coming from a small press run by Kevin J. Anderson, this is big leagues writing.

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### **Karl says**

What a great start to a new fantasy series. Cat Rambo has raised her game here. The characters of Bella Canto and Teo are distinct, flawed, believable, and sympathetic. The world-building of Tabat seems effortless, and the clean prose is sprinkled throughout with gems of observation. Add to that a good dose of political upheaval and magic.

This is a grown-up tale, and I await the next volume with great impatience.



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## Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

Cat Rambo's *Beasts of Tabat* is the first novel in *The Tabat Quartet*. It will be followed by *Hearts of Tabat*, *Exiles in Tabat* and *Gods of Tabat*.

*Beasts of Tabat* was a very pleasant surprise for me, because it turned out to be an excellent and refreshingly different kind of a fantasy novel with a touch of bittersweetness. To be honest, I'm tempted to say that this novel is an exceptionally good fantasy novel, because Cat Rambo shows genuine talent for creating an intriguing fantasy world with three-dimensional protagonists.

This novel has plenty of originality and quality, because the author avoids using clichés (there are many well-known elements, but the author uses them in a good way). Although this novel is clearly a fantasy novel, it has a few elements that can - at least partly - be considered to be new weirdish elements. In my opinion this novel is slightly reminiscent of Rjurik Davidson's new weirdish fantasy novel, *Unwrapped Sky*, because there are a few similarities.

Here's a bit of information about the story:

Teo is being sent to Tabat by his parents to have a better life among the Priests. A Priest called Grave is taking him there, but something happens during the journey and Grave is badly injured. Soon Teo manages to escape and finds himself all alone in Tabat. Then he meets Bella...

The characterization is flawless, because the author has created interesting and realistic protagonists. Teo and Bella are richly drawn characters that have their own feelings and opinions. The author fluently explores what kind of feelings they have of the happenings, politics and other people, and she doesn't sugarcoat anything that happens to them.

Here's a bit of information Teo and Bella:

- Teo is one of the Shifters, but he can't shapeshift. He feels bad about it, because he's different from the other persons in his village. He's sent away from his home so that he could have a good life elsewhere.

- Bella Kanto is a Gladiator and a Champion of the city. Alberic, the Duke of Tabat, is her lover and they often come together after Bella has won a fight. Bella also has female lovers.

The author writes realistically about what happens between Teo and Bella. When Bella takes Teo into her home and offers shelter to him, their lives become entwined with each other. It was nice that the author explored their lives from both point of views, because it added depth to the story.

In my opinion Cat Rambo wrote well about what happened between Bella and her many lovers, because Bella's feelings towards her lovers were explored in a deep way. For example, Bella's relationship with Adelina was handled in a good and realistic way (at first they were lovers, but when Bella began to avoid her, they became friends and managed to stay friends for many years).

The worldbuilding is excellent. The author has created a fascinating and richly drawn fantasy world that is inhabited by Humans, Beasts, Shifters etc. The world feels believable and realistic, because the author pays attention to many minor details and writes about what may happen to people and beings. She slowly reveals new wonders and horrors about the world and thus deepens the reading experience in a wonderful way.

Reading about Tabat was intriguing for me, because many Beasts had suffered and died in the city. Dryads were being burned alive each day in order to strip the magic from their bones to fuel the aetheric lights, the Great Tram and other machineries that kept Tabat running. Because the Beasts had suffered and continued to suffer there, discontentment was in the air.

Although there's plenty of beauty and diversity in this novel's fantasy world, the world can be a cruel and savage place - especially for those who are not Humans. Shifters were being exterminated and burned in Tabat, because Humans hated Shifters. Humans also enslaved Beasts and treated them badly in many ways. Humans did extreme things to Beasts to make sure that they behaved well.

It was great that every once in a while the author revealed interesting details about the world to her readers. For example, fairy bites and stings were dangerous. It was fascinating to read about how fairy bites and stings were treated, because you had to act quickly or the consequences would be deadly.

It was very intriguing that the ritual fights of the Gladiators determined the weather in the city. Because Winter had won for a long time, the Merchants were becoming annoyed and wanted Spring to win. This added nice tension to the story.

What makes this novel especially interesting is that at first it may feel a bit young adultish because of the teenage protagonist, Teo, but it soon develops into a complex adult fantasy novel with surprisingly dark undertones. This novel has a wonderfully dark and compelling undercurrent that runs throughout the story, because there are harsh and realistic moments that break the illusion of a pretty and innocent story.

One of the best things about this novel is that Cat Rambo has created a bit different kind of a growing up story for Teo. Because I've read many novels in which young male protagonists easily grow up to be heroes etc, it was refreshing to read how Teo had to struggle in order to survive and how difficult things were for him. Teo's problems added realism to the story.

I can honestly say that Cat Rambo's Beasts of Tabat is one of the best and most interesting fantasy novels I've had the pleasure to read during recent years. I look forward to reading its sequel, Hearts of Tabat, because it'll be interesting to see how the story continues.

This novel dares to be different and it offers excellent entertainment to readers who want to read good and thought-provoking stories. It's a fascinating combination of fantasy, magic and fight against oppression. I'm sure that this novel will appeal to readers who are interested in quality fantasy.

An excellent fantasy novel!

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**morbidflight says**

Tentatively tagging this as feminist because it is rare to see women characters written well (pretty much only seen it from women authors). This book does a great job exploring relationships of different types (not all

romantic or sexual) and it seems like women in this world are real people (yay) and not trophies (boo, hiss). I confess, this book hooked me from the second it revealed that the gladiator in question was one Bella Kanto (and if you guessed from the name that it's a she, you'd be right). I hope it's not presumptuous to see myself in her (no, not like that).

It's also rare to see split point of view done well; I usually just dislike it because it feels like the same story told twice from the same person. These two characters are distinct, and the use of first-person for one of them didn't even bother me all that much. I'm curious to see more (didn't realize how recent this book was, as I acquired it from a storybundle and therefore assumed it was an ebook reissue).

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## **Chris Pavesic says**

*Beasts of Tabat* focuses on the intertwining tales of Teo, a young boy who has been sold to the Temple by his parents in order to save his younger sister's life, and Bella Kanto, a gladiator who represents the force of winter in Tabat's arenas.

Teo's objections to his slavery are understandable. He is a shifter who is locked into human form. He wants to explore the world and not be bound to the Temple, but the priests use magic to control him. He has read about Bella Kanto's exploits all of his life, and hopes that she can somehow save him.

Bella Kanto serves as the champion of Tabat and fights for the forces of winter. Until she is overthrown, winter will be the strongest force in the land. This does not set well with the merchants in Tabat, the citizens, or with the Duke who rules the land.

Tabat is seeped in magic and sorcery. The humans hold tight control over the other types of beings. The beasts, many of them recognizable fantasy-type creatures, are treated cruelly. The popular belief is that the beasts are non-sentient, and can be disposed of as animals. They are tortured, broken for service, dissected for magical "parts," and eaten. Dragon flesh, for instance, is considered a delicacy because of its relative scarcity, although Bella finds it to be tough and stringy. Shifters, when discovered by humans, are killed outright because they are considered beasts who can look human. But shifters will prey on the beasts just as easily as beasts of the wild will prey on them.

## **Major Spoilers Ahead—Be Warned!**

This is not an easy story. It is not a simple plot that unfolds in a predictable pattern. Cat Rambo creates a highly complex world and brings a reader into it slowly at the start. We begin by empathizing with Teo--a young boy longing for adventure. He yearns for freedom and idolizes the glamorous and brave gladiator Bella Kanto. When we are introduced to her, the backstory of how she was raised, how she became a gladiator, and the reasons why she fights for winter are stirred into the story.

Bella's attitude and comments about the beasts reveal the main focus of the plot. When faced with helping the Duke choose creatures for his menagerie, she comments: "I have no way to save them, but increasingly I am loath to stand by and watch." As a reader you might think that you know where this is going.

You would be wrong.

After a few chapters the book begins gaining speed as more and more layers are added to the narrative. This

is not a simple tale of good versus evil. This is a tale of shades of grey—of multiple perspectives—of overlapping areas of right and wrong. Rambo has created a society where you cannot characterize anyone simply based on whether they are human, shifter, beast, or something else entirely. You have to judge the characters by their actions and motivations. It is easy to sympathize with some of the morally ambiguous characters in one chapter, only to be repulsed by their actions in the next.

*Beats of Tabat* is a engrossing novel. As a reader I was immersed in the storyworld created by Cat Rambo. I shivered at the cruelty and sometimes bleak outlook of the characters. I reveled in the joy and passion occasionally displayed by Bella, and felt anguish when she was tormented or betrayed. I felt so much sympathy for Teo when he was forced to leave his home and had to smile when he ran away to join the circus. Most importantly, I liked the fact that the races of human, beast, and shifter are not treated in a stereotypical fashion.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable novel that I would recommend to anyone who likes fantasy, dark fantasy, sword-and-sorcery, and mystery.

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### **E.D.E. Bell says**

I am reviewing *Beasts of Tabat* after reading both the first and second books of the Tabat Quartet, which can be read in either order. I find this experimental series format fascinating - the ability to read a story from different perspectives and get a different experience either way. I think if I were starting fresh, I would read them in the published order, but both work.

Rambo's world and characters are utterly immersive. She makes even the most simple moments deeply engaging, which fascinates me as I'm reading. With a dark tone to the overall story, she writes emotions, including pain, in a very naked and raw way. And the story and world are just unlike anything I've ever read. It's wonderful to read something so fresh.

CW on violence: (view spoiler)

I will definitely be reading books 3 and 4.

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