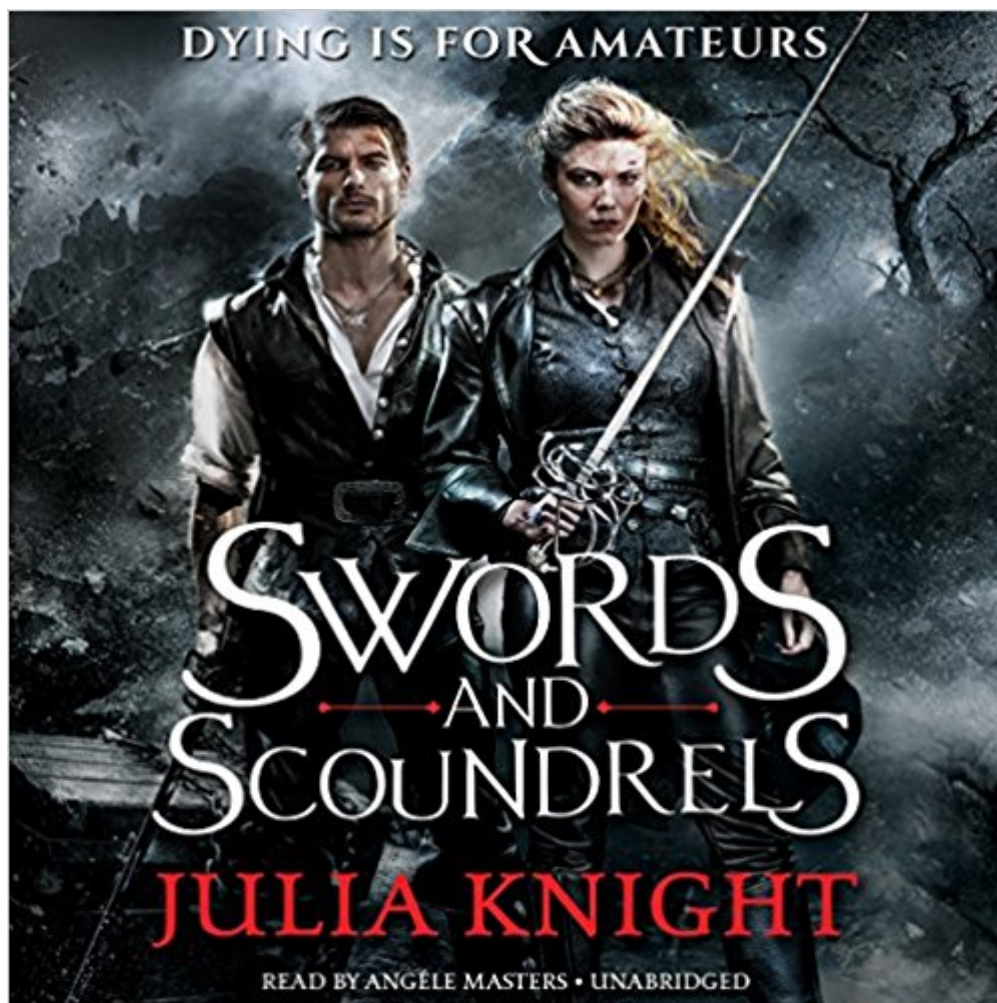


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Swords And Scoundrels (Duelists Trilogy, Book 1)



Synopsis

A fast-paced new adventure fantasy in the vein of Michael J. Sullivan and Scott Lynch. Gold is for fools, and dying is for amateurs . . . Vocho and Kacha are champion duelists: a brother and sister known for the finest swordplay in the city of Reyes. Or at least they used to be -- until they were thrown out of the Duelist's Guild. As a last resort, they turn reluctant highwaymen. But when they pick the wrong carriage to rob, their simple plans to win back fame and fortune go south fast. After barely besting three armed men and a powerful magician, Vocho and Kacha make off with an immense locked chest. But the contents will bring them much more than they've bargained for when they soon find themselves embroiled in a dangerous plot to return an angry king to power.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Roguish highwaymen and all the intrigue of a bloody revolution... will keep you guessing until the end. I can't wait to read the sequel!" --Anne Lyle, author of *The Alchemist of Souls*

Julia Knight is married with two children and lives with the world's daftest dog, who is shamelessly ruled by the writer's three obligatory cats. She lives in Sussex, England, and when not writing she likes motorbikes, watching wrestling or rugby, and killing pixels in MMOs. She is incapable of being serious for more than five minutes in a row.

I found this book an enjoyable read! This book has an unusual narrative structure – it frequently jumps from the advancing plot to “Interludes” that fill in the backstory of the characters, and reveal critical details that allow you to look at what you’ve read in the present differently. This threw me a bit the first time it happened, but I did end up liking how we would see the origins or reasons characters had done things earlier, and then working back from the earlier revelation to connect the dots. The book also speeds up dramatically in the second half. The first half was a slow burn, with the protagonists unsure of how they were being manipulated, and lots of intrigue that seemed to be going in many different directions. However, the last 40% or so just had a breakneck pace I really enjoyed, with a generous amount of fighting, narrow escapes, and payoff for the setup earlier in the story. From a setting standpoint, the idea of a clockwork city was awesome, and scenes where people narrowly escaped through moving gears and waterworks were my favorite. I also loved all the little throwaway bits about how the city worked – that people would orient themselves by the Shrive and King’s House (the only ones that never moved, except for the Guild), how there were defenses that just fired off randomly which people learned to get around, and clever touches like the clockwork duelist in the guild. On the subjectively negative side, one of my few complaints is that the book spends a lot of time describing the world, providing us with the history of the world, the inner monologue of the characters, and, in general, a rather large amount of description. Readers who enjoy elegantly described worlds will absolutely enjoy this – however, I’m more of a “get to the action!” type reader, and I found myself skimming some of the longer worldbuilding segments to get back to the story, because it wasn’t necessarily moving the plot forward. Your own experience will likely depend on your taste in books. My only other big complaint is that, as a “big picture” person, when there are conspiracies afoot, I like to be in the loop. I want to see the manipulators moving the pieces around on the board and have at least some idea what they’re attempting to do. There were at least four different competing conspiracies going on in this book, and my problem is that, for whatever reason, I had difficulty following them. Like Kacha and Vocho (who are absolutely at the “ground level” of several conspiracies, being manipulated by all sides) I wasn’t sure what the goals of the various conspirators were, or why they were taking the actions they did. I would have enjoyed the book more if I understood what everyone was trying to do, because then I’d have a better idea of the stakes. I found it hard to tell who was close to accomplishing their goal and sometimes, even what their goals were, just like the siblings. However, I really enjoyed the characters. As brother and sister, Kacha and Vocho’s feelings about other (the simultaneous love, loyalty, and resentment we often have with our siblings) felt real.

Supporting characters like Dom grabbed my interest from the start, and Dom remained perhaps my favorite character in the book. Even Eneko (essentially the antagonist) did things for perfectly understandable reasons. With perhaps one or two exceptions, the vast majority of the characters could have been the hero of their own novel, if it was written from their perspective, and I love books where everyone thinks they are doing the right thing, yet circumstances bring them in constant conflict with each other. Finally, the action itself is top notch, especially the fighting and fencing. The descriptions were short, punchy, and got the action across in ways that made it easy to visualize what was going on. Pretty much every time there was some fencing action, I was really enjoying myself. Overall, this is a fun, well-written book that I enjoyed, and I look forward to checking out the rest of the series.

This review is for all three books in this outstanding trilogy. The boiled-down plot basically follows duelists brother and sister as they navigate political intrigue and deal with their lives that get turned upside down. What made this series so enjoyable for me was the relationship between Kacha and Vocho, the brother and sister duelist. They have a complicated relationship, crafted by what I think of as an abusive father; mentally in Kacha's case and physically and mentally for Vocho. Their childhood forged an odd bond, and the sheer hate-love relationship they have is simply a joy to read about as much as it is heartbreaking. We follow a few other storylines throughout the series, Petri being the other focus of the books. Petri was an interesting character himself, and he changed the most over the series, rather dramatically I might add. He is more involved in the political side; a needed storyline so we as the readers understand what the hell is going on as Kacha and Vocho spend a lot of the books in the dark. Magic was handled nicely in this series. It wasn't pretty, but it is strongly developed and the mages themselves are a complicated bunch. The world is quite interesting. Both religion and politics are fleshed out enough that anyone loving complicated worlds should be satisfied. For me, I skimmed just a bit during some descriptions, but none were terribly long or too drawn out for me to assign any negativity to them. I was just too wrapped up in the brother and sister's story to care about the layout of a room. The writing reads super quick. The books are all under 400 pages, but I read them much faster than some other 400 page books. It was what I call accessible writing; something easy to follow and lacking poetic or flowery prose. Knight gets to the point rather quickly. The first book was a great setup and really gets the reader invested in the characters. Especially Kacha and Vocho. I say them because I felt they were the most developed characters. Plus, as I said, I just loved their relationship. There were some flashback scenes into their childhood which was used to explain how they got where they were and

some of their personality traits. They were done well, and I never felt as if they slowed the story. The second book was simply amazing and moved at neck-breaking speeds. It, surprisingly enough, solved all the questions and major plot lines from the first book and any raised in the second. It was my favorite by far. The third book was closure. It wrapped up the one remaining thread from book 2 that I didn't think needed an ending. It was my least favorite, but that's only because it focused a lot on Petri. Those interested and loving his character will probably enjoy book 3 the most. I've mentioned how great Kacha and Vocho's relationship is, but they stand alone quite well. Kacha is a sensible woman, strong and a badass. I found her a delight to read. She had a sheltered softness to her, but she could beat anyone in a duel. I enjoyed her struggles, her needs and how they shaped her, how she freed herself, how she grew. Vocho was simply fun. He was as complicated as his sister, but in an entirely different way. I did enjoy his character most. His carefree go-fight-and-deal-with-the-fallout-later attitude was great. Initially I found him a bit pompous, caring too much about what he looked like, about money, but then one little scene explained it and I fell in love with him. Cospel, their assigned servant, starts out with a small role which grows with each book. He quickly became another great character, adding some humorous dialog and playing off Vocho's dialog brilliantly. Keep an eye on Dom in the beginning. I found him to be an equally entertaining addition to the cast. All of the characters stand on their own nicely, adding their own flare to the story. Overall, I must say I was surprised by how much I loved this series. I highly recommend it to everyone.

I enjoyed the interaction between the brother and sister in this story. I read a great deal (about four to five books a week) and I enjoy a series like this one that adds something different for my reading enjoyment

I will do my best not to spoil things. The story opens on Kacha and Vocho, two duelists who have fallen on hard times and have taken to being highwaymen. They're brother and sister who happen to be the two best in their field. That was until Vocho supposedly killed someone he was paid to protect and they had to flee the city. What follows is adventure, intrigue, and more than a few deep interesting characters. The set dressings were cool, the overall plot had me invested, and the action was fun. Knight did a good job at keeping the swordplay moving without getting into blow-by-blow details. This book had me hooked from chapter one. On more than one occasion I wanted to slap a couple of characters, but that wasn't a bad thing. The character had flaws. Each person presented in the story wasn't just some cutout plopped onto the page as a plot device. By far my favorite

character was Petri. He starts out as what looks to be just a hatchet man, but there is so much more to him. If you like The Three Musketeers, or swashbuckling stories in general, I would heartily suggest this book. It found me completely at random on , which doesn't happen often. Finding new books is usually saved for trips to the store rather than online, but the cover, blurb, and sample had me hooked. I look forward to book two. Why didn't I give it five stars? It's a great introduction to a new series, but it leaving it open to book two and three means that certain threads are left hanging. If the series keeps up like this and things are resolved I will gladly rate them five stars each.

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