

Shadow and Bone fills tall order of high fantasy



By **JORDAN REID**
For the *Keizertimes*

For a genre that is bound only by what can be dreamt up in limitless imagination, there are a surprising amount of commonalities and suspiciously similar themes that often crop up in fantasy literature.

Why is it that so many fantasy stories, for instance, seem to be set in eras akin to the real world's Medieval period? How many of them involve elves, orcs, or a comparable species living in tandem with humans? Many creators are undoubtedly inspired to jump on the bandwagons fashioned by virtuosos and trend setters such as the Brothers Grimm, Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis, but in today's heavily saturated market the stories that tend to stand out the most are ones that take risks and move away from the usual Middle Earth and Narnia-esque worlds of established canon. *Shadow and Bone*, a new Netflix series based on the works of Leigh Bardugo, sets itself apart from the pack admirably with its impressive world-building, style, and intriguing characters, but also stumbles a bit thanks to a few decidedly cliché story beats and a certain side plot that seems oddly detached from the rest of the action.

The thing that struck me the most while watching *Shadow and Bone* was the unique setting. Breaking free of the usual sword-and-shield era, the characters in this world have access to commodities such as guns, trains, and all the tall hats they could ever desire. This alone gives the world character, and the show has an admirable show-don't-tell policy when it



Jessie Mei Li plays Anna Starkov, a character whose mysterious powers could destroy the world or remake it. Our reviewer says the show's visuals and story set the series apart from recent entries in the high fantasy genre. Submitted photo

comes to explaining how the inner workings of the society functions. That policy also means that conversations can occasionally be hard to follow, however, as the script seems to feel comfortable throwing left and right, silly words that are typical of this type of story with the assumption that those who didn't read the books (like me) will catch on eventually. And catch on I did, for the most part, even though I felt hesitant to learn yet another set of made-up phrases at first (come on, guys... don't we have enough words as it is?) The costumes are impressive, the cast effervescent and refreshingly diverse, and the

story is plenty interesting if not terribly original.

What do I mean by that? Well, the story starts when an average orphan girl finds out that she is special and destined to save the world. There is a clan of wizard people who are born with innate abilities and are persecuted for unclear reasons (I guess they are more akin to the X-Men/mutants of the Marvel universe now that I think about it), and there is a love triangle between the girl, the childhood friend, and the dark newcomer. These are just some of some very familiar beats that flew in the face of an

otherwise unique world and story, and the show suffers slightly from them. As a result of combining multiple books, there is also a story thread that makes the pacing suffer a bit, as it is only tangentially related to the main plot. You'll know it when you see it.

And see it you should, because *Shadow and Bone* is, overall, an exceptional piece of television that will please even the most diehard fantasy fan. Look it up if you get the chance.

Shadow and Bone season one is now available on Netflix.

Caption It!

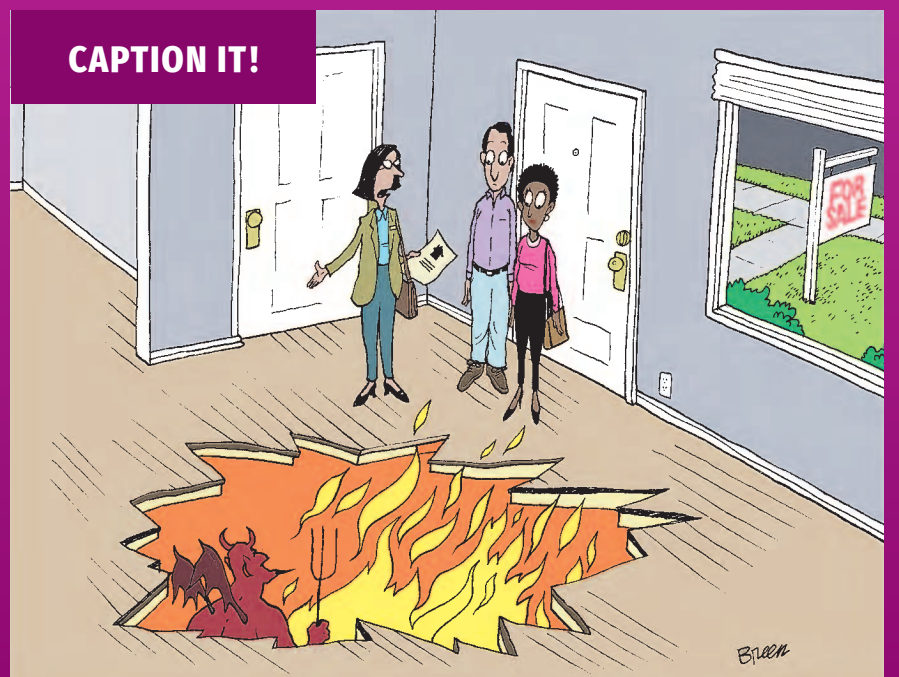
By **STEVE BREEN**

ARCHIVE
WINNER



"OH. I WAS EXPECTING SOMETHING MORE ALONG THE LINES OF BARBARA EDEN."
—John Lane, East Falmouth, MA

CAPTION IT!



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