“If you love a heroine who's tough, brilliant, and never runs from a fight, look no further.”
—Tess Gerritsen, New York Times bestselling author of The Shape of Night

TORI ELDRIDGE

THE NINJA DAUGHTER

A BOOK CLUB KIT
An interview with Tori Eldridge

The Ninja Daughter is your debut novel. Can you tell us a little bit about the book and what inspired you to write it?

The Ninja Daughter is about Lily Wong, a Chinese-Norwegian modern-day ninja in Los Angeles who, after the rape and murder of her younger sister, dedicates her life to the protection of women. Lily is driven by guilt for abandoning her sister and filial obligation passed down to her by her Hong Kong mother. Meanwhile her Norwegian father — a North Dakota farmer turned Chinese cuisine restaurateur — comforts her with Midwest wisdom and Hong Kong food. The story dives deep into family relationships, cultural diversity, and gritty issues like domestic violence and sex trafficking, while still entertaining the reader with snappy prose and fast-paced action.

I wanted to share my own Chinese-Norwegian heritage and write deeply about family. But instead of writing literary or historical fiction, I wanted my story to be set in diverse Los Angeles with a complex mystery to solve and realistic fight scenes. I also wanted to blast through ninja sensationalism and portray ninja as the empowering protectors we strive to be.
What were some of the unforeseen challenges you came across writing this novel?

Lily’s investigation exposed me to aspects of my city that I never knew. This required research into city politics, mass transit, gangs, and international crime — all of which was fascinating but a lot to digest. This, combined with the cultural and esoteric ninja information I wanted to impart, kept me focused on richly economic prose and tight scenes that kept the pace.

Tell us about Lily. How much of her character is drawn from your personal experiences or your experiences with others?

My mother is Chinese-Hawaiian, my father is Norwegian from North Dakota, I’ve trained in Ninjutsu, Wushu, and boxing, and I’ve lived in Los Angeles for thirty-five years. Aside from that, Lily and I are very different people. Her life was derailed by violence and tragedy. Mine has been blessed with opportunity and rich life experience. I’m also a mother of two adult sons, which has given me a close look at the challenges and issues of Millennials and a two-sided view of parenting.

The book focuses a lot on multiple cultures. What research did you do to make sure these cultures were accurately represented?

Aside from drawing from my own experiences and conversations with my culturally-diverse friends and relatives, I immersed myself in fiction, articles, and media. I read books with African-American, Latino, and Asian characters written by authors of color. I listened to music and watched television and films popular with those communities. And I watched countless documentaries and video interviews. Authenticity is hugely important to me, and representation matters.

“AUTHENTICITY IS HUGELY IMPORTANT TO ME, AND REPRESENTATION MATTERS.”
Food itself plays an important role in the book. Why is food such a central role in so many cultures and how did you attempt to portray that in the book?

As the saying goes, we are what we eat. The heart and soul of a culture is poured into their food and reflects of the environment and circumstances of their community. It’s also quite telling which foods provide comfort. It’s not always those from our heritage or childhood. Many times, comfort foods have been adopted from other cultures that have positively impacted our lives. In this way, gastronomy is a rich tool for character development and expression.

Female empowerment and the wellbeing of women are such strong themes in the novel. Why is that important to you?

Before writing fiction, I traveled the country teaching the ninja arts and women’s empowerment. I blogged on mindful living and even wrote a book called Empowered Living: A Guide to Physical and Emotional Protection. It’s important to me that people, and women especially, have the tools to make positive decisions and choose the most empowering perspective. Our experience of life is determined by our perception of that experience.

How are books like The Ninja Daughter capable of inspiring and empowering groups of women?

Fiction taps into deep emotions and opens us to possibilities that make us think, question, and explore. When a book, like The Ninja Daughter, also dives into societal issues like diversity, community, and violence against women, it creates empathy, resonates, and inspires change. Stepping into the lives of others, even if only for the time it takes to read a book, can make a difference.

What’s next for Lily Wong?

Every action has repercussions and every act of violence takes its toll. In book two of the Lily Wong series, our warrior protector faces personal demons as she rescues at-risk teens, dives into the underworld of youth sex trafficking, and copes with a visit from Gung-Gung and Po-Po for Ma’s 50th birthday. And, of course ... there’s Daniel.
## Discussion Questions

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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>Lily’s father (Vern Knudsen AKA Baba) gives his daughters his wife’s Chinese surname to make peace with his in-laws and root Lily and Rose in their Chinese ancestry. What do you think about this decision? How much impact does a name have on a person’s identity? When Baba says, “I don’t need a name to tell me who I love and who loves me,” how does this statement make you feel?</td>
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<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>The author, Tori Eldridge, is an actual modern-day ninja who holds a 5th degree black belt in To-Shin Do Ninjutsu and has taught modern applications for the ancient art of the ninja for decades. How does her portrayal of ninja compare with your own perceptions? What did you find fascinating and/or surprising? If you train in ninjutsu (or another martial art), what techniques did you recognize?</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Lily’s perception of her mother changes over the course of this book. Do you predict Lily and Ma growing closer or always having a wall between them? How much of their mother-daughter issues stem from Ma’s Hong Kong culture? Can you relate?</td>
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<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td>During one of Lily’s meditations, she discovers this bit of wisdom: “Never become so attached to following the path that you cease to question whether you should still be on it.” How do you feel about this statement? Have you felt similarly attached?</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Lily’s maternal grandfather (Gung-Gung) needs a male descendant to perform ancestral worship for him and his ancestors after he’s gone. Without it, he believes his soul will roaming without honor. To this end, he places enormous pressure on Lily’s mother and to a subtler degree on Lily. Do his beliefs seem superstitious and archaic, or reasonable given his culture? Have people ever challenged or dismissed your beliefs? Who in your family has the greatest cultural influence?</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td>The Ninja Daughter is enriched by empowering lessons and wisdom gained from Sensei, Baba, Farmor, and even this quote from Lily: “I learned three valuable lessons that day: Never assume a person wanted help. The weakest one in a fight was often the most dangerous. And no one was truly unarmed until they were lying in a morgue.” Is there a particular bit of wisdom that made an impact on you? What’s your favorite quote from The Ninja Daughter?</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Lily calls Daniel Kwok the perfect Chinese son. How do you feel about him? Is he the right man for Lily, or does she need a more dangerous suitor?</td>
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<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>Sensei tells Lily to “guard her center.” What do you think he means? Is it good advice? Did any of Sensei’s words, lessons, or wisdom resonate with you?</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>J Tran is an enigmatic assassin with a deadly fascination for Lily. Her opinions and emotional reactions to him change constantly throughout the book. What feelings did you have about Tran? Did they change as often as Lily’s. How did you feel about his decisions at the end? Do you think Lily is in danger of becoming like Tran?</td>
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<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td>Domestic abuse is a complicated issue. How do you think the author handled this subject matter? Do you agree with Lily that timing of when to leave must come from the inside and that forcing action at the wrong time can be ineffective and/or dangerous? What experiences have you had or witnessed that support your opinion?</td>
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1. Mix bar-b-q sauce, Hoisin, and garlic chili sauce together.
2. Pre-boil baby back ribs for 35-40 minutes. (Cut rack to fit in the pot.)
3. Put the ribs on a rack in a pan lined with foil.
4. Sprinkle Chinese Five Spice on both sides (optional).
5. Brush sauce on both sides and leave meaty side up.
6. Broil at 400 degrees for about 45 minutes. (Or grill as desired.)
7. Serve with rice.

1 rack baby back ribs
Chinese Five Spice (optional)
3/4 to 1 cup of Hickory Bullseye Bar-B-Q Sauce (or your favorite)
1/3 cup Hoisin sauce
1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon garlic chili sauce

1. Marinate flank steak, sliced paper-thin against grain, in cornstarch and light soy sauce.
2. Prepare rice noodles as directed.
3. Sear beef in peanut or vegetable oil.
4. Sauté garlic and ginger in oil and add in broccolini and mushrooms.
5. Mix in Shaoxing wine, sesame oil, low-sodium soy sauce, and sugar.
6. Add bean sprouts, noodles, seared beef, and green onion.
7. Toss and serve.

16 ounces extra-wide rice noodles
1 pound flank steak
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
2 tablespoons peanut/vegetable oil
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons minced ginger
1 tablespoon oil
Chopped broccolini (optional)
Sliced mushrooms (optional)
2 tablespoons Shaoxing wine
1 tablespoon sesame oil
1/4 cup low-sodium soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/2 cup bean sprouts
Green onions, 1-inch pieces
**SELF-DEFENSE TIPS**

When escaping from a wrist grab, turn your hand so the thinnest part of your wrist points toward the exit where his fingers and thumbs meet. Then shoot your wrist in that direction to break free. You can also punch toward the ground while suddenly bending your knees.

If an attacker grabs your wrist from a low angle, make a strong fist.

Then, punch toward the ground.

Bring elbow upward for strike toward the face.

Follow through, striking whatever area you can reach, and then run away.

When choked from the front, tuck your chin to your chest, shrug your shoulders to your ears and attack — stab his eyes, knee his groin, smack his ears, stomp on his arch. Don’t waste your precious weapons trying to peel away his hands.

Clench your chin toward your chest like a turtle and raise your shoulders.

Then, attack by kicking wherever you can.

Stick your fingers in your attacker’s eyes or slap his ears.

As he recoils, strike him in the face and run away.
JIN XUAN MILK OOLONG TEA

Lily has loved this Taiwanese tea since she was a child. How not when Jin Xuan means Golden Lily?

LONGJING TEA

Also known as Lung Ching or its literal translation of Dragonwell, is grown in the Longjing Village of Hangzhou. It's a favorite of Lily's.

The Ninja Daughter author Tori Eldridge visited the tea fields on her recent trip to China.
ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

THE NINJA DAUGHTER

"If you love a heroine who's tough, brilliant, and never runs from a fight, look no further. The Ninja Daughter is your gal. Tori Eldridge introduces the warrior-sleuth you'll want fighting by your side."

**Tess Gerritsen, NYT bestselling author of The Shape of Night**

"Eldridge's debut thriller introduces readers to a heroine for the #MeToo era and deftly explores the dangers of Lily's avocation, the challenges of familial relationships, and the need to continue to fight the abuse and exploitation of others...Readers who enjoy an action-packed adventure that doesn’t neglect character development and speaks truth about the human condition will welcome this quirky, passionate, and endearingly relatable protagonist."

**Library Journal (Starred), Debut Pick of the Month, November**

"The Ninja Daughter is a remarkably fresh, intense thriller, and Lily Wong is one hell of a new hero. I want this Ninja on my side. Tori Eldridge is redefining the genre."

**J.T. Ellison, NYT bestselling author of Tear Me Apart**

"Lily Wong, the heroine of Tori Eldridge's debut thriller, The Ninja Daughter, is Jack Reacher — if Reacher were petite, female, and Asian — smart, skilled, and relentless; a passionate fighter on behalf of women who are in too deep to save themselves. The Ninja Daughter is an exceptional first novel, offering readers a tense and fascinating look into a culture and a world that most of us have never seen. I loved this book!"

**Karen Dionne, international bestselling author of The Marsh King’s Daughter**

"An exhilarating thrill ride! Lily Wong is a champion to the underdog — smart, brave, and a powerful force to reckon with. I loved her!"

**Liv Constantine, internationally bestselling author of The Last Mrs. Parrish**

"With The Ninja Daughter, Tori Eldridge has created a heroine to love... and to fear! Lily's quest to protect the women of L.A. left me breathless, and Eldridge's snappy, down-to-earth prose kept me flipping pages."

**Rachel Howzell Hall, author of They All Fall Down and the critically-acclaimed Detective Lou Norton Series**
THE NINJA DAUGHTER BY TORI ELDRIDGE, AGORA BOOKS/POLIS
BOOK CLUB KIT DESIGNED BY JENNIFER VANCE