



## Cethe

*Becca Abbott*

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Human-like, but not human, the nara ruled Tanyrin for centuries. The most feared among them were their naragi, sorcerers whose power was all but invincible. Not until the coming of Arami Lothlain, King of Tanyrin and Blessed of Loth, did the rein of the nara come to a bloody end. For four hundred years afterwards, the land was at peace.

Stefn Eldering was the youngest son of the Earl of Shia, the last in a long, proud line of demon hunters. He was also a sin-catcher, living proof of God's displeasure, the shame of his existence atonement for the sins of his ancestors. Michael Arranz was the son of a duke and one of the despised h'naran, half-bloods cursed with the blood of the nara running through their veins. Of all the h'nara, his family alone was immune from the persecution of the powerful Church of Loth, protected by an ancient covenant.

In ordinary times, the paths of Michael and Stefn would never have crossed. Alas, times were no longer ordinary. The latest of the Lothlain kings was a weakling, unable to curb the ambitions of an increasingly powerful, corrupt clergy. Famine stalked the land. Fear of the h'nara, fanned by the Church, spread tentacles everywhere. Tanyrin teetered on the edge of chaos.

A loyal and devoted friend to Tanyrin's crown prince, Michael could refuse Severyn Lothlain nothing, not even when Severyn asked the unspeakable of him. Determined to wrest the throne from his brother, Severyn intended nothing less than the resurrection of the ancient naragi. Michael, whose naran blood was the purest in Tanyrin, was the logical choice. But for Michael to become what mankind feared most, he needed a conduit through which to take the powerful, dangerous magic of the Dark Stream. He needed a man who carried the ancient blood of the cethera.

He needed Stefn Eldering.

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## Cethe Details

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## From Reader Review Cethe for online ebook

### Ayanna says

1/13/14 reread

I can't believe I never mentioned it before, but the storyline is completely archetypal classic yaoi. You know, with the rape-love thing going on. Seme pm rapes uke. Seme fucks with ukes head by telling him he orgasmed, therefore he enjoyed it, invited it, secretly craves it, so it wasn't rape. Uke goes into crisis. Stockholm starts setting in. Uke, meanwhile, starts emitting uke-pheromones upon initiation as uke, and therefore gets kidnapped and almost (or actually) brutally raped. Meanwhile, seme 1 comes riding to the rescue like the proverbial knight in shining armor. Uke comes to conclusion, "My seme does not treat my as poorly as other brutal raping asshole, therefore he treats me well and I love him." And they live codependently ever after. The end.

Seriously. I cannot believe I didn't mention that before.

The Severyn breaks were annoying because honestly,

Alas, I couldn't even make myself pretend to care, even in this reread through, so I don't get to find out if I get bonus points or not.

BTW, GR should totally add a thing where we can record reread dates and get those to count towards our reading challenges, too. Just saying and all.

8/17/12

I rather did like it, but it got to a point where I didn't really care about any of the other characters except Michael and Stefn, and for that reason, it only gets a 3. That means either it focused too much on other characters or didn't write them in such a way to make them vital to Michael and Stefn's story and thus inherently unable for me to tune them out. (I think I ended up skimming most of the parts about Severyn and whatever and I could still keep up with what was going on with Michael and Stefn, so...)

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### Emanuela ~plastic duck~ says

**01/18/13: Revised rating after a couple of years of reading m/m: from 4 to 3.**

This book kept me on edge until the very end. It's a hard journey, full of violence and magic. And love. Eventually.

The love story of this book begins in the most non-romantic way: a rape. Stefn, the human protagonist, has the Blood. It's not really explained what this means or why this happens, we later learn that through sex he can give to naragi, a supposedly extinct race of Dark mages, the energy they need to perform their spells. Michael belongs to a family of witches, but he's more powerful than everyone else and he needs to bond with

Stefn to expand his powers. Stefn doesn't agree to the bond in the first place, of course, and he resists Michael a few times.

The bond between the naragi Michael and his ceth Stefn is apparently only sexual. Even if Stefn is repelled by Michael, he is nonetheless attracted to him and he says it openly in one of the most revealing statements of the book "*Don't want you... Just need you*".

It sounds pure Stockholm syndrome, because, on top of everything, Stefn is a sin-catcher, a creature of ill omen, and he is regarded as a cast-away because of a birth-defect. Michael rapes Stefn at first (let's say it's out of necessity), but he is not a heartless man and he shows Stefn more kindness than everyone else before. So, when Stefn realizes that he's fallen for Michael, we don't know if it is because sometimes you can't help falling in love with the first person that treats you like a human being, or the very person who holds you prisoner, or if everything depends on the magical bond.

There is another similar bond in the book, but we are shown that the two men involved do not feel as close as Stefn and Michael. Can I forgive Michael for the initial rape? I think I can, because the very last pages of the book show the extent he is capable of to save Stefn and it shows that in the end the two are equals in their relationship (Michael saves Stefn, but Stefn saves Michael too).

I'm not going to elaborate further on the rape. I was able to read the book to the end, even if it made me squirm. Be warned: poor Stefn has to endure A LOT of abuse, what happens with Michael at the beginning is nothing in comparison, but it's told in passing (but if you felt for Stefn like me, you can't help suffering).

The world building was wonderful. At the beginning there were a lot of names and terminology, so it was slow to read, but then it flew.

The secondary characters are interesting. If you read my status updates you'll understand that I had a hard time with Michael's best friend, Severyn, the prince who's scheming to become king. Severyn is dead jealous of Michael and he's not an adamant figure, I think he kept something from Michael (together with Michael's powerful grandfather).

There's a lot of politics because the story takes place in a world where the secular power and the religious power are colliding. It's a time of political and religious unrest and it was interesting.

The book doesn't explore everything and I guess we will hear again from the Kingdom of Tanyrin, because the confrontation between the Church and the King isn't resolved, there's the marriage between Severyn and Stefn's sister to be celebrated and so much left to be explained.

I'd recommended this book to those who like complex world building and a fantasy setting, but not to those who resent relationships beginning with rape and those who are repelled by violence and torture.

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### **Seregil says**

Almost 5 stars.... but I will be generous with it because it's exactly the type of book I love and look for all the time - long fantasy story with a significant gay romantic subplot. It also had the hate-each-other-in-the-beginning thing. And cool magic that can be powered by gay smut XD What more can a fangirl ask for?

Bad points that make me hesitate about the 5 stars include:

- several loose ends (like the seme's father and his health problems that were never properly explained and that was hinted they could be solved by a practitioner of the "light" magic - and they should be able to have access to one by the end of the story. Or like the poor Prince who was lusting after the wrong person and was about to marry the uke's sister - which we never got to know what type of woman/wife she'd be and if they'd get along). Should I assume there's a sequel in the making and the loose ends were on purpose?
- we never really understood what why some people "had the Blood" and could be a Cethe and what exactly did that mean? How come a Cethe could endlessly supply energy like that? I assumed they were some sort of medium between the river of magical power and the magic users, but what did that imply exactly and how come it was possible only through sex?
- the characters in the beginning were kind of just thrown at us. I never really remembered who was the one who got stabbed and if he appeared later on (I got the feeling he survived.... I think). Of course... I could look it up on purpose, but I shouldn't have to :D Anyway, my point is that some of the side characters (like the prince's friends) were very hard to remember and individualize.

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### **Lilia Ford says**

One of those books I wish I could give ten stars to. Admittedly, this is pretty much my ideal book: a complex, engrossing fantasy world, with two wonderful leads, vivid secondary characters, and plenty of sex. It's unafraid of going to some pretty dark places, but I found nothing gratuitous at all, and the author's overall attitude was affirming not cynical. I thought Abbot dealt fairly with the brutal complexities of her world: the abuses taking place in the land are grotesque; consequently, these characters must get their hands very, very dirty in their quest to restore justice. Some are more honest about the price than others--and more cognizant of the dangers of using others as tools. In the end, that honesty about the true costs is the only thing that can halt the slide to tyranny--that, and love.

Needless to say, I am dying for a sequel to this. I can't stand the idea that this is the last we've seen of this world, and of Michael and Stefn in particular.

PS. A special word of praise for the cover art--it's gorgeous.

[For a more extended discussion of the non-con elements here see the review I posted on my blog, <http://www.liliafordromance.com/#!How...>]

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### **Elizabethetta says**

This is my kind of fantasy—a well described world of wizards and magic, political plotting and intrigue, action and adventure, and a pair of feuding lovers who take their time getting in sync. Lots of lovely slow burn. This book has been on my TBR list forever. I don't know why it took me so long to get to it, but I really enjoyed it.

It did take a little while for me to get into the story, to get the lay of the land—typical with in-depth fantasies, I think—but once it came together I got swept into Stefn and Michael's grand adventure. Their story is finely woven into that of the young royal they serve, Prince Severyn. He is desperate to battle the

religious fanaticism that threatens the throne as well as bring order back to his beleaguered land. And he'll do it at any cost, using Michael's magical abilities to strengthen the cause. The religious fanaticism and cultural backstory added to the richness of the world building.

Stefn and Michael's connection is unusual. Stef becomes a political pawn— taken against his will and forced to act as an energy source for Michael's wizardry. Via... you guessed it, lusty, sweaty sex. So, beware if rapey slavefic doesn't appeal, there's lots of that here. What I really liked was that it took them a while to work their way through suspicion and mistrust to find respect, friendship and love. There was nothing fluffy about it either, it's a long bumpy road.

Despite the slow start and some lagging here and there, this a well-done, entertaining read. And, hey, sex used as fuel for magic... that's pretty hot, too.

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### **M'rella says**

I absolutely adore this book! I adore all Becca's fiction! =)~

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### **Scarletine says**

What a disappointing book! It \*could\* have been a great story, there was heaps of potential passion between Stefn and his mage'master'Michael. However it just didn't materialise. The 'romantic' sex was so quick, it was as if the author was embarrassed to be writing it. She seemed to want to be writing a straight fantasy, with all of the worldbuilding in the book, that it weighed down the m/m romance.

The author became quite obsessed with the back stories of characters i cared nothing for and histories of different peoples, mages, religions, monarchy etc. None of it was well explained and it all became very confusing. In the end I didn't really care about any of the characters, apart from Stefn and Michael. And Stefn was such a poorly written character- (view spoiler)

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### **ConsultingStag says**

**Normally this would be the type of story I like, but the characters reactions were not convincing at all and simply made me appalled and disgusted by the story.**

Stefn was raped by Michael in the beginning to make him his cete, and fair enough, after almost no time passed Stefn acts towards him as if nothing happened and it didn't bother him at all.

*And that was exactly what made me dislike the story to a degree I can't even begin to describe.*

Stefn gets whipped by Michaels grandfather and after a bit of crying he's alright again, at the end he gets raped more times than he can count, but after an successful escape, thanks to Michael, this is all but forgotten and it doesn't take a day before he has sex with Michael again and is mentally totally fine.

**This lack of response to being tortured and raped was what made it impossible for me to enjoy the overall story. They can go and fuck or get fucked by unicorns or crocodiles for all I care, but this was simply horrid!**

Admittedly, the plot was good and interesting, but I simply can't get over the fact that rape and torture is being trivialized like that!

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### **Eve says**

There's something about Becca Abbott's writing style that is very likeable and appealing. I had really enjoyed her online fanfiction, especially the 2 lengthy Ai No Kusabe fanfic stories which are each outstanding (if you don't mind lots of noncon), and I also enjoyed Cethe thoroughly. The book is well-written, the world is interesting, and yes the romance in this one is a little formulaic but it still grabbed me and since this is a longer book the progression from enemies/master-slave to true love was well developed.

There's a completed sequel on the author's subscription site which is Severin's story and which was also a very good read. Hopefully that will get published in book form soon.

As another aside, Becca Abbott's several Gundam Wing fanfics are fabulous too - on par with PL Nunn's Smallville fanfic, in that they are very satisfying reads even if you weren't a fan of the originals.

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### **Wren says**

Oh my. It would be easier to list the things I didn't like about this story than the things I did, but that wouldn't be very nice, would it?

I loved this. Loved. It. It's a fantasy, a well-done fantasy, with excellent world-building. The cities, forests, fields, castles - all the settings were wonderfully detailed without boring the reader. The background - a conflict between the forces of the Church and the mystical people called h'naran and their human allies - was well-thought out and complex without overwhelming. Clearly, Ms Abbott has a lot more of their history in her possession than she gives us, which makes the parts we do get that much more believable. The main characters are suitably conflicted and complicated, and when they do stupid things you quite understand why they do them.

I don't read much yaoi, but from what I do know the two main characters fall into those tropes - the strong older man (Michael) and the young, seemingly-weak man (Stefn). Their beginning is brutal and non-consensual. The development of their relationship is a roller-coaster of emotion, including unraveling defenses and sudden realizations along with the push and pull of people who don't quite believe what's happening between them.

Some of the elements I liked: conspiracies, unknown history that comes to light, good friends, a big baddie, several characters who could easily be bad but aren't quite and you understand their motivation; horses; castles; magic gone awry; bondage; hurt/comfort; sex used in magical ways; and one of the most heart-

pounding awesomesauce rescue scenes I've read in a while. The kind where you can see it happening in slow-motion.

It took me four days to read this, because I wanted to savor it. I put it down frequently so I wouldn't rush through it.

One caution: There are some brutal scenes of torture, including rape. They're not overlong or overly described, but they aren't off-page either. This doesn't bother me, but if you're squeamish, well, you've been notified.

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### **Cyn Coons says**

I have waited a long time to hold a book by Becca Abbott in my hot little hands. Her stories were always filled with pain and heartache, yet tempered with passion and sweetness.

SL Publishing has picked a real gem to be their first foray into print books. This is going to appeal to the yaoi fans, as well as to fans of m/m fiction who want a good dose of high fantasy with their relationships.

I happen to be a sucker for high fantasy, so this book pushed all of my happy buttons.

Stefn is a sin-eater. Sin-eaters are humans who are born with a deformity and everything that goes wrong is laid to blame at their feet. Despised by his family because of his deformity, Stefн spends his days wrapped up in ancient histories and books.

There's a revolution brewing. The church, which Stefн's family owes full allegiance has grown corrupt and power hungry. The king of the land is in a drug addled haze. The king's brother will do everything in his power to save the kingdom of Tanrin; even if it means bringing back forbidden Naran sorcery.

A coup is staged, and Stefн is the only male member of his family left alive.

He's left alive for one reason, to serve as the conduit of power for Michael Arranz, who's descended from the demon race of Naragi. Michael's blood is one of the purest left, and he needs a conduit if the plans to save the country are to be fruitful.

Enter in Stefн - abused, sheltered and believing fully that the demon race is bad, and that he must do everything in his power to thwart Michael's plans.

Yet, it's hard to rebel when you're very being is tied to what you hate most in the world - When it holds you in a web of pleasure and friendship, greater than anything that Stefн has ever known.

This book took me to a place that few books are able to bring me to. A place where you don't even notice that time is passing, yet you're spending hours devouring every word on the page. I was sad when I found that I only had a few chapters left. I wanted the book to keep going, to spend more time with these characters. I knew I was going to like this book, based on the strength of Abbott's previous writing, but I wasn't expecting to like it quite this much. If this is the quality of work that SL Publishing is going to be releasing, then we're all in for a big treat.

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## **Emma Sea says**

\*sob\* I'm so sad I finished this book. I wish it could have gone on and on . . . Un-put-downable.

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## **Mina Soare says**

Wow, I can't believe I can add it to so many of my shelves. This book did *not* leave a good impression. For once "it was OK" is as accurate as I can get.

The basic arc - war against the king and obnoxiously corrupt Church (subtlety, my people) - was barely entertaining, yet eerily appealing. However the rebel leader (no spoilers) didn't actually do much after the beginning of the novel. One could probably say he had already everything in place, the right alliances, the ... whatever, except for a *naragi*, which he gets in the beginning. There is still no reason for the takeover of Shia, except to get Eldering, although one can't completely discount the machiavellic war maneuvers that we can't understand as we're not given the context and the author doesn't condescend to either (bla, bla, bla...) As I was saying, the throne effectively fell into the rebel leader's hands and all he had to do was protect Eldering and Michael's virtue from time to time (this sounds weirdly funny).

The basic arc is, however, a secondary one. The book mainly concentrates on the romance angle and everyone knows that there is no aphrodisiac better than as much S&M as I can ever expect to encounter in a book claiming not to be that, particularly. Nope... I don't take nicely to someone overshadowing my blame-the-Church angle to present the gay/abuse version of *Beauty and the Beast*...

And third, the cover. One reason I carry 1000 books in 1.5 cube cm is not only that the printed version would be rather heavy, but I still find the prospect of my grandma stumbling on a cover like this rather frightening, thank whoever bothered to invent USB. However, even I can't find myself willing to add a book that *only* has one type of cover that *only* telegraphs YES,-HERE-GUYS-SCREW-EACH-OTHER-A-LOT-AND-THERE-IS-A-LITTLE-STORY-TOO-SO-THIS-BOOK-IS-NOT-LITERARY-PORN, which, as it is, says a lot about judging a book by its cover. I'm not one to spit in the face of honesty, but I'll try to invest brain cells in the pursuit of electronic dust jackets. Yep, Hypocrisy R Us

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## **momokaachan says**

It took me three days to get through this book. For me, a fast reader, it is unusual. But the book was that intense - I had to leave it from time to time to just come up for air.

Becca Abbott does an excellent job of developing her story. The two MCs, Michael and Stefn, are more or less thrown together out of necessity. The interplay with Prince Severyn as a very important supporting character - hmm, almost a MC himself - is well done. Oh, heck, the whole book is well done. I have not been so well entertained since I read Kathrine Kurtz's Deryni series (the original one: *Chronicles of the Deryni* - 3 Vol. Set).

This book is not for the squeamish. There is rape, torture, and worse - politics, betrayals and despair - but there is also that wonderful arthurian "might for right" theme flowing through the book. The hearts of our heroes are tested again and again, and found - worthy.

I almost reluctantly hope there is a sequel to this book - I would dearly love to know "what happens next." I would just cross my fingers that it would be as well-written, and satisfying - as Cethe. I am looking forward to whatever Ms. Abbott writes in the future (her on-line serialized novel Reifu Rising is different place/time etc. but I found it equally enjoyable).

To sum up: damn good read.

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### **SueM says**

[In fact, one scene was really difficult to accept. Stefn had just been brutally gang-raped, when Michael rescues him. Michael heals

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### **Alex ☆ Comets and Comments ☆ says**

*"Beautiful. Like a captured angel."*

This review just about sums up my thoughts on this book. What started off really strong and pulled me in left me high and dry.

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### **Tatiana says**

#### **DNF at 35%**

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### **Honey says**

When I started reading this book I was hooked. The writing was fantastic, the world building breathtaking and the story outstanding. Watching Michael and Stefn's relationship develop from that of captor and victim to friendship and later love was very satisfying. Their travels through the world of the humans and nara were intriguing, as were the political battles going on around them. I couldn't get enough of it. And then they were separated by the spoiled, jealous prince Severyn. Everything just went downhill from there and something happened that made all of my excitement in the book... fizzle and die out. I read the rest in a sort of daze, no longer on the edge of my seat. (view spoiler) It's frustrating, because I'm so disappointed in what otherwise would have undoubtedly been a 5 star read if I hadn't read past the first 3/4 of the book.

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### **M'rella says**

I would love to find out what happened to Remy in the end. I would love to know if Severyn liked his little wife. I would love to know if there is going to be a sequel, even a short one. There are a lot of things that are left unfinished.

The story, I thought, slowed down considerably around page 350 or so, but picked up again later, though I had a feeling it was a little rushed towards the end. It was somewhat frustrating to deal with such uneven

flow.

However, I can't deny - I am in love with Cethe. 5 stars.

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### **Xia Xia Lake says**

5 stars for worldbuilding - I wish CD Projekt Red transformed this book into a new RPG game. I'd play the hell out of it. I love how Becca Abbott uses the themes of corrupt priests and the control the church has over the population via religion.

5 stars for the naragi-cethe idea (brilliantly imaginative) and for building up Stefn and Michael's relationship

5 stars for Becca Abbott's writing skills

1 star for all Severyn's POV chapters - up till the end I did not give two sh\*\*s about him

3 stars for the entertainment of the book. Just as with Reifu Rising the author builds and builds a great possible ending but when the ending comes it's left open, simple and rather ... meh. I might be craving blood because I love battle scenes but come one, building an army, building a mildly interesting throne overthrowing plan and then.... fizzzz

Now, here is a representation of myself while reading this book:

The book begins:

Michael makes Stefn his cethe

The plan for overthrowing Arami's throne is discussed

Royal petitions, the search for the elusive printing press, the find of the printing press, the use of the printing press, the search for Arami's pelthe dealer, the renovations of Shia castle, the rebuilding of the library in Shia castle

The throne overthrow plan is trying to be put in motion but karma and Loth have other plans

The "poor Stefn" stages near the end of the book

The ending - 540 pages later

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It was a nice, if longer than expected, ride. I recommend it, especially if you are a fantasy m/m fan.