



The Fallen

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For hundreds of years, the Blaukenev clan has wandered across Tilzam, from one end to the other and back. Each wagon carries history, love, laughter, pain, sorrow, and secrets. Their greatest secret of all may be Chavali, the clan Seer.

Spirits claim/use/save/damn her.

With her gift/curse, nothing surprises her anymore, no one keeps secrets from her. She, on the other hand, has more than enough secrets to keep. Secrets of her own, secrets of her clan, secrets of the world, secrets she even keeps from herself.

There are always people who want secrets.
Some will do anything to get what they want.

The Fallen is the foundation of the story of The Greatest Sin, of a world adrift from its God that desperately wants Her back. Chavali's comfortable, predictable life will be ripped apart and burnt to ashes as she's forced into the middle of that struggle. Change, she hates it passionately. It hates her right back.

The Fallen Details

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Rachel Barnard says

“So long as there is clan, there is hope.” (Page 174).

Chavali is the clan seer. When her wandering clan, the Blaukenevs, stop for a carnival, she is a fortune teller for the night, telling people what they want to hear. She may not be able to tell the future, but she has the ability read people, from their expressions to their very thoughts. At times she experiences accurate prophecies and is a limited telepath, though neither are under her control. She is held in high esteem, but also regarded as one apart from the bonded clan. When she is held at knife point, her guard must save her. When the clan is under attack, who will be there to save her?

The Fallen is a novel that has been greatly imagined by the author. It is not just a world that Lee French built, but a culture and a people. French begins the story with the beginning and the Creator and then moves so far forward in time that the myth of the Creation is not thought of the same by all the inhabitants of the world. French makes her own Creation and interweaves the present day story throughout the trail left behind by the Creation. I really enjoyed the mythical adaptation feel that this story had and that French kept going back to it to create a tightly woven story that was intricate and fully fledged.

The concept of ‘Clan’ French created reminds me of the close-knit culture seen in the movie Brother Bear or the strong connection of a small town where everyone knows each other and they speak their own slang. French’s clan, the Blaukenevs, do in fact speak their own language known only to them. They have their own traditions and ways of life. These rituals were fascinating to read about and they were presented as part of the way of life, intriguing to the reader and not confusing in that they were foreign. It was like being privy to a new culture by being on the inside.

Chavali also presented the reader with an outsider’s perspective when she is in the outsider’s world, which I really appreciated because it was neat to see the outsider looking in perspective for an entirely different culture that French created in the Fallen society. The reader was able to get a complete picture of the new and interesting Outside world through Chavali’s eyes and it was refreshing. French described the new and different society in a way that kept my attention through every differing detail. Chavali was a fascinating character who maintained her mannerisms within her society of the Blaukenevs and throughout the Outside world. She was a no-nonsense character because she was born into an environment that allowed her to grow as a confident person. It’s neat to find a character who is strong without reason and she maintains her independence throughout a dependent clan culture as well as when she is thrust into the chaos of the Outside world.

K.A. Schultz says

For anyone who loves fantasy, this is a definite read. I fell into this story immediately. The story moved along nicely, Chavali, the main character is interesting, strong, and very likable. The author did a great job bringing the reader into Chavali's world. This book makes the reader feel like she/he is still in the book, days after it is finished. It leaves you wanting more. I am eagerly awaiting the second book in this series. The only complaint I can give is, I wish the book was longer. Yes, it was that good of a read.

Alison Cubitt says

From the opening sentence, the reader is drawn into the complex fantasy world of *The Fallen* (The Greatest Sin). But what struck me most was how accessible this world was to someone like me who gave up on this genre long ago after being put off by the boring bits in *Lord of the Rings*.

This book, though works on so many different levels. There's the overarching story – the creation myth and one that is remarkably similar to that written about in that other great work of fantasy fiction – the Bible. And like the creation myths in indigenous cultures which were told not through writing but by drawing or passed on through an oral tradition, the creator in this particular story happens to be a she. How refreshing. That's one for the sisterhood.

One of the best qualities of this work is the strength of the characterisation. Chavali, (the protagonist) has complexity, depth and above all flaws. She's complacent, grumpy and her magical powers have been known to fail her. There is deftness and wit to the writing, a light touch that ensures that even the minor characters are memorable, particularly in this instance. "Agatha, she's a priest and lives on our floor, has a mean backhand swing with her mace. That's Violet sitting with her, also on our floor. She's an acrobat and contortionist."

These two writers have a real ear for dialogue and the dialogue does what it's meant to – reveal character and move the story along. They make writing look easy. That just shows how well crafted this book is. There is drama and excitement as the story structure leads the reader to a high point in the third act of the book. My only criticism is that in the denouement I yearned to know more of Chavali's thoughts at the end about how the experience had changed her. I felt her story returned her to her ordinary world, without a real set up for the next book (of which I certainly hope there will be). But maybe it was just me being picky. Nevertheless a highly recommended book and one I hope that won't just be read by fantasy readers. This is highly polished, extremely well edited contemporary fiction that deserves a wide readership.

I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Kim says

This was a fun beginning to a fantasy series.

I enjoyed traveling with the clan and seeing a unique type of culture. The brazenness of the clan was a fun addition and was comfortably entertaining and felt very human. The main character is very real and her emotions and thoughts are easy to follow allowing you to be along for the ride of her life.

The story takes a turn and moves off into a surprising and interesting direction, can't wait for the continuation!

I appreciated how the writing and so the story felt very natural and unforced.

Ariane says

The Fallen is a wonderfully written short novel that sets up the story of Chavali the Seer. The writing does a great job of showing rather than telling, with little hints about the world and the way magic works throughout the narrative. The story carries you along a nice pace, something which not all fantasy books do well. The beginning isn't necessarily a gripping page-turner, but once you get past the midway point, it's difficult to put down! I'm definitely looking forward to more books in the series.

Angela Burkhead says

Chavali is clan seer and she takes her job seriously. Her people need her, not only for making money when they stop in towns, but also to use the spirits to guide and protect them. She does not regret her position within her people and she keeps her peoples secrets close to her heart. She knows everyone in her clan inside and out, she has seen her families dreams and even her sister has taken to thinking what she wants to say to Chavali instead of speaking private conversations aloud.

Her gift of reading minds and occasionally seeing into the future is rare and coveted leading to her people being attacked to obtain it. When she loses everything, the Fallen take her in and she devotes the next five years of her life to their cause, but not before attempting to rescue the last of her clan. Clan is everything. Clan is happiness, clan is hope. If she is not the last then the clan can rebuild and survive.

Many secrets still lie hidden, many held by Chavali herself as she refuses to share with any but clan. The world outside her clan is strange and stagnate, filled with unique gifts among the Fallen as well as their enemies giving advantages to each side. In book one the reader learns of Chavali and how she came to be in the service of the Fallen. We learn little about the Fallen and their quest of reunification and only glimpse the potential of this world.

From the first chapter I was hooked. The characters and their dialogue are real, personable and intriguing. The reader steps into their world and feels welcome pulling you in making it difficult to put down. Chavali is a strong woman with all the right reactions and decisions which you don't find often in a book and I thoroughly enjoyed her character. The book has the right pace and the right amount of secrets leaving you wanting book 2. The Fallen is a great fantasy book that I will continue to read through to the end.

Suzanne Hagelin says

This is a story woven with layers of plot and salted with persuasive characters. Life in the clan is vivid and the realm of the Fallen is intriguing. The underlying theme of the series on the one hand, and the main character on the other, are compelling enough that you're saying, "Where's the next book?" as soon as you come to the last page.

The title confused me at first. “The Fallen, The Greatest Sin”, what was that about? Overeating? Trashy romance? Burning fossil fuels? It could mean just about anything. And I didn’t know if the main character had enough substance to catch my interest. A woman with a feisty personality and a pink feather embedded in her skull, sprouting out of her forehead?

I wasn’t sure if I would enjoy it. Fortunately, I was persuaded to give it a shot.

The framework for the series appealed to me. Something had gone wrong with the world. In ages past, a great sin was committed and the tribes were cast out and separated from one another; their Creator, hiding and silent. Each group had a different tradition about what the crime had been and clues to repairing the breach. And someone had been gathering fallen people from different parts of the world into a secret society dedicated to piecing the puzzle together and restoring the lost world.

Chavali, the woman with the feather, immediately takes center stage and remains there, carrying the tale from beginning to end, and winning you over entirely by the charisma of her personality.

As the Seer of her clan, a distinct people group of a couple hundred that lives and travels caravan style, Chavali uses her ability to read minds and occasionally prophesy to earn money for the clan. But the gift, while it earns her respect and service, is isolating and tedious. The man who loves her, whom she would’ve loved too, is a burden to her with his possessive and lustful ideas. She can’t, in fact, let anyone touch her unless she’s willing to be swamped by their thoughts—which would exhaust even the most generous soul.

She comes across selfish and petty at first, but you soon realize that she has set herself apart for the clan. Her love for them, her courage and intuition, and skill at reading and manipulating people, make up for her quick temper and childish habits. She’s watching over them like a spiritual guardian and when the time comes to protect them, she’ll do whatever it takes.

I appreciated the writing. The fantasy world seems familiar enough that you don’t feel lost while retaining an original, creative quality. The characters are strong and real, and the magic seems bound by understandable limits, not unexpected or unreasonable. Chavali is well thought out, clearly painted. The authors portrayed her intuition seamlessly in their descriptions and used clever language devices to capture the foreignness of her accent.

How interesting that a seer who foretells the future states that “the future was fluid” and believes “everyone has a free will”, and that becomes the pivotal moment in the drama! Far from being at the mercy of the aggressors or the spirits, she drives the story as an independent.

“Better to choose your own fate than to be a slave to someone else’s choice,” she says. Then she proceeds to do something “that the spirits would never expect.”

That’s when I sat up and decided, I love this.

Kristen says

The Fallen is an interesting story that draws you into the characters and leaves you wondering about the world around them. At times I found myself wondering more about the Fallen themselves, how they came to be, and history of the world more than I cared about what happened to the main character Chavali. I look

forward to the next book so that hopefully some of my questions can be answered.

P.S. Meraux says

Set against the biblical style fallout of a demolished civilization similar to the fall of Babylon, the residents of Tilzam are scattered to the four winds after running afoul of their Creator. This back-story hints at the possibility of redemption.

Enter Chavali, the main protagonist in Lee French's *The Fallen*. A gifted seer, who lives a gypsy-like existence in a wagon train with her clan, the Blaukenev. She's rather irritable and does her best to remain that way, insuring that people stay clear of her. I admit it took me a while to warm to Chavali, her rude ways and insistence on pushing away the people who loved her made her unappealing. Then I began to understand the reason for it was more about survival than anything else and I cut her some slack. For while she is a seer, she doesn't have full control of her powers and what she "sees." Which means that anyone who gets too close can have a very painful impact on her. Personally speaking, if coming in contact with random strangers had me falling on the floor in pain, I'd probably be more than irritable.

When a trio of visitors becomes interested in the Blaukenev and even more so, their lore-keeper, things take an unexpected twist as the trio is not the only group who want to know Chavali's secrets.

Chavali is forced to examine her feelings about death and life, and what the word "family" means after a great tragedy befalls her clan. Given a second chance, she begins to rectify some of those past injustices. But that's just the beginning of what I suspect will be a challenging new chapter in her life -- that is only beginning to be explored in this first book.

French's writing is straight-forward and rich with detail. The characters are atypical and reeking of past lives, part of which is only hinted at.

Given the length of the novel, I would have preferred more time be devoted to her 'mission' as everything prior to that seemed to work fine as a set up for who Chavali is and why she's become part of this new group. That said, the book is a quick and enjoyable read that I can recommend without hesitation to others.

Tony Breeden says

The Fallen is the first book in the *Greatest Sin* series. Volume 1 introduces us to Chavali the Seer, a gypsy fortuneteller who can read minds. It also introduces us to the Fallen, an organization of resurrected people who are seeking to discover the nature of the Greatest Sin and reunite their world with its goddess Creator.

It's difficult to write a review for a book like this without giving away spoilers, so I'll keep it brief. *The Fallen* manages to draw you in from the beginning. Chavali's world and culture are richly drawn. Chavali's emotional range and reactions to the events around her flow naturally. While Chavali is well-developed, some of the other characters were flat and interchangeable. Some are very interesting. I'm particularly keen to know what's going on with the horse! But the antagonist isn't well developed and this affected my level of investment in the third act of the book.

The plot was a little muddled. There were certainly three acts, but it didn't flow very well. The end of the book felt anticlimactic, but I realize this is the first book in a series. It was a good read. I wouldn't mind reading the next one. I rate this book 4 out of 5 stars.

-Tony Breeden

From the Bookwyrms' Lair

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the author for review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

Kaitlin says

This is one of my #SPFBO books for this year

I really was interested in this when I started reading as I feel like the start of the book really drags you in. At the beginning we're following a young woman called Chevali who is the Clan Seer for the Blaukeners. These people are a travelling group who entertain, wander and live a fairly untroubled life. They sometimes put on shows for villages if they want to trade or gain money, but in general the Clan is family and they never leave or desert one another.

Chevali's character is a promising one at the start, she seems like she knows her own mind and she's kind of stubborn at times. I particularly like the fact that she stood up for herself multiple times and knew how to say 'No' when she needed to. However, as the story went on I feel like Chevali made a few choices and we saw a few internal thoughts from her that were a little disappointing and I feel like she could have stayed a little stronger than she did.

The magic of this world comes from the Seer mostly because whenever Chevali touches a person she gets to see their thoughts as images in her mind. I like the concept of this magic, and the fact that she uses it to be a Seer for the clan was interesting, but alongside this Chevali also occasionally has visions.

The story itself is fairly well paced although I did find some bits a little slower than I wanted. I read the first half of the book pretty quickly, but there is a section in the middle which is setting up a new location and organisation and I felt some of that was a bit slow-going.

On the whole, I think this had some good moments and it didn't follow quite the path I anticipated which I liked, but I think some of the elements I found most fascinating (the Clan life) aren't really a feature later in the book and I would have liked to see more of these.

It's a solid read with only a few typos/grammatical issues (although one was the name of the main character so that's not great!) and I gave it a 3* overall so 6/10 for SPFBO.

Kelly says

I never re-read books as a general rule, but I have read this book twice already. I loved the story and fell in love with the characters even more the second time through. I hope that another book in this series is released soon, as I can't wait to see what happens next! On the flip side, if the next installment takes a while, I can read this one again in preparation for the release!

I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys fantasy or a good read in general.

Favorite quote, "Men. They had the observation skills of walnuts."

Kevin Futers says

This is close to a five star, but not quite. It ticks almost every box you could hope for in a fantasy epic in the making; the characters are beautifully drawn and easy to empathise with, the setting works incredibly well, the use of magic is muted but seems to fit in well with the information that we have about the world. As a bonus the strong female protagonist is allowed to be both strong and frail at the same time, and when thrown out of her comfort zone she has honest self-doubt leading to the discovery that martial prowess is not always the way to overcome the obstacles in the enemy camp.

A word about the setting: I had to think what it was about it that worked so well, and I think it is that you don't have to work at all hard to visualise the world that we enter as readers. The Blaukenev have a gypsy vibe, but they are not gypsies - the analogy is just a useful hook. The townsfolk are rubes, but they also have real lives and they are in their own way very important. The Fallen are intriguing and I have no doubt we will learn more about them as the series progresses. The idea of the Creator's Towers as a mass transit system was also inspired and gives the book a fluidity that a "quest" style book would have lacked.

The villains are a little under-written, too mysterious and unknown. As we lack information about this world, I think at least some information about this Order of the Strong Arm / Mind would have been helpful.

I really would like to see where this goes next and I will be looking out for the sequel.

I received a free copy of this book in exchange for a fair review.

Chrys Cymri says

It's a bit hard to write a review about this book without major spoilers, but I'll do my best.

The world created in the first third is a richly imagined one. The main character, Chavali, lives in a traveller type clan. The culture of her society is drawn in detail, but in a natural way which draws the reader in. My slight complaint is that, as richly detailed as it is, the culture didn't feel that unique. I've come across similar ideas in other books.

However, at around a third of the way through, all this changes dramatically. Chavali finds herself thrust into another culture. This one too is explored in depth, and culminates in a rescue attempt.

Although the novel was well written, it wasn't a page turner. All the detailed world building worked against a sense of urgency or real conflict. There is an antagonist of sorts, but we don't meet him or her, and this isn't developed in much detail.

If you're looking for a slow, immersive read, this is a novel for you. And no doubt the enemy and resultant conflict will become clearer in the sequel.

Jengel says

I enjoyed this book. The characters were well developed and engaging. I will read the next one and recommend this book as a great read.
