



Dragonoak: The Complete History of Kastelir

Sam Farren

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After being exiled to the farmland around her village, Rowan Northwood takes the only chance at freedom she might ever get: she runs away with a passing Knight and doesn't look back. The woman cares nothing for Rowan's company, but nor does she seem perturbed by the powers that burn within her.

Rowan soon learns that the scope of their journey is more than a desperate grasp at adventure. She breaks away from the weighty judgement of her village, but has no choice but to abandon her Kingdom altogether. Sir Ightham's past leads them through Kastelir, a country draped in the shadow of its long-dead Queen—a woman who was all tusks and claws and great, spiralling horns.

Hiding her necromancy is no longer Rowan's greatest challenge, and what leads them across Kingdoms and through mountains is a heavier burden than she ever could've imagined.

Dragonoak: The Complete History of Kastelir Details

Date : Published May 8th 2015

ISBN :

Author : Sam Farren

Format : ebook 427 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Lgbt, Glbt, Queer, Romance, Lesbian



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From Reader Review Dragonoak: The Complete History of Kastelir for online ebook

Lex Kent says

Feb 21, 2017 Review. This is book 1 in a LGBT epic fantasy series. I read the first two books in this series, a while ago. I have impatiently been waiting, for over a year, for the 3rd and finale book to come out. With book 3 releasing on Feb 23rd, I thought I should re-read this series to refresh my memory, and see if I still loved it. The short answer is yes. This is the one series, I seem to measure all other lesfic fantasy by. I started to think maybe I built these books up more in my head, then what they really are. They are not perfect by any means, but I still loved every second of this book, and I remember book 2 being even better.

I do want to mention, this book is slow in parts, especially the first half. But think about When Women Were Warriors The Warrior's Path or even The Lord of The Rings. The first books in good epics fantasy series, seem to be a bit slower, and involve a lot of traveling, and this book is no exception. But it is world building, and character building. By the time you are done with this book, you are so invested in not one or two characters, but a whole group. And with the cliffhanger at the end, it is impossible to not read book 2. I forgave the cliffhanger because I don't see it as a cheap authors trick. And this is a series, not standalone books, by any means.

The main character is Rowen, a Necromancer. She is living in a time when necromancy is feared and some even burned alive. This book is seen through Rowen's point of view, and she is a wonderful character. Her love interest is Claire, a Knight. Again a very likeable but torn character. The romance between them is slow and sweet, but it makes sense with Rowen's sheltered and innocent upbringing. You will not find steamy sex scenes here, but the fade to black kind. But you still feel every inch of their connection and chemistry. It is not just the main characters that are well written, but the supporting cast too. Each character has their own personality and is well fleshed out.

I'm really happy to say how much I still enjoyed this book. And remembering that book 2, was even better, I can't wait to read it again. For fantasy fans, this book is a must. It is long, and slow in parts, but it is worth the journey. Did I mention there are Dragons? :)

Rain says

How did I not read this sooner? This book is fantastic! The world, the story, the characters, the romance... everything. It was entertaining and engaging from the beginning and it had my undivided attention.

I frequently find myself criticizing/disliking at least one aspect of a book (something related to the characters, a flaw in the plot, or maybe the pacing), even if I'm really liking it overall, but that's not the case here. In every aspect it was pretty much perfect for me! I think the world-building is great and I don't remember ever feeling overwhelmed. All of the characters are also very well-written, and the romance was really nice, I love that it never felt rushed, rather, their relationship developed slowly over time.

All in all, this is the kind of fantasy book I'm always expecting to find, and I'm really looking forward to reading the sequels. (:

Jem says

Imagine Lord of the Rings, with Frodo, Aragorn and Treebeard-on-steroids going on a quest. Except that they're all female (yeay!).

Dragonoak is set in a time when dragons go around razing whole towns. And knights in dragon bone armor go around trying to stop them. But don't go looking for dragon slaying action here. At least not in the first book. Or at least, not in 97% of the first book. This is first and foremost about the journey of a young woman cursed with a special ability so terrifying and diabolical, people would burn her at the stake if they knew. It's a journey of self-discovery (the book is entirely from her first person perspective) as she goes from a simple, country girl and unwanted village pariah to being a valued member of a "family", as she comes face to face with the prejudices, hatred, fears and superstitions of the outside world, as she experiences love and betrayal for the first time, and as she is forced to make hard and dubious choices for the "greater good".

Probably the most frustrating thing about the book is that the purpose of the quest is not made known to the lead character (and therefore, the reader) until late in the book. So it takes quite a bit of patience (and a lot of trust in friend reviews ;)) to get through the many chapters where the main characters travel from one town to another with no seeming end or purpose. It occasionally got disorienting as well. More than once I had to try to recall where I was in this world. I think it would have helped if there was a map of some sort in the book. And a glossary for the different peoples/races mentioned. Fortunately, the same limited perspective that made the read so frustrating also made it so incredibly addicting (and powerful when the truth hits). Everything is seen from the country girl's innocent yet not-so-innocent eyes. It's a truly immersive and emotional experience.

All that travelling around allowed the author to draw such detailed and in-depth characterizations of the three main protagonists---Rowan the country girl, Igtham, the knight/dragonslayer and Kouris, the amazingly badass but also motherly creature called "pane" that it was impossible not to fall in love with them (despite how hideous the book's description made the "pane" seem like). By the time the true purpose of the quest was revealed, I was completely hooked.

The book is trying for the epic fantasy look and feel obviously, and succeeding mostly. Though it could probably use a bit of trimming here and there. Like jettison that annoying Michael character and his entire storyline. I won't miss him one bit. Akela's accent. I don't know what to make of it. It's funnier than it's supposed to be. Distracting, at best. I had a hard time trying not to imagine her as a gag character, which she obviously isn't. Occasionally, something seemingly out of place, or rather, out of time slips in--modernish concoctions like ice or chocolate, or modern terms like "processing" an emotion, or "dietary choices" or "operative word". Nothing big but they were enough to pull me back to the present like that coin from "Somewhere in Time". Tolkien this ain't. But it's still entertaining as hell.

4.5 stars

lov2laf says

This is a really well done fantasy novel filled with knights, monarchy, necromancers, dragons, and creatures I've never heard of. The author did an excellent job of world building and it's clear that the plot is intricate and well thought out.

The story takes awhile to unfold and it's not clear what outcome our characters are striving for because it is told from the perspective of our lead, Rowan the necromancer, who's like a fresh new lamb that is also purposefully kept in the dark by the other characters. Rowan is basically on an epic journey of all journeys and we find out the plot as she does. The book is a page turner, though, and held my interest the entire time.

There were so many unexpected twists I think this book gets the most points for "I didn't see that coming" more than any other book I've ever read. Whatever surprises presented it wasn't forced, made the story more cohesive, and helped things slip into place. That's pretty hard to pull off and at every turn I was really delighted by the new directions the story took. So, well done to the author for that.

In addition to a complex plot, each character clearly has a strong backstory and distinct style which I thoroughly appreciated. As for ethnic diversity, many characters are not white, specifically our lead, Rowan.

Overall, the book is high quality and I give it around 4.4 stars.

There are two drawbacks I did feel the book had, though, with one being a little more pressing and the other being super minor. The main one was Rowan's love interest...not that I wasn't rooting for it. I was. A lot. But, because Rowan is more sheltered and is fairly naive, she felt really young to me despite being in her 20s. Her love interest is much more worldly wise and it felt like there was somewhat of a mismatch...like a kid getting with a grown up. Ack.

And because the two don't always talk the most I was curious as to the why and when the mutual attraction developed. They had a number of scenes together which I could see the author using to indicate something more was coming but there also wasn't a clear attraction/sexual interest between them, either. I hate to nitpick but, since we're in Rowan's head, it would've been great to have her fawn over said love interest like fantasize about her when she should be thinking of something else, bite her lip, blush in her presence, awkward freudian slips of interest/attraction, jealous of other's attentions...that kind of thing even if Rowan considered herself way out of the running and could never fathom having the same level of interest returned. That would've made it very clear and much more organic. Instead, the romance aspect felt kind of tacked on and clunky.

And the minor quibble is coming across a few missing words here and there or the wrong word used ("content" vs "contend", for ex)...

But, hey, the story is HUGE and awesome and a fantastic debut so whatever gripes I have are really, really small in the grand scheme of things.

I truly enjoyed the book and am thoroughly impressed by this author. The story ends with a dramatic cliffhanger so I'm glad books 2 and 3 are already out. I'll definitely be reading them.

Yes, recommend.

Liam (Hey Ashers!) says

This is a (long) review posted on Hey Ashers! The original post, which features more intelligible formatting than Goodreads allows, is available in its entirety here!

Spoiler Rating: Moderate

Finest of Katies,

NaNoWriMo Week Three has ended (no, I won't talk about my word count), and I finally have a self-published novel to tell you about!

Don't let my one-and-a-half-star rating scare you off. *Dragonoak: The Complete History of Kastelir* is flawed, sure, but it has some good stuff going on.

And yes, I enjoyed it—but I found myself reading *Dragonoak* as a first draft submitted to my writing group: a promising, fresh, malleable thing in need of serious revisions, not a finished work. Unfortunately, I have to rate it as the published novel it is, not the novel it could become. It'd get more than a measly one and a half stars if I could rate it on its promise alone.

Diversity

- The main characters are a lesbian and a homoromantic gray-asexual woman, and I seriously can't contain my excitement about that.
- The wider cast includes lesbian and gay couples, and their relationships *aren't* taboo.
- Women fill (what we view as) traditionally male roles, including high-ranking positions in the army (pardon my swoon).
- Characters who don't fit the male/female gender binary use third-person pronouns, and no one thinks twice about it.
- The main character is dark-skinned and dark-haired.
- She enters into a romance with a pale-skinned and light-haired woman.

(Side note: race doesn't appear to be a source of tension in *Dragonoak*. However, it's worth pointing out that Rowan, the main character and first-person narrator, is a farmer from a small village, and she's described as a person of color. Sir Ightham, who is of much higher birth and was raised in the capital city, and who has attained the exalted position of Knight, is white.)

Romance

- Rowan and Sir Ightham get to know each other, establish trust, and build romantic tension by small, tantalizing degrees.

- The scenes that advance their relationship into a romance (like the first time they hold hands) are well written and worthy of multiple rereads.
- They don't immediately flip from Companions With Romantic Tension to Clingy Soulmates.
- In fact, they *never* become Clingy Soulmates.
- Their romance isn't the be-all end-all focus of the story.

Sword-Fighting

- The romantic interest is a knight who is crazy-skilled with her sword.
- The main character tries to learn sword-fighting, and (unlike so many main characters out there) she *doesn't* pick it up easily or with supernatural speed.

Magic

- Rowan's brand of necromancy is awesome, and not something I'd ever read before.
- Information about her magic is doled out slowly.
- Her magic isn't a Super Useful Multipurpose Tool that she and her companions are constantly relying on throughout their adventures.

History

- This is a world with an extensive and plot-significant backstory.
- The novel is not, like its title suggests, a boring history textbook with all the events laid out chronologically; it focuses on a small cast of characters living in a world that's haunted by its past.
- The kingdom's history is told through legends and stories and first-person accounts and rumors, all slowly coming together until the final piece clicks into place.

I'll only discuss the most significant four things that could improve, because this isn't an actual critique for my writing group and I need limits. Four seems like a good limit.

Let's see how well I stick to it.

Thing The First: Narrative Technique

1. The Narrator Isn't The Protagonist

Protagonists must overcome obstacles to achieve a goal; their struggles are the point of their story. The people who actually *tell* that story are narrators. The protagonist and the narrator don't always have to be the same person, but sometimes—like here—using two separate people for those roles can have a significant, negative impact on the story.

Rowan narrates *Dragonoak* in the first person, and possesses none of the traits of a protagonist (goal, obstacles to overcome, antagonist, character arc, climactic goal-related moment, etc.). Throughout the book, Rowan just tags along behind Sir Ightham and sightsees.

Meanwhile, Sir Ightham has a *Super Secret Quest* that takes her through kingdoms and across wilderness; it has her fleeing pursuit, collecting confidential information, and scheming with some very powerful

people. *But the details of Sir Ightham's quest are kept hidden from the reader, because Rowan doesn't know about/isn't involved in it.* (Italics for emphasis.) Rowan/the reader doesn't find out what Sir Ightham's up to until *very* late in the book—and even then, Rowan *still* doesn't get involved. She continues to just hang about while Sir Ightham is protagonizing off-screen.

This is *agonizing*. Yes, splitting the narrator and the protagonist can be an effective storytelling technique, but that's not the case in this particular version of this particular story. It left me hobbled to Rowan the Aimless Tourist when I really wanted to be questing alongside Bad Ass Sir Ightham.

Do I think this problem could be fixed? Definitely, with serious revisions. But (as I obviously still haven't accepted) this isn't a manuscript, and I need to let go of my dream of seeing those revisions realized. (Why is it so hard to let go?)

2. *Rowan Is Somehow Omniscient*

For a first-person narrator, Rowan knows an awful lot about what's going on in the minds of the people around her. Take, for example, this group of bandits:

Two issues here: (1) the "self-proclaimed leader" never actually told Rowan and Sir Ightham that he's the leader, so it appears Rowan already knows the history of this particular group of bandits; (2) the leader scowled silently, but Rowan knows exactly *why* he scowled.

Another sign of an omniscient first-person narrator is the liberal use of phrases like "as though," "I knew," "no doubt," "seemed," and so on. These phrases appear innocent enough, especially when they imply some doubt ("as though"), but they become dangerous when the writer relies on them to tell the reader what's really going on in the non-point-of-view character's head.

Although there are many possible reasons for Sir Ightham to pinch her lips, Rowan immediately jumps to a specific conclusion—a conclusion that the reader is supposed to believe is accurate.

This type of mistake is common for several reasons, including:

- (i.) The writer has a hard time divorcing themselves from the viewpoint character, leading to a sort of bleed-over of knowledge from the author to the character.
- (ii.) The writer's writing style relies on *telling* the reader what they need to know ("Our eyes met, and he scowled as if he'd hoped to never see me again") rather than *showing* the reader and trusting that the reader will figure it out ("Our eyes met, and he recoiled, smile souring").

Although it's not enjoyable to read, this mistake is easy to fix, and certainly not the end of the world.

Thing The Second: Conflict And Pacing

Some key facts about conflict:

- (a) Conflicts are those obstacles that a protagonist must overcome to succeed in their goal.
- (b) Conflicts force protagonists to react, to reevaluate, to modify or change their course of action.
- (c) Conflicts should (ideally) build upon and complicate each other, raising the tension and the stakes as the protagonist's goal becomes (seemingly) farther from reach.
- (d) Conflicts should (ideally) be tied to both the story's theme and the main characters' arcs (what they learn over the course of the story, and how they change as a result).

Frankly, I'm not clear on what the story's theme is, nor did I see any character arcs. Which is, you know, not a good thing.

On top of that, there just isn't much conflict in *Dragonoak*. Sir Ightham's quest is surely conflict-filled, but (again) it's kept Super Secret for most of the book.

Rowan's sightseeing, meanwhile, is inconsequential; she's not struggling for or with anything, not accomplishing anything, not learning anything significant. Yes, there are a few times when Rowan seems to be in danger of drawing attention that'll get her burned at the stake (the standard fate for necromancers), but those tense moments quickly dissipate without any interesting follow-through.

Now, there are a couple of false/minor conflicts that involve both Rowan and Sir Ightham:

- (i.) They're attacked a few times. The attackers appear out of nowhere and are swiftly defeated, and our heroines continue on their way. Injuries might be sustained, but neither the attacks nor the injuries significantly affect the plot.
- (ii.) Someone they want to talk to isn't where they'd thought she'd be, so their journey is extended by several weeks to reach her. This isn't a big deal, because Sir Ightham's quest apparently isn't on a tight schedule.

That said, there are two really fantastic, A+, two-thumbs-up obstacles thrown in Sir Ightham's path. No, I won't tell you what they are, because spoilers.

What makes them fantastic, A+, two-thumbs-up obstacles? Two things.

- (i.) They throw a *huge* wrench into Sir Ightham's plan, bringing her whole mission to a grinding halt.
- (ii.) They aren't mere personal challenges for Sir Ightham to overcome; they're events that will dramatically affect the kingdom and the world at large.

Unfortunately, both conflicts come *very* late in the story; you have to push through a great deal of Rowan the Tourist Touristing About before you get to them. Also unfortunately, the first of those two conflicts isn't handled quite as realistically as I would've liked, and therefore isn't as powerful as it could've been.

In sum, this story—which is a whopping 160,000-ish words, far exceeding the norm for fantasy novels—is 75% conflict-free traveling, followed by two brief periods of conflict (themselves separated by casual sightseeing). Clearly, pacing is an issue.

Thing The Third: Nuanced Portrayals Of People

One reason why I adore Maggie Stiefvater's writing is how nuanced her portrayal of each character is. They aren't characters at all, they're *people*: complex, idiosyncratic, and lovingly described by an author who knows them as intimately as she knows herself. You learn something about each character from, like, the way they hold a pencil or turn pages in a book. Her portrayals are immersive and gorgeous, and oh my goodness hold on I'm having a writer-crush moment. Just *thinking* about her writing gets my heart a-flutter.

Okay.

Now, I'm not saying that every writer has to achieve Stiefvater levels of nuance in order to be successful. I'm saying that some nuance is important to make the characters *people*, and that a lack of nuance results in characters who read like cardboard cutouts: they're the same size and shape as people, but lack the depth required to convince me that they *are* people.

Dragonoak has plenty of nuanced moments, some of which are especially well written, but it also has too many instances of cardboard cutouts. For the sake of making any sense at all, I'll break those cardboardish moments down into three types: portraying emotions, portraying change, and portraying groups.

1. Portraying Emotions

A lack of nuance turns emotions (which are complex) and their expressions (which are complex) into simplified equations.

- (i.) Happy Person = grinning, laughing
- (ii.) Upset Person = crossed arms, scowling
- (iii.) Nervous Person = fidgeting, stammering

A writer who doesn't pause to consider to the finer details of (a) the situation and (b) their character's emotion and behavior is prone to thinking, "Okay, the character is nervous. Nervous people fidget and stammer," and will rarely deviate from that stereotypical description of nervousness.

But how emotions are expressed varies widely between people and situations. When I'm in a room full of strangers whose eyes are all on me, I get the flushed-nauseous-trembling sort of nervous that takes a few minutes to recover from. When I need to mingle and get to know a roomful of strangers, I get the smiling-inquisitive-engaging sort of nervous that can (apparently) pass as not being nervous at all. This is because—surprise—I'm a real person, and I react to different situations differently, even if the primary emotion I'm feeling is essentially the same.

How a person experiences and expresses their emotions can also be influenced by what they'd been feeling/doing the moment before. A teen who's furious at her parents probably won't turn all glitter and rainbows when they give her a piece of good news; that anger will affect how she experiences and portrays her sudden happiness (if she even feels happiness at all; the anger might be too strong). Meanwhile, a writer who doesn't consider the nuance of this teen's emotions might say that she went from Stereotypical Anger (crossed arms, scowling) to Stereotypical Happiness (laughing, grinning) in the space of a few seconds.

The result are characters who all display their emotions in unrealistic and, frankly, boring ways.

(Trust me, I know. My computer's full of old novels and stories populated with cardboard characters; they're so boring that I can't bring myself to read them, *and I wrote them myself*. That's *terrible*.)

This isn't always an issue in *Dragonoak*—like I said, the book has its nuanced moments—but those cardboard emotional displays popped up more often than I would've preferred in a book that's already published.

2. Portraying Change

People typically change in increments; depending on what about a person is changing (maturity level, personal or religious beliefs, their understanding of themselves or their society, etc.), it's a process that can take weeks, months, years, or lifetimes to complete.

If a writer doesn't consider the finer details of how people change, a character's major change can be reduced to (at worst) a switch that's instantaneously flipped from one position to the opposite. An immature brat becomes respectful and responsible overnight; a do-gooder morphs abruptly into an evil villain.

In *Dragonoak*, Rowan recognizes and overcomes her own extreme prejudice. Character arcs that involve unlearning prejudices are awesome, and I really like the set-up for Rowan's prejudice. However, when one's prejudices run as deep and powerful as Rowan's, the process of unlearning them should realistically take quite some time—certainly much longer than the mere days it takes Rowan to shed hers.

Had this change taken a more realistic amount of time, it could've added some neat conflicts and tension to the story. But it was cut too short, and as a result, it didn't offer anything useful or even interesting to the story.

3. Portraying Groups

It might be easiest to pinpoint a lack of nuance in descriptions of groups of people; groups become a single entity, all identically experiencing the same thought or emotion.

No two people will have exactly the same reaction to anything, much less a group of several hundred. Regarding the second excerpt, I expect there'd be the "emergency mode" people who get focused and serious during a crisis, there'd be the "practical mode" people who just stay on task because the situation could get messier if they don't, there'd be the "take-advantage-of-this-opportunity mode" people who might decide this is their chance to steal something or leave an unexpected gift in their crush's bag or go take a nap while their boss is otherwise occupied. And so on, forever.

Describing a group of people, especially a very large group, as all experiencing exactly the same emotion (*especially* if they're all displaying that emotion in the same general way) is unrealistic and boring. I want to read about various people struggling with and expressing a variety of emotions, not cardboard cutouts identically mimicking identical emotions.

In sum: I'm not a fan of simplified portrayals of characters' emotions or arcs. Nuance is where it's at.

Thing The Fourth: Research Is Important

Writers exist in a lifelong state of *research*, which often involves looking up information about things they

have no personal knowledge of but are going to be writing about. You can't very well write a novel set in ninth-century Japan if you don't know anything about ninth-century Japan.

Okay, you *can* write that novel, but you'll get tons of things horribly wrong, and those errors will affect how well your novel is received, especially among readers who *do* know something (or can make educated guesses) about ninth-century Japan.

Unfortunately, Goodreads won't give me the space to elaborate on that here. To read the rest of my Research Is important stuff, see either my website or my Tumblr. Sorry for the inconvenience!

Okay. I said I'd limit my critique to the four most important points, and I think I *technically* succeeded.

Would I recommend you read *Dragonoak*? I'm not sure. It's rough and very long, but it's also promising, with a lovely touch of romance. I guess it depends on whether you have the time and patience to devote to a novel that isn't well plotted and executed. (Which I know you don't, since you're finishing your doctorate and teaching and generally bad-assing around.)

I will say that there's a very good chance I'll be picking up its sequel eventually. Farren's an imaginative writer with interesting stories to tell (seriously, I hope they write a prequel telling Rán's story), and I'd like to see how their writing improves.

Love,

Liam

Alice Jooren says

This book knows what you want. What you want is gay ladies in fantasy settings, and it is more than willing to give it to you. They pour off the pages into your waiting arms. It would be an understatement to say I am happy with this book.

Ted says

Quite liked this. Wasn't really a fan on how it ended but overall I enjoyed it. Pretty high fantasy that has knights, dragons, Kings and Queens, etc. Rowan the outcast gets swept up fairly quickly into a, dare I say, near Tolkien-ess type adventure. I say that because with a lot of fantasy there's TONS of traveling involved. And that did bog it down for me a bit. But it also gives time for the party to get to know each other, so I suppose it suits its purpose. Heading into book 2. Nice to see they're KU :)

Chloe says

I've been wanting to read this book since I first heard about it this past spring- because there's nothing about

fantasy epics with believable queer characters that I find unappealing. Finding out that it's *free* on Kindle this afternoon promptly bumped it to the top of my list.

Linh Nguyen says

4.5 stars

Definitely has a The Warrior's Path feel to it, calm, refreshing, not as beautiful but equally colourful. A fairy tale with kingdoms, knights, dragons, necromancers, panes (half bull half human according to my imagination =)). I finished this book in one day, I was that hooked. Now moving on to book 2!

Olivia says

3.5 sterren rounded up to 4.

I really like the diversity of the characters and the author's poignant way of highlighting prejudices/discrimination against inhuman panes and necromancers.

Initially, I was rather dubious on the dynamic of the fair-skinned knight (white saviour complex), having a lowly dark-skinned farm girl as a "squire or servant" (but not really)...just you know, tagging along, witnessing the knight's journey while having low self-esteem. But as more diverse characters in positions of power and the secrets/reasons behind the knight's actions are revealed, I realised that my initial preconceived notions were misconstrued. The journey of self-realisation is just really, REALLY, slow.

In short, it's a rather good start to a new and imaginative world featuring badass women.

Blink51n says

After starting and abandoning several books in a row, Dragonoak has got me out of my reading funk! I love the world Farren has constructed here.

It is beautifully written and vastly layered. The author does a fantastic job of conveying the histories and people across different counties throughout the story without using a big information dump.

Personally, I found a lot of parallels between this fantasy world and our own and feel like this is something of a social commentary on some issues - most notably racial prejudice and homophobia.

Rowan is a great narrator. She is so naive and sheltered, making her the perfect way for us to learn the world.

I also love the pane - so great to find so many fresh concepts in a fantasy book.

I'm excited to see what book two has in store!!

Highly recommended.

Book Worm says

Alright, I really enjoyed that ride and can't wait to start the second book.

What did this story have? A very naive necromancer, a stern knight and a very likable pane. They form an unlikely bond in the midst of ... we don't know until maybe until 80% of the book are read what the adventure is all about. However, this did not keep me from reading on, no on the contrary it slowly reeled me into the story, into seeing this world and the inhabitants with ever clearer eyes. As Rowan, the necromancer's naivete is slowly lifted from her mind, the more she sees and learns, my own preconceptions were questioned.

I encountered in this first book a very complex and intricate world, main characters that actually undergo a great deal of character development and well developed side characters.

There were a few typos and sometimes that grated a bit on my nerves, but even that couldn't deter me to like the book very much.

Lex Kent says

I love this series! It is by far the best F/F fantasy series I have read. I can't remember the last time I read a book and couldn't stop thinking about it even 2 months later. It draws you in and immerses you in the characters. You feel for them, root for them, and want to continue your journey with them. Dragons, Knights, Pirates, Necromancers, if any of those interest you, don't pass this up! What also is great this book is free, no risk in snapping this up. The second was 7 or 8 dollars and boy it was worth it, I'd have paid double to enjoy such a great book. Now I just have to impatiently wait for the third book to come out. And boy it can't come fast enough!

Kogiopsis says

2.5 stars, rounded down because I left this book with a sense of... incompleteness.

I have to agree with this review's assessment that this book reads like an early draft brought in to a writing group. Their critique is a lot more detailed than I'm going to get into here, but the takeaway is the same. Technically, the writing often lacked polish; the delivery of information was stilted at best; and the plot... meandered, to put it kindly.

I wanted to like this book, really I did. You all know at this point how I feel about f/f, dragons, and medieval fantasy - at least, I feel like you should know this. If not: I love all three of these things, and a book which promised to deliver all three should have been a shoo-in favorite for me. The thing is that *Dragonoak* just... failed to convey information. Flat-out, that's the issue I had here. I don't have an issue with worldbuilding-heavy books, and I'm in favor of the school of thought that advises not just infodumping to acquaint the reader with the world, but at the same time... it's not easy to read a book where, from practically the first page, you feel like you missed the memo on something important. Partly because of the way information was doled out, and partly because Rowan, the POV character, was almost constantly in the dark, I had the sense of never actually being caught up with what was going on.

Now, to a degree I'm willing to deal with not knowing things because the protagonist doesn't - but the amount that wasn't made clear about Rowan *herself* does not get a pass on those grounds. To be perfectly frank: there was so much withheld about Rowan, for so long (why was she ostracized by her village? what are her powers? What the *hell* is society's beef with necromancers, who from what we're shown seem to mostly be super-healers?) that I could never connect with her as a character. Too much was held back for me to develop a sense of who she was and what she'd experienced, let alone her growth. Because her experiences in the village were cagily withheld, any steps she takes towards growing away from them aren't impactful. There's just not enough emotional depth here for anything to count, honestly.

That said: Farren definitely gets props for writing a diverse fantasy. Queer characters, characters of color, trans and nonbinary characters - they're all here, integrated without a second thought into pretty much every society we see. And this isn't a case of well-meaning but rockily written representation: this is the smoothest aspect of the book, I think. (I would argue that as of this volume, Ran is not confirmed asexual - her species reproduces asexually, but that's different from the identity of asexuality, a distinction that, as an asexual biologist, is important to me.)

The thing is, after all that, I still kind of want to read the sequel. Partly that's because I want to *understand*, partly because I'm invested in some characters (Ran) and the consequences of others' actions (Katja, because what the *heck*). But I'm not... interested enough to pay \$8 for it, so it's probably never gonna happen. I don't really have time/money to spend on another installment wherein I understand virtually nothing.

Penny says

Surprisingly good.

It's quite evident that this is a self-published novel because of a few typos and some issues regarding sentence clarity. But that was mostly okay because the plot was engaging enough to grab me.

The journey is long and full of twists (I thought the end was going one way and then something completely different happened. I still think my way was better though). Also, there are dragons, knights, necromancers, new races, betrayal, a slow burning lesbian romance, a myriad of secondary characters, etc.

The second volume can't come soon enough.
