



# The Ruins of Ambrai

*Melanie Rawn*

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A thousand years ago, Mageborns fled prejudice and persecution to colonize the planet Lenfell--a perfect refuge for those whose powers were perceived as a threat by people not gifted with magic. But the greater the magic, the greater the peril. Lenfell was soon devastated by a war between rival Mageborn factions that polluted the land with Wild Magic and unleashed hideous specters called Wraithenbeasts. Now, generations later, someone is planning another war on the still crippled planet that will tear three Mageborn sisters apart.

"I am mad (petulant, in fact!) that I can't immediately read book number two in the *Exiles* trilogy.... Melanie Rawn has established beyond doubt that she is a great writer of fantasy and *The Ruins of Ambrai* will join the *Dragon* series in my library of favorites for years to come." --*Realms of Fantasy*

## The Ruins of Ambrai Details

Date : Published March 7th 1997 by Pan Books (first published 1994)

ISBN : 9780330344197

Author : Melanie Rawn

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Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Epic Fantasy, Science Fiction Fantasy

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# From Reader Review The Ruins of Ambrai for online ebook

## Louise Mundt says

Bogudfordringen 2011 bød på fantasy, men da det er en af mine yndlingsgenrer, besluttede jeg at spice udfordringen lidt op og valgte derfor en 826-siders lang engelsksproget roman, jeg har haft stående på min reol siden '95 eller deromkring. Jeg har haft begyndt på bogen flere gange, men er gået i stå af flere årsager: Sproget er kringlet, bogen har et kæmpe persongalleri og sidst men ikke mindst er den læsset med baggrundshistorie, der skal få læseren til at forstå, hvad det er for en verden, handlingen udspiller sig i. Med andre ord: Den er lidt af en mundfuld.

Jeg skulle ikke langt ind i bogen, før jeg alligevel blev grebet, og jeg er ikke syndelig stolt af at indrømme det, men det skyldes formentlig, at jeg allerede der var begyndt at blive en smule teenage-forelsket i den unge Collan Rosvenir, bogens eneste mandlige hovedperson. Collan vokser op som slave med et helt særligt talent for musik. Som ung er han en genert fyr, men som voksen forfører han den ene ungmø efter den anden, når han med sit smukke udseende og skønne sangstemme synger sig ind i deres hjerter (eller noget andet \*ahem\*). Samfundet er matriarkalsk, og det er derfor almindeligt og velset, at kvinderne tager en smuk ung mand med hjem – og manden betragtes blot som en brugsgenstand, der ikke har noget at skulle have sagt overfor kvinden. Men på det punkt er Collan anderledes, for han holder sig ikke tilbage for at have sine egne meninger eller at svare igen – og det gør han på sådan en kæk vis, at jeg ikke helt kunne lade være med at finde ham ganske charmerende.

Bogens kvindelige hovedpersoner tæller hele tre: Søstre Glenin, Sarra og Caillet Ambrai. Søstre vokser op hver for sig under forskellige familienavne. Glenin vokser op hos sin far hos Lords of Malleris og går under faderens efternavn Feiran (hvilket er højere usædvanligt, idet børnene ellers altid får moderens efternavn). Sarra vokser op hos sin mor blandt Mage Guardians, men da moderen dør kommer hun til en plejefamilie og tager deres efternavn, Liwellan. Caillet, den yngste der aldrig når at kende sin mor, vokser op hos slægtninge og får efternavnet Rille. Kun den midterste søster, Sarra, er bekendt med sine søstres identitet... Sammenholdt med bagside teksten er det vel ikke svært at gætte, hvad plottet er... Mere vil jeg ikke afsløre...

Det er en svær bog at skulle skrive en anmeldelse af, for den har mange facetter:

For det første er der den verden, som bliver beskrevet. Det matriarkalske samfund er en interessant idé, men på mange måder synes jeg ikke, at det fungerer særlig godt. Melanie Rawn har valgt at tage det klassiske middelaldersamfund og vende det på hovedet – men så alligevel ikke helt, fordi en lang række ting fungerer som i et klassisk mandsdomineret samfund. Et godt eksempel er moden, hvor det fortsat er kvinderne, der er iført det fysisk hæmmende tøj som f.eks. store kjoler, men også et eksempel som, at drengebørn er uønskede fordi alle ønsker sig pgebørn, der kan føre slægtens navn videre. Jeg har svært ved at forestille mig, at det ville være udfaldet af en kvindedomineret verden... Just saying.

I forlængelse af det er alle forklaringerne, som hæmmer historien og gør den enormt tung at komme igennem. Flere af bitingene virker kun til at være med for at understrege personligheden hos de forskellige søstre (Glenin, der ofrer alt for magt. Sarra, der er politisk bevidst og ønsker en bedre fremtid for Lenfell. Caillet, der altid tror på det gode i andre mennesker). Alle detaljerne trak bogen væsentlig ned fra den fornøjelse, den kunne have været.

Hvad der tilgængelig fungerer er personerne, der er meget levende. For mig kunne flere passager af historien

have været reduceret til en simpel kærlighedshistorie á la Briget Jones, hvor man kunne sidde og heppe på, at de dog snart tager sig sammen til at kysse hinanden. Resten er bare fyld – lad mig komme hen til de passager, der handler om personernes interne relationer.

Det var derfor en bog, hvor jeg var glad for at blive færdig – men samtidig alligevel så frem til at tilbringe mere tid med personerne, for jeg håber at skulle tilbringe mere tid sammen med især Sarra og Collan.

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### **Emory says**

I loved this book, but I would recommend against picking it up. If you read this and the sequel, the story draws you in and leaves you wanting to know what happens next, along with a bit of what happened in the past as some of the backstory has not yet been revealed. But the third book in the series is MIA, and has been for decades. It may come out one day, it may not. However, my feeling is that reading something that leaves you this hungry for more is just an exercise in futility until that one is released. If you want to read some Melanie Rawn, read her Dragon Prince/Star books, or the new ones she's been working on.

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### **Rebecca Huston says**

Sigh. I love it when an author takes the time to build a complex, interesting world. But in this one, it's so complex that at times the plot gets drowned out by the explainitis going on from the writer -- this was a book that was gorgeous in tone, and in language, but really needed an editor to trim it down. Hence the three star review. And I keep hearing rumours of a third book in the series, but haven't seen anything yet.

For the complete review, please go here:

<http://www.epinions.com/review/Exiles...>

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### **Susan says**

Although I LOVED this book and the second one in the series, I do NOT recommend that anyone read either of them, YET. The third book has never been written and it has been over 12 years since the last one was published. If and when the final book comes out I will change this rating, but so many unanswered questions/cliff hangers really spoil the first two books.

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### **Kate Lansky says**

Yes, this is a thick book. Rawn's books tend to be. But please don't be put off by how much space this sucker takes up among your paperbacks! It's a fabulous book: witty, imaginative, and intricate, with completely unique characters at every turn. Rawn's societies are amazingly detailed, completely thought out and thoroughly planned. Most of her books include a fair amount of politics as well as a ridiculously large

number of characters - this book is no exception. I admit, I had trouble keeping the names straight. Luckily, Rawn juggles her huge casts amazingly well... and often provides a 'whos who', just to help you out.

Sometimes the politics got to be a bit much for me... a little long-winded in parts, leaving me wanting the story itself to continue. I felt like that detracted from my enjoyment of the plot occasionally. But Rawn gets you through by presenting these parts through the eyes of a character who is utterly fascinated with them, or by making the events and politics essential to the plot.

The book, in my opinion, was a little hard to get into, but once you are through the first chapter, you should be hooked. Just give it that much of a chance, and forget how long it is. You will fly through it once you get started.

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### **Jen3n says**

This is apparently the first book in a series. At >800 pages it probably should have been two books. However I understand why it wasn't broken-up; looking back I have no idea where I would have chosen to split the novel.

On the minus side this book was a slog. A SLOG. It was very hard to keep track of characters: there is a metric fuck-ton of them and they all have very similar (and in some cases identical, damnit) names. And then there are only a set and small amount of clans (called Names) in the entire world anyway, complicating the issue even more. The Slogginess and Character recognition problem is also not helped by the fact that everyone dies. Seriously: don't get attached. Apart from the main three (or four, depending on how you look at it) main characters, no one is safe in the B-listers. All the secondary characters die, save for a very small handful. Oh, the backbenchers all live, but I had no idea who any of them were, nor did I care. The last chapter of the book is full of paragraphs that I'm sure are meant to be meaningful about how So-and-So and Whatsit are now married or Hoodiehoo, Thingie and Blhblah are now the Captal's official honor guard and et cetera, but, since the book spent almost no time at all with any of the characters, I really don't give a crap. They will probably figure largely in the next book, being as how they are the only ones left alive, but don't throw them in at the very end and then assume I'm going to have any sort of emotional response to their triumphs.

Another minus was a Plot Badger. The very first line of the book's description on both the publisher's website and the inside flap on the book itself is something that never, ever, ever comes up in the story itself. 1000 years ago, a highly advanced civilization landed on this empty planet to escape persecution they faced on their home world because they were all magic users. The society in modern day is medieval and has no interest or idea about their origins. It simply doesn't come up. Maybe in an offhanded conversation or two about certain banned historical books, and about language-shift, but that's it. What the fuck is the point? Does it figure into the next book? The one after that? Why even say that's what the book is about on the flap if the book has NOTHING TO DO WITH THAT?

On the plus side, it was so well written and several of the characters were so well developed that I managed to totally ignore all the minus' most of the time. It was really compelling and the world was so interesting that I didn't want to quit reading it. I won't be reading any more of these, but I'm very glad I finished this one.

Neither recommended or not recommended, but if you're interested in epic fantasy, then you might like to

give this a try.

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### **Amanda R says**

I've told the story before about how this book changed my life, so I won't repeat it here. I'll just say that even though it's not perfect - there are some contradictions and inconsistencies and some things that just don't make much sense - it still gets all the stars because it's an excellent story and because I owe my entire life to it.

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### **The Pirate Ghost (Formerly known as the Curmudgeon) says**

This book starts the second trilogy/series I've read from Melanie Rawn and it's better than the Sunrunner books, in my opinion. Fantastic characters, fantastic story world, fantastic plot. The book was an easy read from cover to cover and left me wanting more. Fiesty Sarah is fun and she and the Bard deserve each other. In more ways than one.

I laughed, I sat on the edge of my seat and oohed and aaahed with each new chapter or development. I'd recommend it for anyone with the following warnings.

There is violence. There is some nudity and adult situations, but not a lot of them.

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### **Heather Douglas says**

This has to be my ultimate favorite book. Not 'one of my favorites' but THE favorite book of my collection. There are so many things that I love about this series.

First, I love how the author tells the story. Specifically, how she spends chapters describing the journey/events of one character's life, and then goes back in time and describes those same events from the perspective of another, opposing character. It's such a neat way to give the reader an understanding of what happens and why things happen. Ultimately, you find yourself cheering for both characters, and gives so much depth to the story.

Second, I love the society the author has created. People aren't necessarily citizens of a nation/country/state, they are citizens of a family. It's a brilliant idea. It focuses on the connections and loyalties between people and family members.

Third, the author has no problem killing off main characters -- not that this happens often. But, you're constantly sitting on edge because you never know if the character you've grown to love is going to live past the next few pages.

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## Dev Null says

Yarg! Reminds me of Celia Dart Thornton and her unending dictionary descriptions of irrelevant rooms, only here it seems to be pocket 1-dimensional sketches of completely irrelevant characters. I swear I've been introduced to 200+ characters by name, almost none of whom I remember or care about because they're mostly walking stereotypes anyways. In fact, I was remarking on this very fact to myself just before reading the following line from the book:

"Veller Granfallin, for instance, figured as a villain in all the histories, but was never portrayed any more deeply than a layer of dust on the tabletop"

This, in addition to being a great example of the ridiculously over-the-top metaphorical language that seems to be required of modern fantasy, perfectly describes most of the forgettable characters in the book.

Which is a shame, really, because unlike Ms. Thornton, Ms. Rawn actually appears to have a story to tell. There is an interesting world here with an intriguing matriarchal society and some interesting political twists in an otherwise run-of-the-paper-mill evil wizards taking over the world story.

Or perhaps I should say there would be an interesting world and political twists if only the details held together at all, which they mostly don't. For example, the government is a representative democracy, but its leader has taken over enough power single-handedly to completely destroy one of the 15 member-states, apparently without comment or protest from any of the others. So she's really an absolute dictator with a puppet government, right? But no, mere chapters later she is scrabbling for votes in council and not doing things because they might be perceived badly. Hello? You just had every single man, woman, and child in California executed and every building in the state burnt to the ground, and you're pushing for votes in Congress about tax laws? Do whatever the hell you want; they obviously can't stop you. Which reminds me; she has the state of Ambrai invaded by the army because they attempt to thwart her. Ambrai was apparently one of the biggest economic and cultural centres on the planet and yet apparently every single person who lived there was killed or driven off, and no one even came back to loot the bodies - much less re-settle - for 17 years. That is so fantastically wildly improbable - both the efficiency of its destruction and the lack of resettlement - that I hadn't gotten over it before some refugees finally wander in and start living off the food left lying around 2 decades before! And in a world where we continuously get it pushed down our throats how poor and downtrodden the average peasant is!

It goes on (people risking their lives based on the assumption that an ancient nursery rhyme about pigs refers to a particular (modern) toy store; a matriarchy of Victorian-era sexism reversed, but with over a third of its prime governmental body males - and almost all of the members of the cult of bad guys; a Muslim-like stricture against males going outside with their heads uncovered... which is apparently followed by every other male in the society except all of the main characters; etc...) but I'll stop. The worst thing is that half the time the contradictory details weren't even necessary to the story - just leave them out and you're fine!

But I persevered, because I did at least want to see how the few more interesting characters got along, and see what happens with their little rebellion, and to find out how the evil baddie gets it in the end. Wish I hadn't bothered. The baddy gets eaten by the Ghost of Christmas Past (or some other previously unmentioned spiritual Deus Ex Machina plot device, I forget,) the baddy's henchman turns to good apropos of nothing and his daughter forgives him his extensive list of brutal butcheries on the basis of blood ties she didn't even know existed 5 minutes before, and the rebellion happens off camera with the good guys just turning up and shouting "Hurrah! We won!" The interesting characters? They fall in love and get married in

direct contrast to everything they stood for up to that point - but thats fairly standard grade-school hair-pulling romance, and so the most believable thing by far about the end of the book.

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### **Josephine McNabb says**

I read this book when I was around fourteen and I'm not sure what possessed me to read it again but I did. When I was fourteen I really enjoyed this book. It was the first book in the genre that I had read and it was wonderful.

As an adult, I loved it even more. I understood the connections better, the need for the rising. I enjoyed e-learning Collan, Sarra, Glenin and Caillet's back story and watching them grow into their roles. The heartbreak as the rising continued kept me enthralled as well as the spats between Collan and Sarra, which had me laughing. All the characters where well rounded and the story is one of my favourites.

The only thing that annoyed me was that the end seemed a little rushed and anticlimactic. It seemed like the big fight scene at the end really didn't matter and I wanted it to to so much more than it it.

This story is about family, loyalty and the need to stand up for what you believe in, regardless of which side you are on.

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### **Jamie says**

without a doubt one of the best series i have EVER read. Melanie Rawns worlds and characters are beautifully crafted, and although her stories are very long, they dont FEEL long when you read them, total page turners.

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### **Olivia says**

This novel is really great for about the first third of the book. Rawn sets up four main characters with background stories that are almost good enough for the price of the book. However, the story just falls apart after that, the novel loses its sense of time, and bogs down in its "social messages".

Rawn creates a world where all of the gender stereotypes are reversed. This is done in a really clever and insightfull way, and if this was a stand alone book, would really be a memerable acheivement. However in a fantasy epic these kind of tricks very quickly become tiresome and distracting. Satire cannot carry an epic fantasy series, and in the end the odd mix of satire and melodrama sinks this book and this series into a hole she still hasn't writter herself out of more than ten years later. OH yes she still hasn't finished this series more that a decade after they published book two and has no solid plans to finish this series. While this book has some really great parts the overall series and story falls flat on its face.

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### **Jessica says**

Well, this is sort of standard fantasy, but enjoyable. There's nothing particularly new about the plot, but I



would say it is nicely done. Magic is present but not constantly in use. The book is pleasantly chunky, full of descriptions and explanations that give the world quite a bit of depth and make it seem real, which can either be fun to read if you find that sort of thing interesting, or dull if you're not particularly fond of lengthy tidbits. I found it interesting, so I enjoyed the book rather than yawned at it. Also of interest to me was the more female-led society presented in the story, which is definitely refreshing, and, I will admit, a large reason why I enjoyed the book.

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## **Lauren says**

In 7th or 8th grade around the holidays my English teacher passed out journals as gifts (she was really sweet like that). Mine had the cover art from *The Ruins of Ambrai* on it (could that lady spot a nerd, or what?!), and eventually, a year or two later, I got around to actually reading the book.

Guilty pleasure? Maybe, but the pleasure certainly outweighs the guilt in this case. This is one of those books I go back to as "comfort food" when I need to take a break from school-related reading and get lost in something fun, and it, along with the sequel, were good enough that I still find myself occasionally checking to see if the third book in the trilogy has been completed yet. I'm not holding my breath waiting for that to happen, but if Melanie Rawn ever does finish/publish it, I know I'll be able to spend a few happy days curled up on the couch revisiting *Lenfell*.

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## **Jester Girl says**

The author's grasp of her world, the family trees of the characters, and the political histories involved was impressive, but they could have been presented better. As it was, I felt like I was reading a history book for the first 200ish pages. From time to time I was a bit invested, but got annoyed when, just as I was beginning to take an interest in one character, the author would shift to the exhaustive history of another character. By the time the first character came around again, I had forgotten why I was interested in him. I feel like some good editing of flow or spreading out of information as the story unfolded could have had a huge positive impact on the reader's experience.

Also—a minor thing, but it really threw me—two very forceful and politically powerful women were mentioned regularly early on in regards to the political climate, but for a long time I thought they were the same person because their names were so similar. In the middle of a barrage of names/histories/family connections, two names that look the same attached to two similar women was very confusing. Once I figured it out I felt like a twit, but there was no way I was going back to read it all over again to untangle which had done what.

I was determined to finish this book, but it was a struggle for me. The main things that put me off were:

- 1) The characters did not end up being true to their described personalities (i.e. a woman described as poised and intelligent making rash, stupid choices in fits of anger, etc).
- 2) Characters making odd or dangerous choices with no apparent logical reason.
- 3) Lots and lots of traveling that ended up being (or at least feeling) pointless.
- 4) A globe magic system that was never really explained, but might have had something to do with the colors of the globes. (???) In a world that was described in so much detail, this seemed odd.

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## Elle says

[(the ladder boy and his boyfriend, who have so little characterization beyond their ~love~ that I can't even really tell you who they were) (hide spoiler)]

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## M.L. Chesley says

While I absolutely love Melanie Rawn, I was sorely disappointed that she did not finish this series. The books were outstanding, hence the five star review. But I would like to see this series finished. I don't know the reasons behind why she did not, but I have seen recent works of hers out on bookshelves and it still makes me wonder. Oh well.

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## Matthew says

I was excited to pick this up, having greatly enjoyed other books by the author in the past. It starts out promising enough, bursting with flavor and the joy of discovering a new world... then, slowly at first, but then exponentially deteriorates about halfway through. My main issues included unrealistic character motivations, obvious and clichéd plot development (on the occasions the plot actually advances), and a lack of editing to the point where I wondered if the editor had quit after throwing up their hands in frustration after shouting "SHOW, DON'T TELL" one too many times. If requested, I'd be happy to pull some quotes the next time I'm not on mobile- I have a few selections bookmarked on my Kindle as examples of what not to do.

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## Patrick St-Denis says

Like a multitude of fantasy readers of my generation, I was a big fan of Melanie Rawn's Dragon Prince and Dragon Star series back in the 90s. And when The Ruins of Ambrai, first volume in the Exiles trilogy, was published in 1994, I purchased the hardcover edition as soon as it came out. Did the same when its sequel, The Mageborn Traitor, was released. Daunted by the proliferation of big fantasy series on the market, like I did with several other SFF sequences, I elected not to read them until the entire trilogy was done. Which, in this case at least, was a good thing. For as most of you know, the final installment, The Capital's Tower, has yet to see the light. But now that Rawn began working on the third volume last year, I've decided that it was high time to give this series a shot.

According to most of the author's fans, Exiles is by far Rawn's best work to date. Understandably, I had lofty expectations when I sat down to read The Ruins of Ambrai. Other than her latest high fantasy series, The Glass Thorns, published by Tor Books, I've read everything she has written. Hence, I know what she brings to the dance, so far be it from me to doubt anyone's claim that this trilogy is Melanie Rawn writing at the top of her game. But as I've said before, expectations have a way to come back and bite you in the ass, and this is exactly what happened to me with this one.

After a confusing beginning and an uninspired few hundred pages, I had a feeling that this novel would be a complete disaster. I mean, nothing worked for me and this was by far the author's weakest book that I had ever read. I should have known better than to throw in the towel, for Rawn came through with a captivating engame and an interesting finale. Sadly, it wasn't enough to save the book. It's not a total loss, mind you, and I do want to read the subsequent volumes to discover what happens next. But even though it got better toward the end, *The Ruins of Ambrai* suffers from too many shortcomings to be a satisfying reading experience in its own right. Given how much love this series has been getting over the years, one has to wonder if *The Mageborn Traitor* raises the bar to another level, for the first installment cannot possibly warrant that much appreciation. Only time will tell. . .

Here's the blurb:

A thousand years ago, Mageborns fled prejudice and persecution to colonize the planet Lenfell—pristine, untouched, a perfect refuge for those whose powers were perceived as a threat by people not gifted with magic. But the greater the magic, the greater the peril—and Lenfell was soon devastated by a war between rival Mageborn factions that polluted land, sea, and air with Wild Magic and unleashed the hideous specters known as Wraithenbeasts.

Generations after that terrible war, with the land recovered from crippling wounds and the people no longer threatened by genetic damage, Mageborns still practice their craft—but under strict constraints. Yet so long as the rivalry between the Mage Guardians and the Lords of Malerris continues, the threat of another war is ever-present. And someone has been planning just such a war for many long years, the final strike in a generations-old bid for total power...

Worldbuilding is a facet in which Melanie Rawn usually shines and to a certain extent that's the case with this novel. She created an intriguing matriarchal society and is in complete control of the genealogy and the convoluted history of her universe. Problem is, the presentation of everything leaves a lot to be desired. As far as the setting is concerned, the world and its people truly come alive through the author's vivid narrative. But most of the information is conveyed to the reader through some massive info-dumps that really bog down the narrative. Too often the reader is subjected to a barrage of names/family trees/family connections/history. This is as confusing as it is overwhelming, and makes it quite difficult to keep track of everyone's loyalty and where they fit in the greater scheme of things. Interestingly enough, I didn't have any problem with the over-the-top matriarchal society and its ramifications until I got to the Selective Index at the end of the novel. When I learned the planet was colonized during what is referred to as the Second Great Migration by thousands of mainly Catholic settlers following a 7-year intergalactic voyage, things immediately went downhill. Since Rawn doesn't elaborate on any detail that could have explained the shift from a more patriarchal to a decidedly hardcore matriarchal society, all of a sudden one of the underpinning elements of the series' backdrop lost most of its credibility and didn't make any sense anymore.

The political intrigue at the heart of the tale is also a bucket that doesn't always hold much water. True, there are many unexpected political twists and turns, but the inherent details suffer from just a little bit of analysis. *Ambrai*, for example, appears to have been one of the world's largest economic and cultural centers. And yet, when the city gets destroyed gratuitously, the majority of its citizens murdered like vermin, an act of utter cruelty and violence, the council doesn't seem to mind much. For all that one of the greatest cities that world has ever known has been devastated with extreme prejudice, it's pretty much business as usual afterward. Even an incredibly ineffectual organisation like the UN would have, pointless as the exercise would have been, vehemently criticized and condemned in no uncertain terms such a barbarous act. The same thing occurs following the apparent destruction of the Lords of Malerris. In addition, the political system as a whole doesn't always make much sense. Early on, we learn that a democracy governs the various provinces.

Be that as it may, it is evident that Annyas rules over the council with an iron fist in what is essentially a dictatorship. And yet, when the time comes for a meaningless motion to be accepted, an extremely tight vote is necessary to see it go through. I understand what the bad guys are attempting to accomplish, but it's just that the politicking involved is at times quite gauche in its execution. And the much-anticipated revolution, when it finally comes, occurs "off screen." As a result, unless you can overlook such weaknesses in the backdrop of this tale, the overall plot finds itself on very thin ice throughout the entire book.

Moreover, having what could be one of the most pivotal plot points of the story rely on the decryption of an old nursery rhyme did stretch the bounds of credulity past their breaking point. Melanie Rawn is not usually a writer that takes cheap shortcuts, so it was disappointing to see the good guys puzzle out this secret so easily.

If there is one specific aspect Rawn habitually excels at, it would have to be characterization. She has a knack for creating endearing characters and her works are usually filled with memorable protagonists. The Ruins of Ambrai does indeed feature a few, but there are also too many characters that don't remain true to themselves and act in ways that goes against everything we've been told about them. I liked the idea of having three sisters separated and warded so they can't remember each other and I was looking for some kind of balance between the different perspectives. That didn't quite happen and this lack of balance influenced the plot in a negative way. There is too much of Sarra, period. And a good portion of the scenes she appears in are ultimately unnecessary and could have been replaced by a brief summary of her comings and goings. All that traveling across the world to retrieve Mage Guardians turned out to be extraneous for the most part and did little but bloat an already too large pagecount. Regarding Sarra, I'm still trying to understand why anyone in the Rising would defer to a petulant, annoying, and often clueless adolescent girl. Sarra and her sister Glenin are two sides of the same coin. The former is over-the-top good, in that she wants to end poverty, inequalities, etc. Glenin, on the other hand, due to her upbringing is the polar opposite and is over-the-top evil and cruel. In the end, their being too much, one way or the other, makes it impossible to relate to either sister. Collan, the bard, was interesting at the start, but the inevitable love story with Sarra more or less killed whatever he had going for him. Which leaves young Cailet, by far the most compelling of the sisters. Her storylines offers the most fascinating surprises and I'm looking forward to discovering what Rawn has in store for her in the future. The supporting cast is made up of quite a few engaging men and women, chief among them Gorynel Desse, many of which die before the end of the novel. Melanie Rawn has never been afraid to kill off important characters, so it was nice to see her add a few to the bodycount in this one. I just wish Sarra would have been part of those dead bodies. I found her to be insufferable throughout and I'm aware that she's in for the long haul. So there's no helping that. . .

Having everyone warded and not remembering each other makes for some confusing storylines and it can be rough going through some sections. And once the wards finally come down, it defies comprehension how quickly everything comes together between Collan and Sarra and Cailet and their entourage. The final showdown, with the rebellion not even part of the narrative, is also a bit weird. Also, the aftermath of the Capital's battle with the man responsible for so many atrocities is never truly explained. I'm still not sure how or why everything happened the way it did.

In terms of pace, The Ruins of Ambrai is a slog for more than two-thirds of its length. The beginning introduces all four main protagonists before they are warded and is very slow-moving. The action takes place over the course of 25 years, and it is often confusing because at this juncture it is impossible to know how these different threads are connected. In the next few hundred pages, Sarra, Collan, and Cailet don't remember who they are, so again the reader is often left wondering what the heck is going on. Gorynel Desse appears to be the only one who knows and he's definitely not telling anyone. The last hundred pages or so see the rhythm pick up as we move toward the endgame. Things finally start to make sense and, even though

a lot of storylines are rushed, the resolution of these elevates the plot to another level. Too bad all the info-dumps, the poor political intrigue, and the occasional clumsy execution prevented this book from achieving its full potential. In the long run, Rawn closes the show with style and aplomb with an ending that promises a lot of good things to come. It's just that you have to go through a lot of extraneous material to get to the good stuff.

Now that all of the groundwork has been laid out, I'm hoping that Melanie Rawn can return to form and that *The Mageborn Traitor* will be everything it can be. Unfortunately, although it gets much better at the end, all those aforementioned shortcomings make *The Ruins of Ambrai* Rawn's weakest work to date.

Please note that both *The Ruins of Ambrai* and *The Mageborn Traitor* are currently not available in digital format. I asked the folks at Daw Books and they said that they wouldn't be made into ebooks until they had a manuscript for *The Capital's Tower* in hand.

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