



Dragon's Bait

Vivian Vande Velde

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Fifteen-year-old Alys is not a witch. But that doesn't matter--the villagers think she is and have staked her out on a hillside as a sacrifice to the local dragon.

It's late, it's cold, and it's raining, and Alys can think of only one thing--revenge. But first she's got to escape, and even if she does, how can one girl possibly take on an entire town alone?

Then the dragon arrives--a dragon that could quite possibly be the perfect ally. . . .

Dragon's Bait Details

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Author : Vivian Vande Velde

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From Reader Review Dragon's Bait for online ebook

Andrea says

[a little morality lesson about how vengeance is a bad bad thing and you shouldn't do it. This is not necessarily wrong, if predictable, but when you

Elsi says

Published in 1992, this book suffers from the "this book is for young adults so it must be short" mentality that existed back then. And therefore, the characters are not as well developed as I would have liked. In her review for School Library Journal, Margaret Chang observed "While the writing is smooth and the story moves quickly, the girl's emotions are not convincingly portrayed. The story's tone wobbles, sometimes keeping a comic distance from tragic events. The abrupt ending may leave readers puzzled as to the heroine's motivations." I think that if this book had been written today, the author would have been able to flesh out the characters better and given the reader much more detailed descriptions. Let's hear it for J. K. Rowling -- young adult fiction will never be the same again.

Jess says

I wish there was a sequel.

TheBookSmugglers says

Oh book, why you make me so torn?

I first heard about Dragon's Bait through this piece on Entertainment Weekly about unmissable teen reads. And because it was an older title and because the Publishers Weekly review (which I sought after I read the EW article) said it is a "thoughtful mainstream fantasy with a gently feminist slant", I decided I needed to read it soon.

Basically, the story follows a young girl, fifteen-year-old Alys, as she is accused of being a witch by her neighbours and summarily convicted in an unfair trial by the visiting Inquisitor. She loses everything and worst of all, Alys' sick father dies in front of her eyes as she is dragged away to be sacrificed to the local dragon.

Alys thinks she is all but dead when, to her surprise, the dragon – who shape-shifts into a hot young man (obviously) called Selendrile– does not kill her. Instead, he listens to her story and offers to help her to avenge herself.

And you know, I can totally see where both EW and PW are coming from but at the same time...no, not really?

On the one hand we have a quick story with a fairytale vibe. Plus, Alys is a great heroine. Her voice is engaging, ironic and questioning. Her father has been teaching her to work on his workshop against the mores of their time where women don't actually work at all and she loves the feeling of being useful.

Then when she is taken to be sacrificed to the dragon, she wonders why is it that only maidens are always the ones to be sacrificed? And the dragon-boy brings to her attention that dragons don't actually make those demands at all as they couldn't care less who they eat. Those choices are made by the men who rule the towns and who perceive maidens (young unmarried girls with no profession) as worthless. This could actually be taken as really cool meta-textual observation about the way we have chosen to write these stories about dragons and maidens over time.

On the other hand, there is very little character development when it comes to the secondary characters, very little thought about character-motivation and a confusing world-building that is both historical and fantastical but doesn't really care about pesky historical details or in presenting a carefully constructed fantasy world.

Not to mention that there is a fairly heavy-handed, shallow moral lesson about revenge and how bad it is. And if yes, Alys' arc is interesting in the way that allows Alys to take control of her own acts by becoming less and less reliant on the dragon's help and coming up with her own plans, it is also incredibly frustrating how it plays out. Because in the end, Alys is still rescued by dragon-boy after deciding that her feelings of revenge are so bad she decides that the right course of action is to take the blame for **EVERYTHING** bad that has EVER happened in the village and I am like: **WHY**. It is such an out-of-character thing to do, all the more so because after she is rescued, those guilty feelings are never addressed again?

And then we have the romance between Alys and Selendrile. And at first it is great to see addressed the inevitable allure of the not-so-human, dark, older hot guy at the same time that showed Alys mistrusting him and fearing him for the monster that he is. And for the greatest part of the novel – till the very end – Alys is very unsure about his true feelings and fears he will **EAT/KILL HER** eventually. But then they end up together anyway in the most abrupt ending of **ALL TIMES** in which Alys ends up **FOLLOWING** him because she has **NO OTHER CHOICE**, even though he possibly **EATS PEOPLE** and doesn't really show his emotions toward her except when it comes to mocking her humanity. He is very good at **THAT**.

And I am like: **WHAT JUST HAPPENED?**

And in a way, this is a really interesting choice and it points out to a darkness and to the fact that Alys wants to be with this creature but because it is so abrupt, this choice goes unquestioned and unchallenged for its clearly problematic aspects.

Because this was published 20 years ago, maybe it is worth reading Dragon's Bait as a historical piece of YA fiction to see how far YA has come in terms of writing and character development but also how little it has changed in terms of its most obvious problematic romantic tropes?

Yeah, I will go with that.

solaret says

Looking back at this, it seems that Twilight has been an exceptionally bad influence on teenage fantasy. Dragon's Bait fits many of the parameters of paranormal romance, which is notoriously bad, but it's also a

coming-of-age story. And that's much better than any gorgeous, powerful piece of arm candy making up most of the plot.

Though there is Selendrile. He's a dragon who can change into human form - and an exceptionally good-looking human form - and is given plot-related reasons to travel with the heroine, Alys, and come into intimate situations with her. But it's so much more than that, at the same time.

See, Alys is a witch. Or rather, she's been accused of being a witch, and in the medieval setting of the book, you're guilty from the moment someone claims they've seen you dancing naked. (On the other hand, +1 for no high school settings or dystopias.) Selendrile is a dragon that sees her set out for him to devour. Except he's not that interested in eating her.

What I love about this story is that it deals with more than typical romance scenarios based on nothing more than how hot the hero is. The morality of revenge is even more important than that. For example, is it wrong to want revenge? To act on that want? These are very basic philosophical questions, but the way they're dealt with here...

Furthermore, even when Alys succeeds in getting Selendrile to agree to help her with her revenge, it's never just a matter of him burning down a few buildings or eating some cows. She has to plot on how to make her revenge as fitting as possible. And the consequences of what she does adds to the question of whether or not she was right. She suffers for her actions, something that typical Vampire Academy style protagonists never seem to do. And she learns and grows throughout the book.

Turning back to Selendrile, it's fairly clear that he's an example of Blue and Orange Morality. He's not a "good" person deep down and there is no undying love between him and Alys. He does horrible things to Alys' enemies, more for the fun of it than anything else. (view spoiler) Personally, I think their interaction is more like that of friends, of two lonely people surrounded by prejudice (from which neither of them are entirely exempt) than of lovers. It's believable characterization, because they are two entirely different species, and a few days of adventures won't change everything - and again, wildly different from most fantasy YA novels nowadays.

So in conclusion, I loved this book. It's quick-paced, well-plotted, intelligent, and it's not a trilogy. More than that, I still remember the main characters' names and the plot even though it's been some years since I've read it.

Taylor Spooner says

What I liked about the book was that there was a lot of good scenes in each chapter. I also liked how the girl was able to be near a dragon without the dragon eating her. What I didn't like about the book was that there wasn't that many graphic scenes in the books that I have read before.

Stacy says

He refused to release her hands until she looked at him again. He smiled, but this time the amusement didn't reach his eyes. "It is not often," he said in a voice that was soft and husky but well within the norms of a

human of his --apparent-- age and build, "that I find a damsel flinging rocks at me." He paused as though considering and slowly added, "It happened once with a knight, but I'd already eaten his horse and most of his weapons. The squire, too, as I recall." He tipped his head slightly as though waiting for a response, the same gesture he had made while in dragon shape.

Alys has been accused of witchcraft and has been left tied to a stake, an offering to a dragon. Although she manages to escape before the dragon comes, she realizes there is no where for her to go. If she returns to her village, they will simply stake her out again. She a young woman, alone in the world.

When the dragon appears not to notice her, she decides to accept her fate and shouts at him, tossing stones. Suddenly, he is before her and she shuts her eyes. When she opens them, the dragon is gone and a boy stands before her, with long golden hair and amethyst eyes . . .

She realizes that the dragon and the boy are the same and tells him her plan for revenge against the villagers who left her out here, and killed her father. The dragon likes revenge and agrees to help her.

Abby says

I read this quite a while ago - probably when I was in middle school, and all I can remember is... loved it!

Carolyn says

Not your usual fantasy tropes - what happens when the girl staked out for the dragon to eat, instead joins forces with him to get revenge on her tormentors?

This quite good (albeit short) book.

I really enjoyed how the author did not 'humanize' the dragon, but instead constantly reminded the reader how alien he was, how he did not think like a human.

I definitely read more adventures of Alys and Selandrine.

Cheryl says

Not the author's best. Reads like a genre Romance for 'tweens. Alys is such a princess; sure, sometimes she thinks about and even says independent or smart things, but basically it's a good thing she's got someone to rescue her. Slight & superficial.

Nicko (The Cover Hoarder) says

It took me a day and a half to finish this book. It was short, i think it was the shortest fantasy book I've ever read.

It's a standalone and as such it is entertaining as a light read, it lacks depth.

This is what I think happened: this book came out in the period where fantasy was more marginalized than

SF (can you tell I'm not a SF lover at all?) and during this time it was thought that children and teens have the attention span of mice so fantasy novels that exceeded 450 pages were considered already too long, so they cut them into sections of 300-400 pages per volume. though to be fair I dunno how Wheel of Time and Sword of Truth got past the cut *shrug*.

This novella stems from that time period and it would have been interesting as a standalone novel of 600 pages set in fantasy - young adult genre. It had promise. I don't know why the author did not broaden it.

The plot is fairly plain and unambitious, fast paced (because it's a barely 200 page book) and lacks character development, world-building and atmosphere. Three things that make a fantasy a fantasy. It's good as a light read.

(Sidenote: The Dragon transforming into a 17 year old boy, made me think of the Dragon Aspects from World of Warcraft, there's that)

So I guess that was a short review. Then again it is a short novel.

My other reviews :D

Magadored wants to extrude your face normals says

To sum up this book: Patronizing, moralistic, boring characterization.

Featuring an annoying male lead, Selendrile is a typical pretty boy with exotic magical features. With long white-blonde hair and purple eyes, his true form is that of a big-spankin' lizard. He's ever so knowing, without ever indicating it is what he's supposed to know, but that just adds to his mystical allure.

Entirely unlikeable, Selendrile is borderline abusive with our female lead, Alys. He enjoys: hauling her off without her consent; manhandling her; digging his fingers into her arm for perceived slights; and seeming to enjoy threatening her with his preternatural abilities. He's also a being hundreds of years old who likes to watch 15 year-olds undress, despite repeated requests to stop. Sexy, right?

Alys likes to think of herself as an independent woman because she works in her father's shop and looks down on all the village boys for their lack of ambition. Unfortunately, being kind of bitchy has its consequences. She's just been accused of witchcraft by those who would take her father's tin shop from her, so she does the logical thing and shacks up with her would-be murderer so she can get revenge on the town.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"There's nothing I can do. Except enjoy the thought of you flying over Saint Toby's village and breathing fire and roasting them all, every singe one of them, down to the last baby."

The dragon raised his brows.

"Well," she said, "maybe not the babies."

The dragon grinned and stood again.

She has a crisis of conscience about her plans with him 75% through the book, but it isn't fleshed out very well. The author wanted to teach us all a lesson, with speed, so our leading lady suffered a small case of deus ex machina so she could wrap up nicely. It's a very short book, ~200 pages, so there really is no time for anything else.

All right, aside from the characters and the plot the writing isn't that bad. It was a quick read. My major beef with this book lies with the fact that it's a YA romance where the relationship being promoted is creepy and inappropriate, riding the alpha male trope.

Maddie Senator says

This was a choice little find in my school library back in tenth grade, and it's been a favorite ever since! I love, love, love Selendrile, and I wish I could meet someone like him! The story is compelling, but not too long, and luckily it doesn't have a sequel. It's nice to have a stand-alone book sometimes!

I was also pleased that it had a good lesson. Fifteen or sixteen year old Alys is falsely accused of being a witch by neighbors and sentenced to death by dragon. They tie her to a big pole outside of the town limits and leave her. Eventually Alys is able to extricate herself, but has nowhere to go. Her father is dead, and there are wolf-infested woods around her. So, when she sees a beautiful white dragon flying overhead, she yells, "You stupid dragon! Come and kill me!" and tosses a rock at it. Amused, the dragon wheels around and lands by her. She clenches her eyes shut and waits. . .and waits. . .until, finally, Alys opens her eyes--only to find a nude young man with long white hair and purple eyes staring at her! He turns out to be the dragon in human form, and agrees to spare her and help her with her plans of revenge against the townspeople. But is revenge really all that it's cracked up to be?

Jamie Collins says

I enjoy stories like this one. Not necessarily stories where the maiden is rescued by a handsome, mysterious hero, but those where help comes from an unexpected quarter - where someone who's supposed to be an enemy turns out to be a friend. I also like a turn-about, where the weaker party is called upon to do some rescuing of the stronger.

So theme-wise, I'm fine with this book. There's simply not enough to it. I don't read a lot of YA novels, but I did recently enjoy the only other Velde book I've read, *Companions of the Night*. That book surprised me, so I thought I'd try another from Velde. But this one pretty much met my expectations of what a younger YA novel would be like - a nice little story for a young reader, but one that wouldn't hold much interest for me.

Ithlilian says

I've read a few short YA books lately, most of which have been good. This one is the shortest of any of them, and it is also good, but lacks the depth that the other books have. The dragon character doesn't have much of a personality at all, and the girl accused of being a witch is driven only by revenge. I was waiting for the part where the girl realized that revenge doesn't make you feel any better, but I don't think she really got to that point, not truly. I still don't understand why the dragon is drawn to the girl, nor why he decides to help her with her revenge. Since he barely talks and has no feelings, I guess we will never know. Still, the book is

enjoyable. It is so short that I had no problem reading it quickly, I finished it and thought it was okay. Nothing special about it at all that would warrant any rating above a three. There is no complexity, no excitement, just go from here to there, plot a bit of revenge, and move on. I know that YA can be deeper and better than this, but oh well. Dragon's Bait is an enjoyable little escape from reality, and to some it may be fun to see a girl reek havoc on her tormentors. To me it just felt shallow.
