



The Hound of Rowan

Henry H. Neff

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Max McDaniels lives a quiet life in the suburbs of Chicago, until the day he stumbles upon a mysterious Celtic tapestry. Many strange people are interested in Max and his tapestry. His discovery leads him to Rowan Academy, a secret school where great things await him.

But dark things are waiting, too. When Max learns that priceless artworks and gifted children are disappearing, he finds himself in the crossfire of an ancient struggle between good and evil. To survive, he'll have to rely on a network of agents and mystics, the genius of his roommate, and the frightening power awakening within him.

The Hound of Rowan Details

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Author : Henry H. Neff

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From Reader Review The Hound of Rowan for online ebook

Silvana says

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Bronte says

So I think just about any premise involving a young boy going to a school filled with magic and the extraordinary would set up an automatic comparison to Harry Potter, just as any obscure title would be compared to its genre's classic. Knowing that, I did not going in here drawing comparisons; I'm rating this book totally as its own work, giving it the respect it deserves. That being said, maybe I read this with the wrong perspective in mind because I found several issues with it.

First off, Max McDaniels is an interesting protagonist. I like that his friends have skills superior to his own, like Conner with his charisma or David with his intelligence. I liked that he tries to do the right thing, but there are several instances that allude to his past that really add complexity. Particular his anger was really interesting to read. I also loved his dad, and the characters I named earlier. However, there were so many characters in and a lot of them are disembodied because it's hard to keep track. Part of me wondered why so many names were thrown in there other than to world build, but I couldn't remember a characteristic, or a physical trait, or really anything. This pertained to students and teachers alike, I only remembered the main ones because the rest of it felt rushed, especially when at random intervals they would appear, do something minor, then disappear. Was that necessary? Did it drive the plot forward? It felt more like, *"Oh hey it's be cool to have someone appear right now and say this, here's Faculty Member X. Okay I said my two cents, bye!"* And... I don't know I felt like the story could be tightened.

I really enjoyed the beginning of the book because the pacing allowed me to get to know Max and his father, and set up for the story. When Neff slows down specific moments to relay information while still moving the story forward, he really does it well! But the pacing gets really wonky further in the book because so many concepts are being introduced! *We're here now here's classes, here's 20 characters, now an obscure sport, now an awesome match and a dance in the same day, oh there's also pets...* Did the author know he would have a series? Would there have been a better way to further flesh out some concepts because they are pretty interesting! But I have a vague idea of some because so much is thrown at you, which is really saying something in a 400 page book. And because so much is thrown at you, things are glossed over and you're expected to believe that "hey, this is now a thing." Hey, this regular human was assaulted, now they can just live at Rowan Academy when it was such a big deal to keep normal people in the dark about Old Magic and this world.

... Was it necessary for Max to have a pet? It didn't move the story forward and already there was so much

happening, was that really something to focus on? I know I'm harping on the little things but there was attention placed on this when the idea could've been scrapped and more attention could've been paid to something else.

Also, the amount of information that is relayed didn't feel earned, if this makes sense. Half the time the faculty withheld information for... I'm not sure, safety? To not create a huge stir? Which then left the children in the dark, and after people were injured then information could be relayed? And instances where I'd really like to read more about, are summarized and we're being moved forward without creating a connection at all. And when it's convenient Max runs out of magical reserves, but in other instances he's all drained? I wish Max and crew went out and did things, but instead things are told to them, things happen to them, and the story doesn't feel character driven. I did like that David went out of his way to do research, but for how renounced the faculty is, they relied on the knowledge of a first year to get them through. If they were trying to keep secrets/appearances, shouldn't they have found his sources and then banned him from continuing?

I don't know. I love magic, the extraordinary and overall fantasy, but this story felt like a hot mess. I gave it two stars because I was invested enough in a good few characters which is why I saw it through to the end. Maybe these concepts are more elaborated on in the later books, or hey, maybe the issues I have aren't huge in the eyes of a younger audience. Either way, I might borrow the sequel from a friend but it's not on my priority list.

Zachary Ljubicich says

One of the best books I've ever read, this book and the series as a whole has followed me throughout my childhood.

Sarah says

If you like Harry Potter and you like Lightning Thief, I can almost guarantee that you'll like this book. There are some striking similarities between this and Harry Potter... not quite passing the plagiarism border. They're both about magic schools, both main characters have dark hair, Series starts around the same age (this guy's 12), they're going through the whole hero cycle thing where they're destined for a dangerous and probably fatal world-saving mission. Despite all of these similarities, I never FELT like I was in a knock off of Harry Potter. The writing wasn't quite as good as HP, but wasn't merely as amateur as LT. Overall, I feel like I found a little gem because I picked it up off the library shelves at random and haven't heard anything about it, but it was engaging, endearing, and entertaining.

Kathryn says

Reading the first few chapters, I found myself comparing this book to Harry Potter. As one of the most avid reader of H.P. I have to say that I was a little disappointed. But when I got past reading chapter 4, I found myself falling in love with this book.

There's a significant difference between this book and H.P.

The main plot, unlike H.P, this book does not exactly use "magic" per say, it's based more on the real stuff like science fiction and folklore.

I was also amazed by the author's imagination. I loved how he imposed "charges" into this book and the how he uses "tapestry" as a means of both good and evil.

The only frustration I felt reading this book was that the author seemed to cut the chapters quite abruptly and move on the the next from time to time. I wished very much for him to explain more deeply about some of the incidents.

But overall this book is awesome. I just pick up the second book and can't wait to start it. I guess for the H.P. fans it is important not to be bias and just sunk into it. The book itself will do the rest of the work for you.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I was originally going to go 4 stars on this book, but on reflection I decided I had to go 5. We'll call it a borderline 5. I try to give few 5 star ratings as any book I give a 5 needs to be exceptional or the rating fails to mean much.

I went there in this case as I think it will remain a reread book for me if I ever have time to do a reread. I have less time to reread books now as there seem to be so many I haven't read yet...go figure.

So, what do we have here? Why did I come to the decision that it should cross over into the 5 star range?

First, it's just well written. I've mentioned before that most plots, characters and so on that "can" occur in stories have at some time. That's true here. I occasionally go on a "YA reading stint". I have lately and most have hit me as mediocre. Many of the teen books I read tend to bleed over into YAPNR (Young Adult ParaNormal Romance).

This one didn't do any of those. Of course the "youths" in it are around 12 and 13 I assume we'll see more "interpersonal relationships" as the series goes on.

As I said, it's a well written book and draws in the reader. Where I often find these books fading in and out as I started this one I got to know the character(s) and liked many of them. So first, the writing appeals, it flows.

Secondly the plot. After Harry Potter hit there were a rash of books about young people in magical worlds and in magical schools. Not all were good, not all were bad. many were so-so.

I doubt anyone who's a fan of the Harry Potter books will be able to escape the comparison. There's a lot of things to compare but it doesn't rip the story off. It's not a copy of the book at all but there are several places where they...cross into the same neighborhood. What have here is a story that draws on mythology (I just read some of the "Frost" ya books and they hit some of the same ground. Of course the Percy Jackson books use Greek) mostly Celtic and/or Norse mythology. From there we spring into the magical world where these myths and legends are of importance today. Young people (or "YAs") come to school to be trained in many things from the mystical to tactics and strategy.

(view spoiler)

We'll meet kids of all types from the friendly to the obnoxious and outright evil. Our young hero is forming a circle of friends but for now he's still young. The action of the book moves along pretty seamlessly and springs into a climax that doesn't have any of the "tacked on" feel a climax can have when you get a young hero facing some great evil. The story works well so far and I enjoyed their set up and back story. There's no pacing problem where the book starts out interesting and then slows down only to pick up again later.

I have my doubts about how some of the story elements may be used later...but they're fine now so we'll wait and see. With enough action, some humor, and a well written story this one is good and I can recommend you try it.

I already plan to follow it up. If I still had "youths" at home I'd read it with them.

Enjoy.

Karen says

I love when I pick up a book, knowing very little about it, and discover that it is *just* what I was looking for. Because this is a book about a young teenager who goes to boarding school to learn magic, the comparisons to Harry Potter are inevitable, but this is so much more than a Harry Potter read-alike.

Basically, this is the story of Max. While visiting an art museum with his father, Max sees a vision in a tapestry. This vision draws attention to Max, both favorable and negative. Ultimately, Max is sent to Rowan Academy, a boarding school where gifted teens are trained to use their powers.

While at school, Max and his new friends discover that other, potentially gifted students have been disappearing from all over the world, as are famous works of art. The students -- going against all the rules - - must determine the correlation between the disappearances and save the world. Between classes and football games, of course.

Cindy says

Just goes to show you that when you read a book almost 10 years later your opinion can change. I completely believe this book is better than my original review. Not a 5 star but it is better.

(old review from 2008)

I really tried to not compare this book to Harry Potter and I went in with an open mind. But the truth is this is a Harry Potter knock off. That wasn't my main problem with the book though.

The problem with the book I had is not one character did I feel close to. The chapters and activities jumped with no connection to each other. In almost every good book you get close to a character and feel bad/sorry for them whatever. This book there was no emotional connection to any of them. In fact at the end of the book I was wondering why I even bothered to read this, the boy was crying and I'm like.... I should care because.

I know its fantasy and all, but I can't get over the unbelievableity of this book. Kids have schedael from 6 am till 6 pm. They get these animals that play no part of the book. This book might have been great had it been about 200 pages less and less trying to throw things out there.

Lastly, the whole concept of the book was confusing. I know it's good vs. Evil but what was evil and why was really hard for me at 24 years old to understand there is no way a child would understand it.

Katie says

This book is basically a Harry Potter rip-off. While it has some differences (for example, technology is embraced not eschewed; the kids have animals that they care for; the kids come from across the world, not just the UK), it's pretty similar – ie: the kids have untapped powers, the kids are specially selected, the kids go through a process similar to the sorting, there is a school sport (soccer-esque), there is a powerful yet charming headmistress, quirky teachers, and a villainous group that seeks to thwart them. Basically Harry Potter. The story follows Max as he starts his new life at his new school, has some adventures, figures out a mystery, saves the day, etc. I could see why kids would enjoy the book, but for me, it was too similar to Harry, and no where near as good.

PurplyCookie says

I was pretty excited reading the back of the book--it seemed like it had all the qualities of a children's fantasy novel that would entrance me. It did captivate in some ways, however, in many others it was sadly lacking.

I felt myself more compelled to focus on the supporting character (the main character's roommate) than the actual main character, Max. He was sadly disappointing in many ways, and continued to irritate me throughout the book. It was only towards the end of the book that he even showed any potential as a leading character--and even then it was so hurried and slapped together that it didn't really end the story at all. I always wonder why writers use the 'intelligent one' as a supporting character and not the main one?

The characters were undeveloped, and the plot was not well outlined for me. Of course in the first chapter I was completely taken aback by the Harry Potter knock-off happening and there really is no way that anyone having read Rowling will not do the same. I found **"The Hound of Rowan"** almost intolerable, both as a Rowling wannabe and as a stand alone adolescent fantasy novel. If Neff could have mined the Harry Potter series for one more cliché to imitate, I would be hugely surprised. If you sat Rowling's plot outlines next to Neff's--without character names--you'd have identical creations. Of course, Neff did (1) name the school bully Alex instead of Malfoy (though why he would end both the protagonist and antagonist's names with 'x' I can't fathom), (2) change Harry's male Headmaster to a female Director (copying the role down to the bedside summary 'talk' after Max/Harry's heroic injury), and (3) dissect Harry's brains-vs-brawn dichotomy by splitting them between Max and David.

I'm also mystified why Neff chose to allow Max to open the door to complete strangers and allow them in the house for tests and such. The complete parental deception was a little unnerving for me as well.

All in all it was a rather poor read and I know I won't continue reading the series.

Book Details:

Title The Hound of Rowan (The Tapestry, #1)

Author Henry H. Neff

Reviewed By Purplycookie

Adam says

A decent first effort. I see these books as a cross between Harry Potter and Fablehaven. The story is fast paced and interesting. The characters are a bit flat but I expect will flesh out a lot over the course of the series.

I have a difficult time not comparing these books to Harry Potter and that is unfair since I've read all 7 of the books in that series. Going back and reading the first book shows that the Tapestry first effort is on a similar level. The key will be whether or not Neff can really pick up steam like Rowling did through the course of the books. The story became deeper, more interwoven, and I understood how all of the books worked together and were laying groundwork for the conclusion.

I'm a bit worried that Neff is already placing so many similar thematic elements in these books and plot vehicles that smack of Harry Potter i.e. a school for kids that are "different" with a whole hidden society that "regular" people don't know about. If I see an invisibility cloak or a Marauders Map show up, I may give up entirely. That is perhaps unfair since a lot of the elements of Harry Potter can be found in Lord of the Rings and imitation isn't new. Still, Harry Potter was so recent and so widespread it is hard not to feel slighted by authors who roll out the same artifice in their stories.

Robyn says

Montana Library2Go

It's against my policy to compare one book or series to another, for two main reasons. A) I don't think it matters that much what similarities exist between books. Just because you like one book does not mean you'll like a book that distinctly resembles it, and vice versa. Too often I've read books that have been compared to books that I truly love, and found these later books to be major disappointments. B) There is very little in the world of fiction that is truly new. I can take any series of the last 60 years and compare it to something else. In most cases, to multiple somethings. It's a sign of lazy thinking to simply say "this is so much like xyz" and leave it at that. For this book I will only say that every other review here on Goodreads is absolutely correct about how very much it resembles a famous fantasy series for young readers, and move on.

I desperately wanted to absolutely love this book. I continue to hope that I will fall in love with the series over the course of the next few books, in which case I may return to this one as a reader coming home to familiar characters and settings, and feel warmth and affection for it. If that happens, I might even be willing

to upgrade it to the 5 stars that I rarely give to books but which I had actually hoped this one might achieve. In that case, I will not remove anything from this review, so that it continues to reflect the fact that I felt upon first reading that it is not more than a 4 star book.

The main problem, aside from the deep sense of familiarity and de ja vu (haven't I read this before?!), is that the author has tried to do too much at once. So much world-building, so many characters, so many teachers and creatures and classes and types of people and history and locations and there is just too much. It takes nearly half the book to really get going with the story. I glanced down when things really started happening and saw that Kindle was saying I was 44% of the way into the book. Yes, a few things happened in the beginning, but they were just as much set-up as the 200 pages that followed them. That's not even something I like in a book written for adults, so when you're writing for younger readers you really need to do more than just build.

And as I said above, there was too much building. I am an alert and focused reader who loves fantasy books in large part because of the creation of the world the action takes place in. I read two David Eddings series in 10 days, for crying out loud, without any confusion about who was whom and where they fit into history, and those characters were both complex and had ridiculously similar names (yes, Belgarion, Belgarath, Polgara, Beldaran, Poledra, and all the others, I'm talking about you here). But in *The Hound of Rowan* I was introduced to too many people, places, and things in a short time, not learning much about or spending much time with any of them. Most of them ran together. The teachers absolutely all did, aside from Ms Richter. I would have read multiple interactions with several before I had any memory of who they had been stated to be the sole time the explanation was given. I just spent 450 pages with these characters, I can only identify the job of Nolan. The rest of the teachers taught various things and I haven't got a clue what those things were because I was really only told once. Since most of the teachers kept appearing in classes that weren't their own, looking over the shoulders of other teachers and of students, since classes were almost never shown and after a single introductory example of a class it was usually only mentioned in passing in reference to tests or homework, there was no way I was going to keep that straight. Same with the students. Several had names that were either very similar to other students, each of which had only been introduced once and had few and vague interactions, which made them difficult to keep straight. Others had names that were similar to non-students (too many C names for males, with Connor, Cooper, Carl, etc.), same situation. Most of the students were given a single identifying trait that was supposed to apparently define them for me, which is not actually character building.

As a side note here, I'd like to say how pleased I am to have diversity in the student population. I don't, however, think it was done at all well. No matter where students came from, aside from one African girl mentioning that she'd never seen snow they were all the same. It was very much like writing a bunch of white kids and then saying "ok, this one is black, this one is..." except as I type that sentence I can't think of any kid that was anything other than either white or black. There was a "Chu" last name, which might have been intended Asian, but I have no recollection of that being mentioned. And almost worse, the African teacher (why were all the black characters actually from Africa? Odd.) was described as having skin the colour of coffee. OH PLEASE GOD NO. That is one of the biggest (and totally legitimate) complaints that people of colour have about lack of diversity in fiction writing. Every black character is described by white writers as having coffee-coloured skin (sometimes a specific coffee, like cafe au lait, sometimes "coffee with a dash of cream", sometimes just "coffee"), and kinky hair, usually with an ethnic bauble thrown in for good measure (those were here, too). It's almost worse to write characters who act completely white middle class, then say they're black and describe them in those hackneyed terms, than it is to just whitewash your book. It hurt to read.

The thing is, there is so much potential here. Hell, I gave it four stars, didn't I? And that potential is not

solely as a near-reread for those who love the record-breaking famous fantasy series that all the other reviews are comparing this to. Yes, there are enough similarities, both large and small, in every aspect (book plot, series plot, characterization, setting, everything), that if you're a fan of that series you can probably have a great time with this one and feel like you're almost back in that world again. But separating it from that, there is so much here that could become something great. Enough that I am leaving it open to adjust this rating up to the rare 5 stars upon reading more of the books in the series. I never do this, but in this case I'm going to blame the editor. It was their job to help Neff in this, his first book, to incorporate all the introductions to this world into the action, instead of just making it basically a list. As it is we spend nearly half the book going from one place to the next, being told "this is this and that over there is that and here's how this works and there's how that works" and that is not just dull, it doesn't make the reader keep ahold of the information. Whereas a character experiencing things, instead of just being told about them during a tour or whatever, that helps a reader immerse in the experience, to see the world, to feel a part of it. Which would have also reduced that horrible familiarity to the other series. It's the editor's job to take an excitable new author and force them to let go of some ideas, or to delay them for later books, instead of cramming them all in.

So much potential, truly. But I regularly complete a book with the feeling that I'm resurfacing from an extended trip underwater. I feel breathless and the world around me seems unreal and without luster. I can't start a new series because I'm still so fully inside the setting of the book I finished. I run errands and find myself standing stock still in the grocery store, considering the future of various characters or the history of different places. I find it difficult to hold conversations, because they feel so surface and unimportant until I give myself a shake to remind myself that the world I was reading isn't real. Not this book. I closed it and thought "well, most of that was pretty clear from the start" and "it really is too bad that it's so much like that other series" and "why the eff do authors create these evil kid characters without justifying their evilness" and "should I start that other book I have before bed or wait till tomorrow" and "ooh I really need to get to the store tomorrow" and similar. I never felt a part of it, so it never became a part of me.

And yet, you see that I have given it four stars, which I do think it deserves. I have my fingers crossed for book two, which I've already gotten from the library, though I have to say I think it says something that two other books are above it in my personal queue. If this were a five star book, I'd be going straight to book 2 without pause. In the past few months there have been books that I finished and immediately bought and started reading the sequel within 10 minutes because I couldn't imagine leaving the world yet. Not here. Here's hoping for better integration in future, which may be easier as I understand it won't be about the school in book 2.

Nu-Jahat-Jabin says

[illegible][illegible]

Stacey Kym says

'The Hound of Rowan' was a spectacular novel that I seriously loved to death but it just...lost something along the way - hence the four star. I loved the incorporation of real life events by the author and the childhood trivialities that we so often find embarrassing as children but then laugh later as adults. It was a fantastic story that made me laugh so often or just grin stupidly at the book. I loved the characters (the good ones) and got seriously creeped out by the evil ones. The story was well formed and the writing superb. It was a great work by the author and as a debut even more impressive. This work reminded me a lot of David Edding's 'The Belgariad' series which I loved. A great children's read! Congratulations to Henry H. Neff on publishing a great debut!

The Library Lady says

Okay, it might turn out to be what some reviews keep saying "a Harry Potter knockoff", with no merits of its own. But since Jo Rowling stole freely from her predecessors, and just happens to be a good writer who revived an old formula at the right time, I'm willing to give this one a chance....

UPDATE (4/7/09) And I'm glad I did. Lots of wonderful touches--people keep mentioning "Mum" the reformed (well mostly) hag cook with good reason--she's wonderfully funny. Well told, well thought out and I'm glad the sequel is on my new book shelf because I'm ready to read it.
