



Touchstone

Melanie Rawn

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Cayden Silversun is part Elven, part Fae, part human Wizard—and all rebel. His aristocratic mother would have him follow his father to the Royal Court, to make a high society living off the scraps of kings. But Cade lives and breathes for the theater, and he's good—very, very good. With his company, he'll enter the highest reaches of society and power, as an honored artist—or die trying. Cade combines the talents of Merlin, Shakespeare, and John Lennon: a wholly charming character in a remarkably original fantasy world created by a mistress of the art.

Although *Touchstone* can stand alone, it is the first book of a brilliant, utterly engaging new fantasy series from the author of the bestselling Dragon Prince series.

Touchstone Details

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Author : Melanie Rawn

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From Reader Review Touchstone for online ebook

Karissa says

This book is the first in a new series by Rawn called the Glass Thorns. I loved Rawn's Dragon Prince series and was excited to see what she's been up to all these years. Well I was sorely disappointed. I read the first 120 pages of this book and finally just gave up. The beginning is confusing and there is no real goal driving the plot forward.

Cayden Silversun is trying to put together a troupe of players that will rise to the top and eventually end up on the Royal play circuit. He ends up bringing together a group of diverse individuals (both in temperament and race) and starts having some success at creating really awesome plays. Then the group is invited to partake in a contest to see if they can stand up against other troupes.

I don't really even want to spend time writing a review for this book; I was just so disappointed in it. The beginning of the book throws a ton of terms at the reader; each of which is a special part that a member of the troupe needs to perform to make the show a convincing whole. They each use special magical tools that have strange names to do this. I tried to just go with it, but for the first fifty pages or so I had no idea what was going on.

Cayden comes off as a weak character; he is easily swayed and constantly struggling to keep his troupe under control. I found him uninspiring. Some of the other players are equally obnoxious; for example Mieka who is the new member to the troupe is very annoying and likes to drink a lot...but because he is very good at what he does is tolerated by the rest of the troupe. None of the characters jumped out as especially easy to relate to or interesting.

The other big problems are the world and the plot; the characters are a complex mish-mash of different types of Elven heritage, Trolls, and numerous other races that are never very well explained. The plot doesn't have much to drive it which prevents the story from having any urgency. Yes, they want to win this contest...but that is pretty much the only thing driving the plot. Most of the plot deals with the characters internal struggles to balance winning with their own beliefs and principles. So most of the plot is driven by the characters' internal struggle...and I didn't like the characters, so I kind of didn't care about their problems all that much either.

It is an interesting idea for a story and if there had been a little glossary at the front of the book explaining all the foreign terms the whole thing would have been much less painful to read. If the troupe were fighting against some other treachery outside of their own internal struggles it would have made the story more engaging.

I finally put it aside after struggling through the first 120 pages over the course of three days. I still couldn't figure out the point to the story.

Overall I really disliked this book. It was hard to read and pointless. I can't in good conscious recommend this book to any of Rawn's fans; stick with her earlier works.

Keri says

I'd love to read it, but I'm afraid she won't finish it after the Exiles fiasco.

Hannah Roberts says

A clear reminder of the difference between young adult fantasy and FANTASY. The plot moves forward but is deeply involved in the type of life ambiguity that drives all people. The group of actors- creating amazing scenes by working together to shape and store magic- search for their path to greatness while haunted by Callent's "elsewhen" dreams. His visions may or may not show the future but their haunting clarity and the terrible fates that he sees for his bandmates lead in ever twisting paths where the prize of stardom might be their demise. I wish there were more female characters involved as always. The magical system is well realized, the setting is inviting without being derivative, and the somewhat slow pace invited you to sink into the characters rather than speed from plot point to plot point.

Jon says

First off, I'm a biased reader. I absolutely love Ms. Rawn's Exiles series and I am hoping for the decade-and-a-half wait for The Captal's Tower to be over with at some point in the foreseeable future. That being said...

I don't know that this series will stand up to the test of time. My first impression is one of mild disappointment, because the book is a lot of 'they went here and did this, and went there and did that' but lacks a lot of 'this is how they did it'. I don't know if that makes any sense, but I'm trying...I guess I should say, this feels more like a sketch of a novel than an actual finished product. It has some great scenes, and steady character development, but it still ends feeling incomplete.

I truthfully should give this 3 stars, but I'm holding out hope that the next in the series holds up better under scrutiny or that I get a better impression after re-reading it in a few months.

-- Jon

[EDIT 06/28/2014]

I recently picked up the rest of the series, and went back to this one to refresh my memory. After re-reading, I still have to say it doesn't feel like a complete book, but it's a little more coherent the second time through. Still not on a par with Exiles or the two Dragon trilogies, but a damn sight better than the Spellbinder books.

I'll increase my truth-in-advertising to 3.5 stars.

Leah says

This book was the worst one I've read in a long time. The story opens with a giant info dump, it's basically

like getting a history lesson of the town/theater culture from a professor who assumes you already know all the info so he doesn't need to be clear about it. From there, the story moves at a snail's pace without anything very interesting or unexpected happening. I can't believe this is the same author who wrote some of my favorite books because this one was painful to read, incredibly slow and the writing was choppy and felt forced. So disappointed.

Melissa Ann says

Fantastic book, really makes you want to read more.

Amanda R says

Started off boring and stayed boring for the next thirty pages, at which point I gave up. There was not a single likable character, very little attempt at explaining the workings of this magical theater troupe, and nary a plot in sight. And because Melanie Rawn was my very favorite author once upon a time, and because her first three trilogies changed my life, I prefer to remember her writing as it was rather than spoil it with the way she writes now. Sad, but true.

Brandon Zarzyczny says

I'm of two minds with this book, on one hand there is absolutely no conflict and no resolution, but on the other hand I absolutely loved the book and the characters. Truthfully, once I finished the book I couldn't stop thinking about what was going to happen next, and I really just want to go back to the world/characters that Melanie Rawn created. However I think that's almost part of the problem, where since nothing really happened I didn't have any sort of ending to the story (Something that I crave). When it comes down to it though, I think that Rawn almost created a new genre of Fantasy, where it's simply a character drama. There is definitely hints of conflict further down the road, but none of it is really present in the book. I mean they are really good friends with their biggest competition, and later in the book a new band/troupe is introduced but their rivalry is pretty stunted. This book was just a drama that happened to take place in a fantasy world, I still would have liked some sort of conflict resolution, but I love the book for what it is. I am anticipating that this is almost just the set-up book, and the sequel will have a lot more things going on.

As for the world building, the races are Tolkien with some other mythological races thrown in, but the big twist is that they can all interbreed, and especially in their kingdom no one is a pure blood. The story takes place around two generations after a horrible war where Magic was used to horrible effects (some of the worst atrocities committed by Cade's grandmother). The magic here is also very interesting, where all of the different races have various specialties, and in this time of peace it has turned into playacting. This was a very original idea, where one guy writes/alters the stories/dialogue and charges the withies (hollow glass tubes/wands), one guy called uses the withies to paint a holographic scene that is real to all of the senses of the crowd, one guy that controls the release of the magic and its effect on the audience, and one guy to playact all of the scenes. Only men are allowed to participate in the theater, and as possibly a consequence there are (Surprisingly for Melanie Rawn) very few strong female characters (really only one), but all of the main male characters really shine.

Touchstone also features probably the most interesting style of foresight/prophecy/premonition, where the main character has sleeping and waking dreams (else-whens) where he sees the future as it will happen if nothing changes. The interesting thing is that the main character can change these futures, but he never knows if what it's changed to will be better or worse than the original future. So basically, if Cade sees a future he doesn't like he then does something to change it (for example making sure to give their theater troupe a different name to prevent them from breaking up) to fit a possible future he hopes to see. This results in the only ending we get, as it's revealed that what he's changed has resulted in the beginning of a very horrible future.

As for the writing, it has a great flow to it, and I had couldn't stop reading it until I finished the chapter. There is incredible imagery, but she does have the tendency to skip parts of the story to apparently speed it up. There was also something really strange where Rawn is writing in the viewpoint of Cade, but around halfway through the book it randomly switches to his best friend Mieka. I was fine with this, but I found the change a little striking, and actually seeing into the mind of the other character took some of the mystery out of him. The viewpoint also transfers back to Cade again very abruptly in the last few chapters of the book. I'm fine with changing viewpoints, I mean two of my favorite series are the Wheel of Time and A Song of Ice and Fire where the viewpoint changes every chapter, but I've never read a book where the viewpoint changes as it does here.

Overall, I absolutely loved the book, and would definitely recommend it. I am now anxiously awaiting the sequel due out early next year, but hopefully it's a little longer and has a little more conflict.

Kes says

This is a book about relationships - specifically, between Mieka and Cayden - set against a fascinating backdrop.

I loved the worldbuilding. Cayden is in magical theatre - as tregetour, he's sort of a playwright. He is in a group with Rafe (the fettler: a bit like a stagehand) and Jeska (the masquer: sort of like the actor). They're missing a glisker - the person who creates illusions and emotions. We start when they're introduced to Mieka, and to their delight, their magic clicks. They form a group (it's actually a mix between a band group and the theatre group), and move on to the Trials (a competition to be the best group), and then sent travelling together.

Unfortunately, while they like and respect each other, there's still sparks between them - mostly due to Cayden's secret (view spoiler). This secret weighs down on Cayden and create barriers between him and Mieka.

Mieka being addicted to Thorn is hinted at as well. This, coupled with Cayden (view spoiler) creates friction.

Unfortunately - and this is why I capped the rating at 3 stars - is that all this tension is *never satisfactorily resolved within the book*. Sure, Cayden makes incremental steps at trusting Mieka, but the book ends with all these emotional issues left unresolved - even as the plot issues (completing the Trials and the (view spoiler)) end.

I did love the worldbuilding - it's subtle. The differences or the ambit of the roles (masquer, fettler, glisker, and tregetour) are never concretely set out; you read and infer from the text. Magical abilities, too, are never

clearly defined - we know that being a glisker requires some Elvenblood because the ability required to glisk is inherited from an Elvish ancestor. Cayden has Wizardblood - but it's not clear what this entails. We know that magic was used in the war, though the memory of its impact remains mixed.

I loved the intermarriage between the races - and the way its integrated into the text is great. We get offhanded text references like how a character looks Elven, but with Human teeth. Or how the ears hint at elven ancestry. There's mention that there are no truebreds left - all purebloods.

I do wish the text was clearer about the world. I was also sufficiently disappointed by the lack of plot resolution that I won't be reading on.

Wealhtheow says

Cayden has enough wizarding power to do anything he wants in life, but his only love is the theater. After his troupe finally finds the perfect fourth member of their group--the rambunctious Meika, who is as sweet as he is wild--they're finally ready to take on the world. Despite rivalries, intra-group conflicts, and drug problems, they rapidly gain renown as innovators and artists. But Cayden has one more gift that he keeps secret: he dreams possible futures. Some he is able to avert, others he makes come true, but he's never sure what choice will lead to which future. And after dreaming night after night of Meika caught in a magically abusive relationship, Cayden is torn about interfering, which may just make things worse.

I quite liked this alternate world, which is a bit like Renaissance Europe. Women aren't allowed to hold memberships in some guilds, or attend the theater, which provides some of the tension in the first half of the book. But unlike our world, everyone in this country has some mix of magical blood and magic is used in the day to day. Wizarding magic was used just a few generations ago in a cataclysmic war, and the repercussions of that can be seen throughout society, from the restrictions on Cayden's magic to the innkeeper who won't serve elf-blooded Meika.

The story lacks a real plot; minor struggles come and go, but there's no big triumph or climax. This book seems to be setting up future plots: the bloodthirsty princess, the power-hungry Archduke, greater freedom for women, and the seductress enslaving Meika. I wish Rawn had spent less time summarizing everyone's genealogical backgrounds and the various villages the troupe performs in, and had used at least one of these plots in this book. And two, I wish Cayden's decision to (view spoiler) I have no patience for plots created because characters refuse to talk to each other.

Nevertheless, I intend to read the next book, not least because I hope Cayden and Meika get together.

Harry Kloss says

Rawn drops her reader into a world, not explaining how things work in it. Sometimes when authors do this it's a bit unsettling, especially if there are many new concepts for the reader to learn and Rawn has created quite a few. That being said, the world and its inhabitants are fascinating. One of the things I love about the book is that it's a fantasy and the characters don't have to try to save the world; they aren't heroes, they're theater performers. I also love that her characters act like real people, other than the fact that they actually wield magic; their relationships, their friendships work as they do in the real world. Sometimes you want to

throttle someone you really like because they act like they have no common sense, and that's how Rawn's behave.

Collin says

What a bizarre book to try to review.

On the one hand, it was... off. Something was just /off./ The worldbuilding is so intense but so many things are never explained, even obliquely. For example, what /exactly/ is the difference between a glisker and a fettler? What is different from the magic that a tregetour has for enchanting the withies, and the magic that a glisker has? The masquer position is definitely the easiest to understand, but how does the magic for a masquer's persona change work exactly? I want to KNOW these things, not just have vague ideas I suss out from little throwaway lines. Along those lines, I'm not totally sure how the Trials and the Circuits work - that could just be because I'm not familiar with sports, because it sounds a lot how some sports (seem to) work. What are the differences between, say, Trolls and Goblins? Between Fae and Pikseys and Elfkind? Between Wizards and Humans? WHY did I have to learn that "Gallybanks" is the colloquialism for Gallantrybanks, the capital, by reading the index at the back of the books?

These are all valid issues.

HOWEVER.

I FREAKING LOVED THIS, even at the same time that I was frustrated and bewildered!

This is a book that just feels FULL UP with forethought and careful setting-up. Nothing is explained outright because nothing in our "real world" would be explained. Info-dumps so common in fantasy novels like this are few and far between. It's immersive, it leaves you floundering to put yourself in this brand new place with brand new rules, and I LOVED IT.

The characters are fun - mostly stock, but with some interesting spins on old classics. Cade and Mieka are obviously the standouts, though I really loved Blye and Rafe, too. (Jeska's just... too promiscuous, or, if not too promiscuous, promiscuity is his only character trait, and it got exhausting.) I love the Cade/Mieka relationship though, judging by reviews of the later Glass Thorn books, it looks like I'm in for the longest slow-burn relationship of all time.

The ins and outs of the theatre are fascinating. I want to attend one of these playlets. I also want Cade to start writing his own drama, dangit.

I'm fascinated by all the plotlines that are running through this story. None of them are "oh no, the world's in danger, Cade is seeing visions of apocalypse!" It's "oh no, Cade is seeing visions of his friends in terrible situations!" It's a much more intimate story, and though I know it'll probably ramp up in the later books, I really enjoy this focused, friendship-based angst. It's good stuff.

I wasn't really expecting magical drug abuse; the fact that the entire series is named after the method for injecting people with magical drugs makes me a little wary. I don't know how Rawn will continue to deal with it, so fingers crossed for a good resolution, but... yeah. We'll see.

This book was slow and tedious and sometimes the characters had reactions, did things, said things that just came out of nowhere and were then resolved too quickly. Was I skeptical? Yes. Do I remain skeptical? Yes. Did I enjoy this story? YES. Am I going to get the next book from the library? YES I'M GETTING ALL OF THEM. I NEED TO KNOW MIEKA'S GOING TO BE OKAY.

Jo says

I like Melanie Rawn quite a bit and got this as soon as I saw she had a new book out. I hate to say it but I was truly disappointed. I almost didn't finish it. The book starts out well, with an interesting premise but lost me about 1/2 of the way in when it got glacially slow. The main characters aren't particularly likable. There's some growth but not much and for what purpose? I never really figured that out. But I persevered to the end because it was written by Melanie Rawn and she's good; I figured it had to get better. Wrong choice. It took forever to read and I absolutely hated the ending. I will not read the next book -- it is obvious there will be a "next book" -- I have too many other books on my TBR shelves that are potentially good. Not recommended for anyone.

Stefan says

This book was the subject of my first ever "Fifty Page Fridays" post on Far Beyond Reality.

Tracy says

I've been a fan of Rawn's for a long time. As in I've been waiting for the third Exiles book as long as anybody' type fanboy. And this is Rawn's returning to High Fantasy, which is where she belongs.

And yet....

While Touchstone is engaging, and it's a return to the 'art as magic' trope she and Kate Elliot and Jennifer Roberson used so well in 'Golden Key', and there are true moments that are refreshing and fascinating and great....

And yet.....

It has a very throwback 90s feel to it, and I'm not sure it's in a good way.

All the characters in the book are descended of different races of legend, and the mix you exhibit supposedly indicate what race of ancestors you have. Elves and Fae, Wizard and Human, Troll and Piskie.

And yet....

I want more. I expected more. I want a reveal and a story that reminds me why I reread 'The Ruins of Ambrai' 3 times back to back. I want the Rawn magic that isn't quite here yet.

Is it better than 85% of what's out there? Yes. But from a writer who blazed the path for GRRMs ruthlessness, and Rothfuss's quality of writing, this isn't what I expected.

Not yet....

But it has a lot of potential.

