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The royal city of Astreiant, the capital of the Kingdom of Chenedolle, is bracing itself for the influx of people, money, and trouble that invariably accompanies the Midsummer Fair. For Nicolas Rathe, the wiry, street-smart pointsman with a strong sense of justice, the fair means more work: keeping the peace, preventing the pickpockets from getting too bold, and tracking down runaway youths and apprentices. But this year the number of missing children is far larger than usual; someone has been stealing them away without a trace and the populace is getting angry. At least the children are alive, Rathe knows, even though it adds to the mystery; the necromancers have not noticed any new ghosts of children.

To complicate matters, the citizens have another good reason to be anxious: theirs is a world ruled by the stars, and the heavens are now in a transition that heralds an upheaval in the Kingdom and possibly even the death of the reigning Queen. Contenders for the throne are jockeying for position, each claiming that her stars are the luckiest and most suited for the position.

Rathe suspects that the astrological portents and the missing children are linked, but has no idea how. With the unlikely help of Philip Eslingen, a handsome, out-of-work soldier, Rathe must find the children and stop whatever dark plans are being hatched before the city explodes into chaos.

Point of Hopes Details

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From Reader Review Point of Hopes for online ebook

Wealhtheow says

Set in a fictional fantasy world similar to seventeenth century England. The main difference is that astrology is real--and not only can it be used to accurately predict the future, it can be used to change it as well. The premise and plot are pretty good, but it gets bogged down in minutia. I know what the two main characters had for literally every meal of the week the story covers. I know how they hang their jackets, I know where they buy their ale--every single conversation, meal, and clothing-buying expedition is documented in detail. Very boring. The most disappointing aspect was, however, the relationship between the main characters. One a mercenary, the other a police officer (or "pointsman"), they're supposedly highly attracted to each other. They even move in together and declare lemanry (a fictional version of a civil union). And yet, not a single kiss between them. No moments of passion, no thoughts on how sexy the other looks--nothing.

Teal says

So boring. So so so so so boring. I read this almost 20 years ago, when I was desperately eager to find queer representation in spec fic. This was one of the first things I found, and you have no idea (or maybe you do) how very much I wanted to love it. It would have been so very easy to please me.

But this -- it was such a painful slog, and I reached the end without seeing even a *glimmer* of attraction between the MCs. After reading 3* books by this author, I know it's a clear-cut case of "not the right author for me."

*Okay, so actually it was 2 1/2 books. I could not have made myself finish *Trouble and Her Friends* unless I'd been threatened with death. Well, threatened with a particularly slow and painful death. Melissa Scott and I are just not meant to be.

Alison says

Wonderful. This is the first book in a cool fantasy mystery series and I really liked it. The main characters are neat, the mystery is engaging, and the story's really interesting. The world-building in this series is amazing. It's thorough and detailed and lush and I love it. Astreiant seems vaguely based on Renaissance-era Holland and it's quite a refreshing and neat place to visit. It's an astrologically-based matriarchal society where women run the government, run business and trade, and own the land, but without de-valuing men, so gender parity among the common people is pretty much a reality. No one is limited by their gender and anyone can do any job and love any person and it's all just everyday life. It's class that separates society more than anything else, and women do very much take precedence among the aristocracy. But this is not a story about the aristocracy. The two main characters are just regular working guys (an elegant ex-soldier and a hard-working policeman), who are both quite matter-of-fact and sensible and a bit poor. Nico and Philip are both very engaging, likeable people and their growing friendship is delightful to read. There's a large cast of interesting secondary characters as well. This book is not a romance, though there are some subtle hints of a romance to come. The story is definitely focussed on the the mystery, which is fascinating. The writing is

solid and wonderfully full of subtext. There are some slow bits and sometimes the writing is a bit clunky with long sentences. This isn't a fast-paced, tense, thrilling mystery romance story, so don't be expecting that. This is a longish story that takes its time and is full of depth and intrigue and interesting people. I really enjoyed it. The second novel, *Point of Dreams*, is even better, but do read this one first.

Jasmine says

I am a sucker for intricately wrought world building that is intrinsic to the plot of a fantasy murder mystery, let me TELL YOU.

Furio says

On the one hand I love fantasies, especially if they have gay characters, but I usually find even the best detective-stories dull.

This is a classical detective-story set in an alternative XVI century French-like kingdom.

The two authors outline a believable society and they enrich their descriptions with many interesting and witty details: the result, admirable though it is, is overwhelming and yet it would have born more development.

Writing is professional and subtle but the story develops slowly and many details one is expecting because of their approach are still absent.

This lack of fulfilment involves the main characters as well: one knows the two leads are going to fall in love with each other (it happens in the sequel) but although the authors describe their mimic to the smallest detail in a very pleasant way, they hold too much behind and one cannot really understand who they really are and why they should fall in love. Just the same happens for the lovely character of Istre: saying too much about him could be a mistake but one has no idea about his emotions. The authors hint at a possible emotional opening between him and Rathe's neighbour but they drop it and never mention it again.

This objectification might be considered all right in a common detective-story, where the main point is solving of the mystery, but is hardly satisfying here.

As it is this story has potential but feels incomplete.

D says

I've read this ages ago but never actually got around to writing a review.

Anyway, *Point of Hopes* is the first book in the Astreiant series (Shelfari lists *Armor of Light* as part of the same series, but it's actually not), and I have to admit that Astreiant is not an easy place to understand. It probably has to do with the fact that I read book 2 before this one, but anyway:

The place feels medieval Europe, with a childless Queen (I'm guessing patterned after Queen Elizabeth I), and astrology actually works. There are also two suns (as far as I can understand, the winter-sun rises after the real sun sets, so kind of like the moon? I've never actually heard anyone talk about two moons, though,

so maybe that's it?) and sometimes the movement of the stars can affect earthly politics.

Which is what happens in this novel. There is much pressure for the Queen to choose an heir and people are getting restless. Especially since children of apprentice age have all started vanishing without anyone knowing why or where to.

Enter Nicolas Rathe, adjunct point to Point of Hopes. The points are a newly established system (not quite a guild) who basically perform the functions of a modern day policeman. Rathe and his colleagues are tasked to investigate the disappearances, helped by his friends--Philip Eslingen in particular, who's just arrived in Astreiant after years of campaign all over the place. Probably not good timing to be a former soldier (waiting for employment) in a distressed city, especially since people are starting to suspect soldiers and pointsmen alike regarding the disappearances.

What I like about the book:

1, The world building. It takes getting used to, but I love the details and it works. I love how the guilds are set up: some jobs are probably more suited to a specific gender, but people don't usually care if your stars are right for it. Rathe's senior adjunct is a woman, and no one has ever questioned that. No talk about women being too soft to hold men's jobs. Or men being laughed at for being good at feminine jobs.

Also, there's this thing called a leman--a lover or sweetheart according to the dictionary--but in this case usually a lover of the same gender. No one cares. The Queen has one.

Do you see why this series is awesome?

2, Interesting characters. I might not have laughed out loud at the jokes, but they are witty and sometimes wry/sarcastic. Just the right kind of humour for me, actually.

The chemistry between Rathe and Eslingen (not immediately obvious: I was surprised in my first reading of PoH that they ended up as lovers, actually, because I thought there was nothing in the first book to show that they were interested in each other) might be a bit subtle, and the writers don't really spend that much time talking about physical attraction, but it's there.

Rathe getting jealous (which he wrote off to himself as envy) thinking of Eslingen with a woman. Eslingen reacting whenever Rathe's name is mentioned. They're kind of cute, actually. And they'd definitely be cute together.

3, EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS BOOK IS AWESOME. Okay, I think the climax happened too fast. But who cares. They've solved the case beforehand. I really can't be objective about this book at all.

M.C. Hana says

I am ashamed to say I bought this paperback used, and owned it for almost two years before I read it. The cover art looked rather bland and dull, and only the back cover blurbs made me pick it up.

When I finished it, I wanted to email Melissa personally and apologize.

Where to begin? I'll start with the world building that Scott and her late partner Lisa Barnett created: an alternate-reality late Renaissance on a world under two suns, where astrological predictions govern nearly every facet of life. A functioning matriarchy that didn't insult or castrate its male counterparts, and a culture of sexual equality more open than anything I've seen since Diane Duane's 'Middle Kingdom' fantasies.

Characters are deftly and affectionately portrayed, even side players with little screen time. There is a subtly-played male/male romance, but it shouldn't offend anyone used to hetero relationships in fantasy.

The core quest is grim without being too violent, perfectly-adapted to the culture around it, and resolved with a bittersweet ending that promises more.

I know there are two sequels, and that all three are being reissued with new covers. I look forward to buying them.

Sineala says

One of my favorite SF worlds, and basically just a really good book. It's an everyone-is-queer, nonobvious-matriarchy secondary-world police procedural mystery fantasy in a world that looks kind of sort of like Renaissance Holland if you squint. (Melissa Scott has a PhD in comparative history. Her worldbuilding is awesome. I first heard of her via *Trouble and Her Friends*, which I picked up because it was cyberpunk and was pleasantly surprised to find that it was very, very queer.) And if that's not enough, there's the magic system: astrology is real, and it really, truly works.

The plot is something that could, in the hands of lesser writers, easily end up boring: in the city of Astreiant, the capital of Chenedolle, the queen, childless, is ailing, and it's time for her to choose an heir. Naturally there is some political infighting. It's also fair season, but what's most on the mind of city residents is that children have begun disappearing, and no one knows who is taking them or why. And luckily, you get to avoid reading about most of the machinations of the nobility, because Our Heroes are not nobility. Nicolas Rathe is a scrupulously honest pointsman (policeman) from one of the rougher districts of town, who stumbles into the problem and sets about trying to solve the mystery. Philip Eslingen is an out-of-work mercenary, new to Astreiant, and he more or less stumbles into... Rathe, and then the two of them try to help each other out.

(Yes, they do get together. No, it's not in this book. One of my favorite things, though, after Nico/Philip, is the series' use of the archaic word *leman* to mean a same-sex lover. My other favorite thing is the gargoyles. My other other favorite thing is the scurrilous broadsheets. No, wait, Istre b'Estorr. You know, I could keep going...)

The actual mystery resolution happens kind of weirdly, and I'm not sure I'd recommend it primarily as a mystery, but I am not a big mystery fan, so it didn't bother me.

And now, having reread this, I'm going to read the shiny new novella. Hooray!

Julio Genao says

some lovely odds-n-ends, but it was basically a feature length episode of Law & Order: Medieval Victims Unit, with next to no exciting progress in any direction until the last third.

most of it was interviews all over town, and a series of introductions to any one of a hundred characters who have nothing to do with anything—though each of them struck me as nicely done in themselves.

if you like your gumshoe detective stories romance-free, long as hell, and with a minumum of explosions, murder, or action that isn't a conversation over a kidney pie...

well then, this is your book.

it's not mine—the copy errors alone saw to that—but i'm told the MCs get together in a subsequent book.

the clues of that are already in this one, but they go nowhere, like some editor at tom doherty and associates was more concerned with deleting any homosexual subtext than with fixing all the goddamned unclosed quotations, missing italics, or random POV changes within paragraphs.

and the thought that might be true makes me really sad.

Marc | Rainbow Gold Reviews says

A free audiobook review copy of this book was provided to Rainbow Gold Reviews in exchange for an honest review by the publisher. I'm a huge fantasy fan, so I jumped on the chance. I'm ashamed to say, I never even heard about this series and I am very glad about this re-release as audiobook and stumbling over it.

The worldbuilding in this book was amazing and I found it easy to imagine this world in my head. It is great to get a clear picture of how the world works, without the author having to resort to telling. It's more that readers are pushed into the middle of things and like when you move to a new place you learn best by becoming a part of things. As a reader I felt like I was a part of the world and it was easy to navigate my way through the world through contxt and detailed descrition. The characters are great, the plot had me intrigued and maintained the tension and even though the romance seems to startin book 1.5, I really appreciated the building friendship and respect between the two man characters. The audiobook narration was well-done, but the audiobook editing missed many partial sentences that were repeated.

Jax says

This really could've used some action. I would've even settled for a sense of urgency. But holy cow was there a lot of description of stuff and talking. Then some more description of stuff and more talking. And more often than I liked it involved repeating something they'd already told one person to a *second* person so the reader goes through it twice. The whole book is basically Nico crisscrossing the city multiple times to question people. Argh. Major pacing problems, *she added silently**. Plus there is nary a hint of relationship brewing between the MCs.

*frequently used phrase

K.J. Charles says

This was just glorious fun. Beautifully and apparently effortlessly developed fantasy world, without the leaden heaps of description and exposition that make so much worldbuilding unreadable. You get a political plot, a cultural background, a whole social structure and a magic system, all conveyed as integral parts of a fast paced investigation plot, with plenty of room for character development. *And* there's three novels and a novella, so I won't be reading anything else for some time. I can't think of any SFF I've enjoyed so much, so effortlessly since the Tales of the Ketty Jay by Chris Wooding, which also have the character-led, plot-driven, immensely readable quality. Loved it.

Edit: Second read because Point of Sighs is on its way. Everything I first thought stands, with an extra shout out for the magnificent necromancer--the character and worldbuilding there could have supported a book of their own--and especially for the matriarchal and queer-positive society so elegantly and convincingly depicted. Makes you wonder how come so many male authors are unable to conceive of such a thing.

Karen Wellsbury says

I bought this book ages ago, in paperback no less, mainly because I'd seen such glowing reviews of it. And it sat in a bookcase. Every time I went to read it there was a reason why not, and then someone I dislike reviewed it and I just couldn't bring myself to read it for almost a year. But last week the time seemed right ! It took me a while to get into this, there is a lot going on and some of it doesn't seem very relevant to what I thought was the focus , and there is a lot of world building to absorb.

At 20% I was about to stop and then it all seemed to come together. It's a beautifully realised book, a medieval style fantasy with a strong mystery element and some fantastic world and society building.

There are layers of society including mages and at every level everyone seems to do everything, there are no apparent gender roles, and nothing seems hetero normative. While there is the 'big' story, who is taking the young people, for me it was all the small details, the everydayness of the book that really captured my attention.

There is a very small hint of a possibility of a romance here , Nico and Phillip seem attracted at times but it's very subtle.

This is a story to get lost in, it's subtle and leaves you wanting more.

Phoenixfalls says

This novel is incredibly satisfying, despite being fairly uneven technically. The characters are charismatic; the mystery, though fairly simple, maintains an excellent sense of tension due to the stakes; and the world is fascinating, lovingly detailed, and fairly unique among fantasy worlds. I stayed up all night to finish this, and immediately wanted to read the next in the series. (Sadly, neither of the two other Astreiant books are

available in any of the library systems I have access to.)

It's actually a little surprising to me, how much I enjoyed this book, because there were several elements of its execution that normally irritate me. Scott & Barnett had inconsistent control over POV -- most of the book is told from a tight third-person viewpoint centered on either Rathe or Philip, but every once in a while they slipped into a third-person omniscient, or switched POV from Rathe to Philip mid-section. Now this isn't uncommon, particularly in fantasy from the 80s/90s, but it always bothers me. The prologue, which let the book pass the Bechdel test on the very first page, was in the POV of characters that did not appear again until a couple hundred pages in, which again isn't really uncommon in high fantasy novels, but again, usually gets under my skin.

And oh, the info-dumping! There are a LOT of passages that are just the characters thinking about how their world works, how peoples' stars affect their chances in life, what the various political factions think of each other, all things that people don't actually think to themselves in real life but which they do in fantasy novels because the authors have put in a lot of work into building their worlds and want the reader to see it.

Normally this is a cardinal sin to me; I would much rather just be thrown into the world and forced to figure out what's going on for myself. But here I was willing to forgive it, because the world was legitimately fascinating. The entire social order is built around astrology, so everyone knows the time of their birth down to the hour or better, and their stars determine what careers will suit them, and they go to astrologers often to get readings for what their near-future might hold. There are masculine stars, which encourage people to wander, and feminine stars, which encourage people to settle, so for the most part women hold political power by virtue of being landowners while the militaries and trading companies are dominated by men, but plenty of men have feminine stars and plenty of women have masculine stars. Stars also determine when it's propitious to marry or have children, so same-sex relationships are common and same-sex partners can have legal standing entirely separate from marriage, which is (I think) heterosexual and focused exclusively on property.

This is what perplexed me most about Scott & Barnett. On the one hand, as I said, there were quite a few heavy-handed info-dumps about astrology and politics, and I was fine with them because they were interesting, but I still noticed them. But the world-building around gender and sexuality was just as interesting and different from the norm as the political and magical systems, and Scott & Barnett conveyed that information in my preferred fashion -- the characters simply used the terminology as was appropriate, and I was left to infer what it all meant on my own. I don't know if one author handled the politics/astrology and the other handled the gender/sexuality, and that was the cause of the difference, or if they left the gender/sexuality world-building mostly oblique so that it could fly under the radar of more conservative fantasy readers; but either way, though I did not mind the info-dumping, I wish the astrology/politics world-building had been handled as subtly as the gender/sexuality world-building was.

It was, of course, for the gender & sexuality world-building the I picked up the book -- I'm always looking for SFF that has alternate gender roles and more expansive ideas of sexuality than is typical. On the sexuality front this book satisfied completely; as I said, queer sexualities are incredibly common and entirely unremarkable in this world, and that is delightful. On the gender front my reaction was a bit more complicated. On the one hand, it's a world where political power is mostly concentrated in female hands -- Chenedolle is ruled by a Queen, all the prospective heirs are female, most property owners are female, and property passes down to daughters. And this is one of the rare books that I placed on my GoodReads "A Passel of Women" shelf -- there are women everywhere in this world, as pointsmen (police officers), pickpockets, tavern keepers, and shady financiers. The preferred gender-neutral sentence construction is "she or he" instead of "he or she." The book passed the Bechdel Test despite having male leads.

But. There was a pattern that I noticed about halfway through the novel, and it's one that I do not like. Despite all the women in the book, somehow, the characters that actually moved the plot were all male. The two leads, of course; but also the butcher that reported the missing apprentice that got the action started; the drunk journeyman that was the main instigator in Philip's changes of fortune; the necromancer that helped Rathe put the pieces of the mystery together; the traders who provided a crucial piece of evidence; the shady businessman who was more involved than he knew. Now, it's possible that this was a deliberate choice by Scott & Barnett. After all, if feminine stars are about stability and masculine stars about change, then it is vaguely in keeping with the focus on astrology for the men to be astrologically more inclined to be the movers and shakers of plot. But really, I'm pretty sure that's a terrible bit of fanwanking on my part; I strongly suspect that despite women having equal or greater power in the world, the men have greater power in the plot because that's how insidious sexism is.

Still, despite all those little critiques, this book was simply fun. I did see where the mystery was headed in advance, but that didn't detract from the tension through the middle of the book because though I knew what was going on I did not know that everything would end well. The climax felt a little rushed, mostly because it wasn't until the climax that I was actually convinced that the astrology-based magic actually had power in the world rather than being superstition, but it was still emotionally satisfying. And despite my reservations about the narrative's gender equality, the world itself is exactly the sort of place I like to spend time, the sort of place I wish was more common in SFF -- one not enslaved to our too-narrow ideas of gender and sexuality, and with swashbuckling heroes and magic to boot. All in all I am very happy I read this, and will be seeking out more of the authors' work as soon as I can.

WhatAStrangeDuck says

This is a very solid fantasy mystery with a well fleshed-out cast of characters. It's set in a world that somewhat resembles 17th century France but quite clearly isn't. The world-building is probably one of the best things about the book. Few authors make the effort to really establish a society that has its basis in concepts we know (like guilds and astrology) but put them together in such a unique way that something really new and original is the result. After reading one too many shoddily put together 200-page fantasy novels, this one here made me realise how much I missed having authors really take the time to set the stage properly. It's like a breath of fresh air.

Kudos!

I also really enjoyed that the book is quite unabashedly feminist without being preachy or whiny. Gender is really just pretty much a non-issue. Of course Nico's boss is a woman because why wouldn't she be? Of course the regency is matrilineal because why wouldn't it be?

The same is true for same-sex relationships. They just are. It's lovely to behold.

As a hint for the usual suspects: This is not a m/m romance. The MCs will get together in the next book but I doubt that there will be much emphasis on the romance aspect. This one here is a deftly woven mystery/police procedural of sorts set in a queer-friendly world where magic and the influence of the stars are just integral parts of reality.

Highly recommended.
