



Darkspire Reaches

C.N. Lesley

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"...the kind of enveloping world-building and characterization that can cause you to look up hours later and only then notice that while you were immersed in the book the sun has set and you've missed a meal. Or two." - Wendy S. Delmater, Abyss & Apex Magazine

The wyvern has hunted for the young outcast all her life; a day will come when, after being rejected by civilisation and the tribes, she must at last face him. Abandoned as a sacrifice to the wyvern, a young girl is raised to fear the beast her adoptive clan believes meant to kill her. When the Emperor outlaws all magic, Raven is forced to flee from her home with her foster mother, for both are judged as witches. Now an outcast, she lives at the mercy of others, forever pursued by the wyvern. Soon her life will change forever. An unique and unsettling romantic adventure about rejection and belonging.

Darkspire Reaches Details

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From Reader Review Darkspire Reaches for online ebook

Michael Kelly says

I read a lot of fantasy novels, and when I began this one, I imagined I knew how it would pan out. I was wrong, this story is very much its own thing and very original.

Rather than the epic quests and pitched battles of most fantasy sagas, this one is much more tightly focused upon just a few characters, their unique situation and their struggle to survive and learn to accept each other as they await the event at the story's climax.

The characters are all good and the events of the novel are seen at various times through several sets of eyes, all with their own fears, prejudices and perspectives. This adds layers of colour and complexity to the plot and the inability of the characters to simply come out and be totally honest with each other is actually very true to life. Everyone needs their secrets and the time to share confidences just never seems to be right, which inevitably leads to greater problems later on.

A very fascinating and original read, and the Wyverns are magnificently described beasts.

Ash (It's a Word Vomit World) says

I have to admit I am a little surprised by all the high ratings. I found about the first half of this book to be just what a lot of people have already said; one of those books you just can't put down...then came the second half. If I could rate the two halves separately, I would rate the first a 4 and the second a 2. As you can see I'm rating the entire book a 3.

So let's start with the first half. It was exactly what you're hoping for in this book: written well, definitely a fantasy type world, believable dialogue, interesting plot, subtle foreshadowing, plenty of peril and suffering for our protagonist, and she was extremely likeable (not annoying as you sometimes run into). A lot of the characters other than our protagonist could have used some fleshing out, but a 4 star rating gives a book some wiggle room for such flaws.

Then we just had to ruin things with the second half. Full disclosure, I am not a fan of romance books, but if it is written well I am more than willing to give the book a high rating. Catherine Asaro, Brandon Sanderson, and Kelley Armstrong have written some of my favorite books, and they all have their romantic spots. So where did this romance go wrong for me? First of all Connor, oh Connor, you just can't make one right decision can you? Trying not to spoil here, but how was he able to do what he did to stop her from bringing down that cave, yet he was unable to drag her kicking and screaming out of it? This could be considered just a poor choice on his part, but there were too many other inconsistencies in the actual story that bothered me to no end. I really don't like spoilers, so perhaps if you read the book for yourself you can spot them.

Imelda was an interesting character though, wasn't she? My only issue with her, which I have with a lot of fantasy book antagonists, was that she had no redeeming qualities. She was just pretty much evil. I thought perhaps her love for her kit would help a little, but then...well, we can just leave that one too.

Too much of this book was brushed over. I wish that more of Connor and Raven's growing relationship had

actually been shown rather than just kind of told. Like when Raven's memory was wiped. This would have been the perfect time to show her falling in love with him, to counteract the deceit that she finds out about later. It would help make their final relationship make more since. Instead we're just told they lived together in harmony for a few months as master and servant, then one day she remembers everything.

Sometimes the story almost seemed to skip needed scenes. A time I can remember in particular was when Raven was helping get Connor back on his feet. The chapter had ended with her smelling the wyrven and knowing that the beast had returned, considering she never smelled the wyrven on Connor unless he had been "out with the beast", I took this to mean she was going to turn to find the wyrven, but then the story shifted to his point of view and the book had skipped ahead. Another time a chapter ended a certain way, and the next chapter began the same way with different wording. It felt like a new episode of a show, "previously on Darkspire Reaches". One last small skip I can remember off the top of my head was when Connor had to find Raven when she had taken off from the Grotto. This scene as a whole seemed like a lot of rambling and it was hard to get a really good picture of what was going on in the physical world.

I continued reading this book hoping there would be an amazing enough ending to redeem it, but it just never came. So is this a book worth reading? If you got it for free like I did maybe, but if you're paying for it? Eh, as you can tell I have mixed feelings about that.

E.M. Cooper says

After reading 'Sword of Shadows' by C.N. Lesley, I had high hopes for 'Darkspire Reaches' and I wasn't disappointed. From the first pages, I was thoroughly immersed in this new fantasy world.

Fifteen-year-old Raven is abandoned by her mother as a sacrifice to the Wyverns but is taken in by Margie, a healer who teaches her spells. Because of her dark skin and hair colouring, Raven is an outsider in her community—called the 'ill luck child' by other children. When the community turns against Raven and Margie with accusations of them being witches, they flee from one prejudiced and ignorant community to another where Margie losing her mind to dementia tries to blackmail the emperor. After escaping, Raven is rescued from death by the Wyvern, where she is taken to Connor, the Drakken in the Darkspire Reaches. I especially liked Raven and the development of her character from timid beginnings as an apprentice, who is lonely and isolated, to a confident woman who sets out on a journey of self discovery and overcomes prejudice.

C.N. Lesley's writing is characterised by beautiful, lyrical descriptions and vivid world building. She is a skilled and entertaining fantasy author.

Erica says

A young woman falls in love with her rapist because he's just so hot. Wow. The author even goes out of her way to try to justify it and give him a good reason to rape a young woman. This actually makes me sick and is a slap in the face to victims everywhere.

The writing at the first half reads like a list of events, so I forced myself to keep going. I wanted to know

about Raven, and that was the only reason I didn't put it away. But she moves four different places in the first hundred pages, and that's just too much moving around and not enough actually happening.

Then comes the rape, and of course it's ok because he's hot. At least that's what the author wants readers to think. Rape is never justifiable, and these types of scenarios are exactly why people don't want to read self published books. I doubt a real publisher would have allowed this garbage to hit the shelves.

Jackie says

This book was rather alarming in its handling of some very sensitive topics. And I do not mean that in a good way. Rape is never okay.

People in reviews rave about the world building of this book? but we never even get to see the other world that they flew to at the end! How did the emperor gain power? Nothing was explained to craft a world. No thank you.

Julie Powell says

This fantasy story is well-written and filled with believable and intriguing characters that sweep us along into the magical and impressive world of the wyvern.

Themes such as superstition, betrayal, loss, fear and insanity work well beside magic and legend to make this an excellent read.

Raven and Connor are both brilliant characters, while their relationship is stormy, its development is fun to watch.

Certainly a tale which engages and perfect for fantasy lovers.

Highly recommended.

Bill Ward says

This is a very well written fantasy adventure featuring an interesting and complex heroine in Raven. She has been adopted and much of the book is about her journey of self discovery, while making a literal journey to escape danger. The author has built a world, which on the fantasy level was intriguing but also had similarities to our world. In the fantasy world there is a fear of magic and different peoples, while in our world there is suspicion of different races, nationalities, colour of skin, religion. I was quickly immersed in the fantasy world and accepted the behaviour of the different characters as realistic for the world they inhabit.

The story is a page turner with an element of romance but as befits a fantasy it is not a classical boy meets girl story! I really enjoyed this imaginative element of the story and especially enjoyed the dialogue between Raven and Connor.

I suspect and hope there will be a follow on book.

K.J. Simmill says

Raven can feel the call of the wyvern, even sheltered deep within the woods where she and Margie, an alchemist and botanical healer, live. As a baby Margie rescued Raven from being a sacrifice to the beast, hiding her away. The wyvern seeks her still. Unwilling to surrender that which was his, it will not rest until it has torn her to shreds, or so she was led to believe. Winter is coming, and with a new law passed outlawing magic and sentencing those who practice such crafts to death it seems those who make their living by potion and scrying are set to starve. With no other choice Raven and Margie are forced upon a journey, one where the true nature of all shall be revealed.

I picked up Darkspire Reaches because I was really craving a good high fantasy, and this book did not disappoint. I was hooked from the first page to the last. Invested in Raven's plight and drawn in to the world of magic and wyverns created by the author. The characters are diverse, entertaining, and most importantly bursting with real personality. This gripping tale will leave you wanting more right until the final page.

Phillip Spencer says

This novel is a delightful read - the sort one has to sneak back to read another chapter while knowing there are other things that one really should be doing!

I had the same feeling when I read this novel as I did when I first read "Dragonflight" by Anne McCaffrey many years ago. (A word of explanation: I see there are some parallels - the wyvern for the dragon; the fire-drake for the fire-lizard; the strong, young, female protagonist is a girl treated initially as a drudge (Raven, Lessa) - BUT they are very different stories in very different milieu. Darkspire Reaches is a fantasy through and through, with magic and transformations, whereas Pern is an SF world.)

My point is that both are well-written and have excellent world-building and that is why I draw the link: within this book I encountered a world I want to go back to, so I can find out more about the Angressi, their conflict with the First Born and the strange world of the Drakken. There is much hinted at, such as the rise of the Emperor Chactar or the Shangrove and Samara Maidens, that could be a story in itself and this adds to the richness of the story since one experiences this as part of a much larger environment not a flimsy theatre set constructed to just carry this novel.

The story in Darkspire Reaches has a good plot and structure, starting out quiet and focused, in a country cottage with Margie, the local "witch", and her fosterling, Raven. As Raven's (and the reader's) view of the world expands, we become aware of how different she is. The story moves swiftly from the local village and torments of its youngsters, on to the Emperor's city and then for Raven to make contact with her own people. We see Raven propelled by fear, prejudice, manipulation and politics from a sheltered environment into what is a conflict between races where suspicion rules but help is found in unexpected places.

Raven learns to question friendship and the motivation of others as she starts to experience her world as it really is. This is an adult fantasy, which does not pull its punches.

Add to a strong plot and milieu a couple of very well-drawn 'point of view' characters whose misunderstandings of each other, and the mistrust this creates, lead to further confusion and conflict. With a number of other key characters - helping or hindering - met along the way we see good characterisation is another of the author's strengths.

My one complaint with "Darkspire Reaches" is that I finished it too quickly and there is so much more I want to know about the world, the wyvern and the characters. This story is complete and stand-alone but I can see the potential for further stories filling in background, plus a sequel to Raven and Connor's story. After all, there is a good precedent: just look at how many Pern stories we ended up with!)

Highly recommended.

William Stuart says

I wanted to try out a different kind of fantasy novel, so I did some looking on Amazon and found Darkspire Reaches by C N Lesley. It turned out to be a good choice!

Synopsis (from the author): The wyvern has hunted for the young outcast all her life; a day will come when, after being rejected by civilisation and the tribes, she must at last face him.

Abandoned as a sacrifice to the wyvern, a young girl is raised to fear the beast her adoptive clan believes meant to kill her. When the Emperor outlaws all magic, Raven is forced to flee from her home with her foster mother, for both are judged as witches. Now an outcast, she lives at the mercy of others, forever pursued by the wyvern. Soon her life will change forever.

A unique and unsettling romantic adventure about rejection and belonging.

What I liked: There were many likeable aspects about this novel. First, the character of Raven was a nice example of a character developing throughout the story. Margie, Raven's mentor and mother figure, went from a sympathetic character to one I didn't like much as the story progressed. Connor, the human/wyvern was a bit of an enigma and is gradually revealed as the story moves forward. I think my favorite character, though, was the Kryling, the firedrake!

What I didn't like: I really thought the rape scene could have been changed. The idea that Connor had to rape Raven to keep her magic from destroying both of them seemed odd to me - despite references earlier in the book about the necessity of Samara Maidens being controlled by taking their virginity. It was never clearly established that Raven was a Samara Maiden, so it just seemed unnecessary. I also thought Imelda was too stereotypical. I didn't like the way Merrill played an important role in the book at first, but then faded away to a non-entity. Lastly, Raven's acceptance of the wyvern part of herself seemed out of character given her fear of the wyverns, in general.

Overall impression: Darkspire Reaches was an overall enjoyable read. The characters were well developed, and the story moved along at a good pace. I didn't care for the rape scene, nor for the way Raven fell for Connor after the event, but would still recommend this fantasy for adult fantasy readers.

My rating: 4 Stars

Kate Everward says

Darkspire Reaches is an interesting read. Great world building, characters and a story that'll keep you busy for a while. Raven has a unique story and you feel the need to continue and see what's ahead for her. The story has everything you need to keep you on the edge. There were some parts in the plot I didn't really feel comfortable with and even though I'd change them, it's the author's story, she has her reasons and her reasons should be respected especially since she's a good writer. Overall the story is a good one, the female character is strong, she endures a lot and I'd absolutely recommend reading it.

Giacomo says

I'll start this review by saying, I love reading fantasy. There was a time, not too long ago, when I felt as if the fantasy genre had died. Not much new was coming out, and what did show up on the shelves didn't suit me. Lately I've seen a resurgence of excellent fantasy stories, and Darkspire Reaches is one of them.

Lesley knows how to build a world, and create--not just characters--but whole races of them, complete with speech patterns and a recognizable cadence that sucks you into her world. From the first chapter you know you are entering a new world, and by the third chapter, you are already familiar with it.

Some authors plop you down in the middle of a fiery battle in a desperate attempt to get your interest. Lesley goes about it differently. There is a confidence in her writing that allows for a slow build of tension, but each chapter has the right level of suspense, and, if you're a careful reader, you'll spot the foreshadowing woven into the pages by a master wordsmith.

This wasn't a book that demanded to be devoured in one sitting, but each bit I read left a good taste in my mouth, like a fine glass of wine, and I realized I was eager to get back to reading each night. As I neared the end, I had to stay up later than I wanted to find out what happened. I wasn't disappointed.

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Jana Petken says

Darkspire Reaches by C.N. Lesley is a mixture of fantasy, self discovery, magic, and romance. Raven is no ordinary girl, however it takes quite a few chapters until her true potential is evident and her character builds from a low serving girl and healer into a magical creature, who causes a stir on her journey through kingdoms and tribal territories.

I enjoyed this book immensely and not just because of the compelling story. Raven, Margie, Connor, Captain Merrill, and the others, owe their character's appeal to the author, who weaved their personalities with style and wonderful visual descriptions. It does not take long to immerse oneself into the world where these characters live, fight, survive, and love. It was also very apparent to me, that this was a book of exquisite fantasy. By that I mean a book, which captured my mind, and took me to another realm of existence. This is what fantasy is supposed to do, although not all books in this genre manage that with such aplomb.

I am hoping that there is something more to come? The book and story ended yet I find myself thinking that

Raven and Connor's journey is not entirely over and that maybe, just maybe we will hear from some of the other wonderful characters again, in another story.

The writing was as smooth and as clear as glass, as was the dialogue and speech patterns of the colourful array of characters.

I take my hat off to Ms Lesley, who did not take me out of her world for one second, but kept me there from beginning to end.

Wyrdness says

2.5 stars.

On the surface this was a fairly enjoyable fantasy adventure, but if you stop to look closely at anything it quickly starts falling apart. Add that to the weird feeling that this was two stories smashed in to one at high speeds (first half about a poor foundling girl being raised by a witch and living with prejudice and hate, the second half is about dragons and being hunted down by an Emperor), and you get some explanation for my rating.

Some spoilery thoughts on why just some of the things don't work on closer inspection:

(view spoiler)

The characters weren't all that great either. I did like elements on their personalities, but at the same time they weren't like real people. They danced between moments of being annoyingly perfect and talented individuals and TSTL decisions that made no sense, neither of which were particularly interesting. I did like that Raven wasn't a complete doormat heroine, but she wasn't really strong either.

I'm not sure I'd really recommend this. I liked it, to an extent, but it had severe problems and there are much better novels to read.

Jalpa Williby says

A very different type of romance/fantasy

Darkspire Reaches was truly a great read. It captured my attention from the beginning. Immediately, I was engrossed in the story, and I finished it on the same day.

I don't normally read stories like this, but I'll have to start now. I enjoyed the world that the author created. I really liked Raven. She was found abandoned in the woods and was saved by an elderly woman.

All her life, Raven tried to find a sense of belonging- to fit in somewhere. She had a heart of gold, always healing people of their pain. It was easy to like her character.

Connor was a different story. He was a very unconventional hero. He made some very poor choices right from the beginning and tried to fix his mess throughout the story. But even as the story progressed, he continued to make poor decisions that come back and bite him later. He was quite lucky that Raven was a forgiving girl.

Even though he was not your "typical" hero, it was hard not to like Connor. I mean he was the kind of guy that once he loved, he loved forever. He was fiercely protective, a warrior, and was not afraid to use his inner "beast."

If anybody is looking for a great escape in books, this is a good one.
