



Dark Oracle

Alayna Williams

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TARA SHERIDAN HAS A GIFT . . . AND IT ALMOST KILLED HER.

As a criminal profiler, Tara used science and her intuitive skill at Tarot card divination to track down the dangerous and depraved, including the serial killer who left her scarred from head to toe. Since that savage attack, Tara has been a recluse. But now an ancient secret society known as Delphi's Daughters has asked for her help in locating missing scientist Lowell Magnusson. And Tara, armed with her Tarot deck, her .38, and a stack of misgivings, agrees to try.

Tara immediately senses there is far more at stake than one man's life. At his government lab in the New Mexico desert, Magnusson had developed groundbreaking technology with terrifying potential. Working alongside the brusque but charismatic agent Harry Li, Tara discovers that Magnusson's daughter, Cassie, has knowledge that makes her a target too. The more Tara sees into the future, the more there is to fear. She knows she has to protect Cassie. But there may be no way to protect herself—from the enemies circling around her, or from the long-buried powers stirring to life within. . . .

Dark Oracle Details

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Author : Alayna Williams

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From Reader Review Dark Oracle for online ebook

Tez says

There's an explosion at a government lab in the New Mexico desert. The site of fascinating work, its lead scientist is missing, and former criminal profiler Tara Sheridan has joined the search for him. But she's facing danger on two fronts: from someone she grew up with, and from the government peeps who want the scientist's files.

Tarot, quantum physics, mines, botany, geology, divination, serial killers...if any of these interest you, purchasing Dark Oracle would be wise. A mix of *The X-Files* and Alex Kava's Maggie O'Dell series, this novel has enlivened urban fantasy with a smack of science that grounds the story with realism. Plus, there are definite wow moments - the climax features a character who truly is one with the earth, in jaw-dropping imagery.

Unfortunately, the sequel, Rogue Oracle, won't be released until March. Too bloody long away...

Kelly says

(4.5 stars) For years, Tara Sheridan has been a hermit. She was once a criminal profiler, and a tarot-reading oracle destined for the all-female secret society Daughters of Delphi. After a series of traumas, she left these callings behind and retreated to a remote cabin in the woods. But when a brilliant scientist goes missing amid the ruins of his cutting-edge lab, leaving behind a young daughter, Tara reluctantly agrees to take the case.

This means dealing with the Daughters again, along with a former colleague who makes Tara uneasy. It also means running for her life when a couple of very powerful people decide they want her out of the way. And, too, it means a chance to face some old fears and perhaps even to fall in love, though she's reluctant to reveal her unorthodox methods to a logical man like Harry Li.

Alayna Williams creates a compelling heroine in clever, intuitive Tara. Harry is a likable character, too, and their relationship — conflicts and all — is touching and realistic. Williams also peoples her novel with memorable secondary characters, from the scientist's daughter Cassie to Harry's awesome mentor to the Pythia, head of the Daughters of Delphi. (Not to even mention the dog and cat.) The plot is suspenseful, the descriptions vivid and often just plain gorgeous, and all the elements add up to a perfect escapist read for summer. I found it impossible to put down; I'm usually reading three or four books at once, but this was *the book* for several days running.

I really liked the way Williams incorporated the tarot into *Dark Oracle*. I'm pretty familiar with the tarot, and so at first the lengthy descriptions of the cards got to me. "OK, let's move on," I was thinking. That is, until I realized two things. First, many of *Dark Oracle*'s readers will not already be tarot buffs and will benefit from these careful descriptions. Second, the descriptions are important even if you don't think you need them! You never know what details will turn out to be relevant later. Williams weaves the tarot imagery into the story in really interesting ways.

A few things didn't quite work for me, and they're kind of intangible "feel" sorts of things, but I'll try to describe them as best I can. Tara's lingering anger at the Pythia seems a little over-the-top at times. I'm not

entirely sure that one of the villains would confess his sins the way he does. And Cassie's age feels a little hazy. She's said to be 23 years old, but everyone calls her "the girl" and treats her like she's about fifteen. She sometimes acts younger, too, but at other times is wise beyond her years.

HERE BE SPOILERS:

One more aspect I really loved: there's a "chosen one" in the story — and Tara's not it! For much of the novel, both Tara and one of the villains believe Tara has been selected to be the Pythia's successor, but the "chosen one" is really someone else. When asked about it, the Pythia says, "You're good, but you're not that good." Tara has all sorts of butt-kicking in her future, but she's not The One, and I can't begin to express how refreshing that is.

Originally reviewed at Fantasy Literature.

Stacy says

Reviewed by <http://urbanfantasyinvestigations.blogspot.com>...

DARK ORACLE is fast paced, filled with great characters, action, mystery, and science with a touch of romance on the side. The main character and storyteller is Tara who is a Oracle who gets her intuitions and predictions from her tarot cards. She uses her tarot cards throughout the story and everything is explained expertly to help bring you better understanding of the tarot so you aren't completely lost. Tara is also a retired Criminal profiler so there is a ton of law enforcement type investigating. All together a great new Urban Fantasy.

Kathy says

This book was completely and utterly dull to me. Several times I even came back to Amazon to re-read the reviews, just so I could be encouraged to continue reading this book. It's ashamed really, I was so looking forward to this fantasy/scifi hybrid. I imagined it to have real promise and be something different from the norm. Although it was different from the norm, there wasn't enough action and progress in the story to hold my attention.

I don't think this author Laura Bickle/Alayna Williams' writing style jives with me. When reviewing her books, my opinion always seems to be in the minority. I'm never impressed with her books and usually walk away from it feeling disappointed and bored. Therefore, this author and her pseudonym will be stricken from my reading list.

Lexie says

I waited until I had book 2 (Rogue Oracle) in my hands before deciding to read this because I had a feeling it would be like with Williams alter-ego persona Laura Bickle's Anya Kalicinzyk series (meaning, I'd want more and not have it and be sad). It didn't disappoint!

Using the Tarot Cards as a means for which Tara found clues was more engrossing then I first believed. I'm

not quite a skeptic when it comes to such matters (tarot reading that is), but I thought it would subsume more of the story than it did. Instead it was more like a silent partner that Tara would confer with and use as a guide, but it wasn't the crutch that the synopsis makes it sound like. As Tara puts it to Special Agent Harry Li the cards don't tell her what to do and she blindly follows them. Instead they offer a way for her to draw connections and use her own intuitive powers to observe what lines up with what.

A plus side is that Williams gave instructive but not preachy or info-heavy details about each card without breaking the flow of the narrative.

Even knowing this is the same author as Laura Bickle, the book itself felt different. There's some similarities between the two protagonists--they both suffer past traumas relating to their gift, both are alone in the world (blood ties wise), both work (or in Tara's case worked) with law enforcement to make the world a better place. The difference is how they interact with the world at large. Anya keeps herself closed off, grudgingly giving small pieces of herself. Tara, even though she is frightened of what could happen, is more open, more willing to accept help.

She's not happy about it, but she recognizes that help--even help from a not quite sure if she can trust him source like Harry--can only facilitate helping the matter at hand. Her and Harry clicked instantly, despite their wariness and general disapproval from his superiors. They were surprisingly complimentary to each other; Harry's forthright manner and logical approach coincided with Tara's intuition really well. Often they would reach the same, or at least similar, conclusion through their differing tactics.

Oh I loved Harry. I really did. I wanted to cuddle him and love him and hold his hand the entire book. He was just so earnest. He didn't believe in the system blindly, but he wanted to believe they had the best intentions and his superior (Corvus, Tara's ex-partner who was ten kinds of shady slime) was doing the right thing. Gabriel, that man made my eye twitch. Seriously. He screamed scumball every time he opened his mouth.

I found the Pythia and Daughters of Delphi subplot to be intriguing. At the end, when most of the cards are laid out on the table, hindsight made second meanings for the comments throughout. If nothing else those are ladies I will never play a game of chance against.

Mandi Schreiner says

Five years ago, Tara was brutally attacked while working as a criminal profiler. She used tarot cards to help track those that committed crimes, but one time the bad guy almost won. Buried alive and cut brutally, after escape she vowed to stop tracking criminals. She also vowed to get away from the Delphi Daughters, a secret organization her mother belonged to. But Sophia, an old friend and member of the Delphi Daughters has come to ask for her help. A man named Lowell Magnusson has been working on hi-tech experiments containing dark matter and very ground breaking technology – which put into the wrong hands could mean World War Three, or much worse. The Delphi know he is important to the balance of power in the world. Now he has gone missing, and his lab has suffered a massive explosion. The Delphi Daughters don't want his lab results to get into the wrong hands and ask Tara to pick up those tarot cards and get back in the game.

After some prodding, Tara finds herself at the scene of the explosion, and it is here she meets Harry Li. Harry works for the FBI and they soon form a friendship and bond as they work their way through the scene. Together, they realize many are out for Magusson's findings – and the race is on.

Dark Oracle has an interesting premise – diving into the world of tarot cards and secret societies, however, the first 100 pages are very slow. When Tara actually uses the tarot cards, each one is described in detail over and over and it kind of makes the story start to drag. I never really felt these characters make it to that next level or give me that extra something special to get excited about. They kind of all coasted through the story, never quite breaking that surface. I didn't quite believe Tara that she would give up her quiet life to go back to what she feared most. Her reason is that she knows Magnusson's daughter is alone in the world like she is. I wanted her to fight going back more, make her return more worth it.

The romance that blooms between Tara and Harry is sweet. Harry isn't alpha, and not quite a beta, just a solid, nice gentleman that falls for Tara. He is a facts and figures man and Tara becomes quite nervous for him to discover that most of her life is based around the spiritual tarot cards. When Harry finds out, he is a little upset, but it seemed like his character couldn't really decide if he was truly upset. It plays into non-alpha role, but I thought the conflict needed more tension. That problem aside, they work well together in this book and it is a very quiet romance.

The villains at work are pretty bad dudes and give Tara and friends a hard time. A couple of things happen that were unexpected and the ending doesn't necessarily tie up all ends. Tara's future is very much undecided. I also enjoyed The Pythia, the leader of the Daughters of the Delphi. A very interesting character who is sly, unbalanced and you never know if you can trust her all the way. She brought a lot into the story.

Dark Oracle drags a bit and is not a "in your face" type of book. I think this world has promise, it is just not there yet.

Lyndi W. says

This is an extremely long winded book. Overly detailed descriptions of the surroundings paired with complicated infodumps about dark matter made this a heavily skimmed read for me. I skipped over so many unnecessary descriptions, I'm sure I only read 60% of the book.

Tara is kind of a wuss. She has strong moments, but most of the time she's a runner, not a fighter.

Harry is a very one-dimensional character. You don't really know anything about him aside from the fact that his parents died when he was young.

This was really just a 'meh' book for me. Nothing stood out in a positive way (aside from Martin's sense of humor). Lots of time wasted on descriptions that could have been used to strengthen the character's relationships.

And the flash-bang ending was pretty lame. It just ends, with no real winding down, Harry is out of the picture, and it's just - poof - over. I hate that.

I know there are other books in this series, so I'll read their blurbs to see if they're of any interest.

For those of you that have read it or don't mind spoilers:
(view spoiler)

I probably wouldn't recommend this book.

Rachel- Goodbye Borders says

So, this has so much information at time, my eyes crossed. I was bored. I stuck with this one, because the hero is named Harry and I need this for Ripped Bodice Bingo! I would have liked this better had it not been so damn descriptive. I did like Tara and felt her character was realistic for someone who had been through a trauma and subsequent PTSD. I do wish she had been a less resentful. Harry, was okay.

Shelley says

Rating 3.0

Genre Urban Fantasy

Review

Dr. Tara Sheridan was once a brilliant criminal profiler with the Special Projects Division of the FBI. That is until the day she was brutally attacked and buried alive by a sadistic killer known as the Gardener. It also appears as though she was left to die by her own partner who wanted her out of the way. Having escaped her entombment, she retired to the seclusion of her own piece of misery while wearing the Gardeners scars on her body and shutting everyone else out.

Tara was once a member of the Daughters of Delphi, a group of Oracles who are led by the Pythia. The same group her mother belonged to and was named the heir to the Pythia. Tara grew apart and distant from the group because she believed they didn't do enough to save her mother from dying of cancer. Tara's tarot card abilities come from her mother and she even uses her cards to gain answers from.

But now the Daughters of Delphi, in the form of Sophia the last person to see Tara's mother alive, have come to Tara asking for her help in finding a very important scientist whose work can change the world or destroy it if it falls into the wrong hands. There is also someone in their own mists that will do anything to ensure that Tara fails and she takes over the mantle of Pythia.

Sophia believes that Tara is the one person who has the talent and ability to find a missing scientist named Lowell Magnusson who was working on a way to use dark matter for the Defense of Defense. Magnusson's own daughter Cassie becomes embroiled in the search and subsequent heavy handedness of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Along for the ride and partnering with Tara is FBI Agent Harry Li. Tara and Li must not only find Magnusson before it's too late, but they must race to save Cassie from those who want to use her to follow in her own father's footsteps.

Dark Oracle is the first book in the Oracle series by Alayna Williams aka Laura Bickle. I started reading this series because I enjoyed the author's other works Embers and Sparks under the pen name of Laura Bickle.

I find the tarot cards aspect of the story intriguing and fascinating and it makes me want to go out and get a reading so that I can see what my bleak future really looks like.

I like Tara and am glad that Williams doesn't sugar coat the fact that she is a broken character who is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. Tara's inner struggles with darkness and despair are real for a PTSD survivor. Her struggles and her feelings towards the Oracles are true to a course, and not shabbily written in order to gain more conflict for Tara to handle.

I didn't much care for the romance with Harry Li. I thought it was a bit over the top, especially when he questions whether or not Tara's feelings towards him were real, or because they were told by the Tarot cards, he pouts like a little child and walks away. He is clearly a non-believer, and I don't see the attraction at all. I wouldn't mind seeing him written out of the series, but unfortunately, the next book is already out.

Cassie Magnusson's character was actually interesting as well, and I hope that the next book continues her story a little more. She is bright, extremely intelligent, and has a photographic memory that makes her a tool for the bad guys to use if they can get their hands on her. Lastly, she was "born" in my actual hometown in NY and her father "worked" at the same university where I went to school which are positives in my estimation.

The whole idea of the Daughters of Delphi is interesting as well. I found myself thinking of the Cassie Palmer series when the Pythia is introduced in the story. Cassie is obviously a novice compared to this Pythia.

I definitely look forward to reading Rogue Oracle when I can locate it in our library system.

CJ - It's only a Paper Moon says

Not worth the read. It started off pretty good but then there were too many info dumps and when I met Harry I immediately disliked him (angry, just a angry angry guy) and I didn't make it very far.

Maria Schneider says

It was okay with a lot of skimming required. Definitely more romantic suspense than urban fantasy. Guy pov/girl POV much like the more basic romances. Some good thriller qualities, some very overdone descriptions. The tarot cards were interesting, but I don't think that was enough to label this UF by any means. More of a FBI romantic suspense with an unfortunate tendency to show too many POV. It got a bit over-the-top with people surviving things, but in general it wasn't a horrible read. I own the second book in the series but I'm not really tempted to dip into it.

Ithlilian says

I read this book first in my to read pile because I thought I wouldn't like it. I was pleasantly surprised, and was immediately drawn into the story. Of course the main character's past is supposed to be a driving point for readers, but I didn't really care. Why the main character is scarred didn't interest me as much the actual mystery of the missing scientist. It's been a long time since I read a mystery in an urban fantasy book that I actually cared about, so that helped boost Dark Oracle in my esteem. Unfortunately, around page 200

everything crashed and burned. A romance developed that wasn't very believable or exciting. I wish I had gotten to know the characters more before the romance was thrown in. A slowly developed romance is always more interesting to me than one that happens all of the sudden for no reason. Then, the love interest decides to get mad over something trivial and I became annoyed. The mystery solving slowed at that point and my interest decreased more and more each chapter. Characters started to become more shallow and less exciting, and the action scenes just weren't appealing to me. The tarot readings, which were originally unique and entertaining, because extremely repetitious and the entire thing started to wear thin. I felt much the same about Embers, interesting premise but the story fizzled. There is definitely potential for a good book from this author if she could just keep up the steam from the beginning of the book the entire way through. This book was well on its way to being a four or even a five, but it just didn't work out. There are plenty of good ideas, the author is great at writing an entertaining mystery, and it almost came together, but not quite.

Imalady says

Interesting premise, but the dialogue was a bit dry and I didn't care too much for every little detail of the tarot cards (of course some detail was to be expected, but I felt my eyes glossing over). This actually bogged the book down and made for a boring read. Picked up later on, but by then I didn't feel invested in the outcome and the action wasn't very exciting.

Did not care for the romance at all - dull and occurred without development. Any drama that occurred or inner turmoil in the character regarding it had me rolling my eyes. It just rang hollow and kind of deflated the tension we're supposed to feel later on in the book re: the love interest since I was not invested at all.

I did like the main character. Thought her claustrophobia was interesting. Other than that, the other characters, especially the bad guys, weren't developed well at all.

Chloe Mccracken says

The divination side of the book was really good, with an interesting variety of divination forms mentioned, though some quite superficially. Still, that side of it was fairly believable. However, sadly the rest of the story was more of a stretch - the relationship was too fast, and the baddies were too unidimensional.

Amethyst Shadow says

I like the storyline and characters. Now, to get in the second book.
