



The Enchantment Emporium

Tanya Huff

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Alysha Gale belongs to a specially "charm"-full family. The men grow horns, and obey females until they "choose". She inherits her gran's Calgary junk shop with fey mailboxes and **the** Monkey's Paw. Leprechaun Joe can help sell yoyos. Tabloid reporter Graham bats very blue eyes and beds her. But when dragons fly overhead can even the Aunties save the day?

The Enchantment Emporium Details

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From Reader Review *The Enchantment Emporium* for online ebook

Jacob Proffitt says

I enjoyed this book despite all the efforts of the author to make me hate it. And I'll admit up front that I'm not a huge Tanya Huff fan, but mainly because she takes her anti-hetero-normative politics so very seriously. So I was surprised that I found this book as engaging as I did.

The Gale family setup was bizarre and I'd hate to be caught in it (on the male *or* female side), but that didn't lessen my fascination for the dynamic they find themselves in. If you buy the premise, the adaptations and rules the family follows in the book fall more or less into place. Yeah there are some odd customs and the sexual mores could put you off even if you buy the premise, but I didn't find it hard to roll with. Huff takes some pains to keep things from being sexually explicit on-stage (though there *is* some frank talk and non-sexual episodes that may put off the truly squeamish), so I was more than happy to roll with her exploration of the family's... adaptations.

I also liked Alysha's character arc through the story. It was fun to accompany her in pursuit of her rebel grandma and figuring out what the situation is like in Calgary. I like the mythology that unfolds and the characters we meet along the way. The emporium itself was fascinating, as well, even if it did feel a little too deus ex merchandise sometimes (yes, Melissa, I *did* recycle my cleverness). Alysha turns out to be the key to my enjoyment of the story. She has a great emotional journey and her maturation as she comes to terms with her power and all those aunties was excellent.

Other supporting characters were fun, too. Michael was interesting as Alysha's long-term unrequited crush and I even liked Charlie though I still maintain she's way too perfect to be all that is claimed of her. Graham was oddly un-compelling in his role as love interest, but I liked him well enough as the henchman turned to the cause of the good guys.

So what did I hate? And no, hate isn't too strong a word. First off, it should have started with Alysha's arrival in Calgary. The whole beginning was just confusing and unnecessary. Reams of names are thrown out and no explanation or identifying handle given to know who was meant. That leaves the reader disconnected to the main character and that's unfortunate. Huff is also uncommonly coy about explaining key details about her characters. We hear of Alysha waking with cold spots where Charlie and Dmitri used to be the night before, for example, but it's *pages* before we learn who either of these names refer to. If deliberate, that's too cute to tolerate and if not deliberate it needs to be straightened out.

Related to this is the broader tendency of Huff to deliver an emotional payload *before* the readers have the information to understand its significance. We learn, for example, that Alysha is entering "the second circle" and have no idea what that means or why she would be so concerned and astonished. In one scene, Charlie returns to the group lightly singed before they'd really realized she'd gone missing. At that point, we're treated to a really awkwardly constructed flashback. This kind of thing happens over and over again and it gets pretty tiresome after a while. It's like Huff is balking at telling a straightforward story or that she doesn't trust that her story is good enough without tricks and gimmicks to punch up the impact. Indeed, I think these stylistic flourishes end up detracting from the impact of many of the key revelations that would have been so much stronger had the readers known enough to appreciate them at the time they're actually revealed.

After all that, I'm surprised that I ended up enjoying it so much in the end. I'll definitely be picking up the next book, though I hope the aggravations are less pronounced. If Huff had stuck with a straight storytelling

approach this likely would have been a five-star review.

Punk says

Canadian Urban Fantasy. Magic runs in the Gale family, so when Allie's grandmother sends her a letter saying she's dead, no one really believes it. Still, the letter says that Allie's responsible for her gran's business, which is supposedly vital to the community, and having recently been fired, it's not like she has anything better to do. Allie packs up and heads for Calgary to take over her grandmother's...junk shop.

Reasons why this book made me D-face: 1) Unexplained magic system. 2) Unexplained "We Must Have Sex To 'Complete the Ritual'" magic system. Unexplained *and* unsexy. I would have accepted explanations or sexiness. Didn't get either. 3) The Gale aunties, the oldest and most powerful women in the family, practice eugenics. Uh huh. They're selectively breeding the younger family members to emphasize certain traits. The aunties also have veto power if someone wants to marry outside the family. Which leads us to: 4) Vaguely incestuous -- sometimes more than vaguely! -- and, again, never in a sexy way. 5) Gender essentialism. *Way* too many sentences that insist that "Gale girls" are like this, or "Gale boys" are like that. No one really overturned that system. 6) The romance didn't interest me at all, which I eventually realized was because the male love interest had no discernible personality.

Reasons why I kept reading: 1) The magic is mostly low key, like pies with compulsions baked into them, or a charm traced on someone's hand. I liked how simple and understated it was. All I wanted was the magic equation to be balanced; part of using magic is knowing what happens if you use too much. 2) Queerness. Of all sorts. Including non-monogamous and group relationships, and because this is Tanya Huff, it's all handled with respect. 3) Family, and chosen family. 4) It's funny, and I liked the pop culture references. 5) Ally was pretty awesome and so was Charlie. 6) I loved Joe the leprechaun and his yo-yos.

Three stars. Annoyed and entertained me in equal amounts. I'll read the sequel.

eBook: Not good. Lots of words with hyphens still in them, many words that no longer had their hyphens but didn't get put back together correctly, at least one missing word and one missing full stop, and something screwy was going on with the spacing if there was a period followed by a capital Y. Didn't have a cover. Did have a cute yo-yo graphic to separate sections.

Jamie Collins says

This is one of the best urban fantasy books I've read in a while. With a slightly stronger ending this would have been a five-star book for me; it really hit my sweet spot. It's funny and light-hearted but not shallow at all. The magic system felt fresh and different, and it's not hard to enjoy this idea of women becoming more powerful as they age. I hope this is the beginning of a new series.

There's a big, loving, powerful, nosy, overprotective and very appealing family. There's a lot of amusing magic. There are dragons, a sorcerer and a leprechaun. Like in most of Huff's books, there is a lot of cheerful, non-explicit sex and innuendo between people of all orientations. Huff is a very good writer, and manages to absorb you into this world with very little exposition.

Caressa says

sigh I picked this novel off the New Fiction shelf of the library, after not reading a word for two whole weeks. Crazy, I know. The librarians were getting ready to send a relief party out after me. Anyhoo. I've learned to be VERY wary of female-penned "urban fantasies," as they tend to be heavier on the romantical pining and orgies than the urban or fantasy. But EE piqued my interest for several reasons: 1) Witches with nary a vamp or were to be seen, 2) Said witches don't have frizzy red curls, 3) Urban Fantasy in Canada? Sweet Eh! 4) Leprechauns, yeah baby!

The Gale family is a less creepy family than Anne Rice's Mayfairs, but they love themselves some pie and lots of wanton sex (Holy Incest Batman!). Luckily for me, very little of the sex plays out as more than hints and innuendos. It's obvious that Tanya Huff sees this story play in living color, but my biggest gripe is that she seems to have significant trouble in getting it from her imagination to paper with the same clarity. Many passages are beautifully descriptive, but often the dialog feels clunky and forced. More than a few times I had to reread sections because pieces of action were missing. For example, Allie is lying in bed plucking at her quilt, with one of many "aunties" hollering up the stairs at her. Then she's suddenly stepping out of the shower while the family dog drinks from the toilet. Wait what? When did she get out of bed & into the shower? And Allie seems to be constantly waking up with people in her bed without explanation. Are they having a slumber party? Romping around incestuously?

After a hundred pages or so I fell into the rhythm of Huff's writing and was able to make it work for me without massive confusion. However, two thirds in I had to set the book down for a couple days, and found that I couldn't immerse myself back in. There also seemed to be a bit of a pacing issue, where there was a lot of exposition dumping. Perhaps Huff could have saved some for the second novel?

I really wanted to fall in love with this book, as it looks to be the beginning of a series. With a number of novels under her belt, I don't think Huff will change her writing style to please little ol' me. I do like that the witchcraft she portrays runs wild and dark; it's more pagan mythology/traditions and less Willow Rosenberg or The Craft. There's something about ancient witchcraft that I find fascinating (along with leprechauns, the post-apocalypse, Iceland, India, and the Deep South). Even though it's against my better judgment, I have a feeling I'll try to wade through the next in the series because, come on, it's got leprechauns!

oliviasbooks says

"For pity's sake boy," Auntie Jane snorted as Dimitri shuffled carefully into the kitchen, there's salve for that . Use it before these trousers rub you raw. Downstairs bathroom. And you lot," she snapped at the girls who gathered round the table as he left the room, "stop giggling. He didn't get in that condition all on his lonesome."

Allie pulled a platter of pancakes out of the oven were they'd been keeping warm. "He needs to learn to pace himself."

Please correct me. But what I've learned from the first 30 pages is the following:

- The Gale family is a family of powerful witches whose main concern is to preserve their magic talents.
- All family members have grey eyes that change with age.

- Each couple produces at least four or five daughters and a son. Some daughters are the offspring of two mothers and a father?
- The men have a tendency to switch over to the dark side
- All women cook and bake like crazy.
- The men choose their mate among their numerous cousins around the age of 20. The only rule is that the age difference has to be less than seven years. The boys find their permanent mate of choice by sleeping around with all matching cousins as much as possible. This results to group sex and "unpaced" sex frenzies on family holidays. And to mild jealousy among the girls who won't accept it if an almost too old female cousin is on a male Gale's "list" of options.

NOT MY CUP OF TEA. I do not mind cousins marrying each other (I have several matched cousins among my acquaintances) or falling in love, but this breeding-program-thing and the sex-as-the-one-and-only-way-to-find-the-best-match-method give me the slimy shivers.

The one remaining star is given for the beautiful cover. ;o)

Carol. says

Enjoyed it, enough to add to my collection. Nice balance of plot and character development. On first read, the first chapter was slightly disjointed and challenging to follow, but sticking with it paid off big dividends. It's true, like other reviewers, I found the sex more distracting but it does play a role in the story in terms of relationships and emotional connections.

Lightreads says

Yeah, stoned on painkillers is totally the best way to review this one.

If you tilt your head to the right, this is a cozily hijinxical* Canadian urban fantasy with a magical junk shop and a leprechaun and a snuggly extended family who express their feelings by baking a lot, also dragons.

But if you tilt your head to the left, it's seriously fucked up slice-of-life about a family of creepy mind-controlling witches who have a consent-optional incestuous breeding program RUN AWAY RUN AWAY.

So I mostly kept my head tilted to the right. Advise doing the same.

*Vicodin. shuddup.

ambyr says

I feel like finishing this book should leave me with more to say than "meh." Let's see. The plot was fast-paced enough to keep me reading, but not enough to get me past the weird gender relations, undeveloped magic system (I like the ritual set-up, but with no sense of what magic normally can or can't do, the ending lacked tension--I assumed they'd win, since so far magic had never failed them), and really, really sloppy

editing.

And then, as other reviews note, there's the incest. It doesn't bother me to read about, but it does raise my eyebrows that it doesn't bother any of the *characters*, particularly those not raised to it.

I also have to say, I see very little moral difference between the Gale women and the male sorcerers. Ally makes vague references to having versus holding power, but for me the line is more whether or not power is used for personal gain--and boy do the Gales ever use power for personal gain. Again, that doesn't bother me--I *like* shades of grey--but the narrative *treats* the Gales as a moral center, and that made for awkward reading. It's slightly problematized at the very end, but too little, too late for me.

Gerd says

I really like Tanya's work, she's one of the few authors that got me to read actual Fantasy, I do enjoy her Valor series a lot, but my true love always was with her Vicky Nelson novels and so it was with great anticipation that I awaited her return to Urban Fantasy.

Ah, but what a disappointment this book is.

After a hundred+ pages I'm still not sure what the main protagonist is supposed to be. Other than some variety of magic user that is.

All that Tanya cares to tell us about her is that she comes from a family that is very free about using incest as a means to keep "the power" within the family and doesn't mind sexual encounters between siblings. This and that they feel strongly drawn to power. Other than that she's strangely vague about what the Gale's are.

The fact that male Gale's grow horns probably means some sort of fairy folk.

And while their enormous, barely controllable sex-drive explains why for example main protagonist Alysha's closest friend and lover Charlie is bound to evaluate each and everything by his or her worth as potential sex partner, and to hump them at the drop of a hat, it leaves us guessing, when the author tells us that Charlie's hair is blue if she means dyed blue or by nature... and that's just the minor unexplained stuff going on.

A very personal thing I minded was the use of text messaging in the book without any translation. Given, we do come upon a passage written in French, only shortly after, but that's something I've come to expect from Canadian authors, same as American ones are liable to drop some Spanish phrases and past century ones to use Latin phrases without translation.

The difference here is that French is a language, which I'm willing to look up if need be, while text messaging is only a abbreviation system without agreed rules. But as I say that's a personal thing.

Btw. I still don't know what- "Spnt nght cxng A Ruby off H2O twr." -is supposed to mean, but water seems to have something to do with it.

I'm not saying by that, that this is a entirely bad novel, but it's certainly not a good book to start a series on. It's written for people that either read a lot more straight fantasy novels than I do, and by that are better at reading the hidden clues, or that just don't mind a game of guess the character race and are willing to take random magical occurrences at face value. However, I'm just not ready yet again to trust a novel against better judgment to perhaps make some more sense down the road. As it stands I have to say, sorry, but this one goes to the did not finish staple.

Robin says

Bought this book on a recommendation from a friend. Now I have to go find the friend a really nice Christmas present.

Although I found the beginning to be fairly rocky (I kept having to check and make sure I wasn't coming in halfway thru the series. Characters kept popping in with little in the way of narrative introduction. it was very odd), the rest of the story was very good. I couldn't put it down. I haven't done any housework in a week.

Honestly, how can you not love a character who (when thinking of great Jacks in history) lists both Captain Jack Sparrow and Captain Jack Harkness? And who has an auntie that's been mad ever since SciFi cancelled the Dresden Files?

Hope this is the first in a series. I REALLY hope this is the first book in a series. I can't imagine just walking away and leaving all these people. I have to know what happens next!

Edited to say: Just read it again because summer. Still love this series. I don't think three books are nearly enough.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I'm sorry if you like this book...and I'm tired.

It seems more and more that when I pick up a book looking for an Urban Fantasy I get paranormal romance. I suppose that I set the bar lower than some for deciding what is PNR. And at the risk of being stoned I find more often than not if it's a female author it's going to lean that way (not always I know. I kind of like Rob Thurman's Leandros series).

The idea behind this book sounded good and caught my interest. I went out and bought it based on recommendations here. It opened up alright. The set up telling us about the Gale women (and Gale men and Gale boys and so on). Our young heroine seems to inherit a "junk shop" (read magical junk shop)...seems to inherit because the aunties don't believe grandma (from whom the shop is inherited) is dead.

The family is interesting, the connection to the fey is interesting, the shop is interesting the book was promising...except for (again) it's preoccupation with what I suppose we can call, "affairs of the heart".

The aunties want Alysha (our heroine) to get over the cousin she was thought to be planning to marry (Gale girls apparently always...or almost always marry Gale boys) loving someone else (a young man whom at the opening of the book he lives with). There is the discussion of which girl another highly prized Gale "stud" may choose...and on and on and on.

At one point Alysha meets a "reporter" and wonders during the conversation if "his hair would feel as silky as it looks if she brushed it back". She's distracted by his hands, his eyes, and the distractions of what's, "under his clothes".

Think about a book where a male writer goes on and on about being distracted by what's "under the clothes" of the women he meets...the "hero" wanting to "brush back their hair to see if it's a silky as it looks". The male would be a stalker...

Anyway...burned out, sick of the (forgive me) estrogen and I'm laying it aside. I read about a quarter of the book...I don't want to put any more time into it.

If it's for you enjoy...it's not for me, I'm apparently NOT the target audience.

Ben Babcock says

This book has been on my to-read list for four years, and I'm glad I finally got to it. Tanya Huff delivers strong urban fantasy set in a Canadian city. She sets up an interesting family of magic users, where the women and the men participate in complicated rituals that allow them to work charms. Alongside, she sends us a light mixture of supernatural creatures to pad out the character sheet—a leprechaun, some dragons and Dragon Lords, but nothing too unusual or overwhelming. That's what I appreciate about *The Enchantment Emporium*: there isn't too much going on here. Huff keeps the plot focussed, the threads all weaving back in upon each other, which kept me interested and entertained.

Allie leaves the rest of the Gale family to go out west and take over her grandmother's shop. Her aunties, the Gale women who are the oldest and thus have the most power, are dubious as to her grandmother's demise. Allie isn't ready to be tied down with family obligations, though, so she goes. She ends up discovering that her grandmother's role in the fragile Fey community in Calgary was even weirder; she was far more than a purveyor of antiques. Oh, and there is a sorcerer in Calgary. Hiding out from Dragon Lords. Allie should just call in the aunties to help her dispatch the sorcerer (Gales don't like sorcerers, apparently), but there is one tiny problem. The sorcerer's hired gun is hot, and he and Allie have a fling. A thing. You know.

With these ingredients, Huff creates a perfect storm of divided loyalties, crises of confidence, and gradual acceptance of one's powers. As Allie gets to know Graham and tries to persuade him to leave the sorcerer's employ, she begins to feel herself changing, as she moves from "third circle" to "second circle" (which is apparently how the Gales rank power). She is still healing from her first break-up with a childhood friend who discovered he was gay. This alone might be enough to make someone feel uncertain about herself; Allie's life is further complicated by having to wade through the various milestones and rituals that accompany being a Gale woman (not to mention all the various attendant family members who want to "help").

It's great to read about a heroine who is as self-possessed and confident as Allie is who isn't also a) the Chosen One and b) some kind of kickass streetfighter. Don't get me wrong; I love me the Buffy the Vampire Slayer. But Allie is a research assistant in anthropology, not a fighter, and the way she interacts with the "heavies" of the supernatural world—the Dragon Lords, the sorcerer—reflect this. She is protective of her friends and allies and confident when she stands up to her potential enemies, but it's a calmer confidence. (In a way, it's a little bit naive, because Allie is banking a lot on the reputation of the Gales and her ability to call her aunties in for help.) Nevertheless, even though she never starts and rarely engages in direct confrontation, Allie gets a lot done.

For example, it is easy to miss it if you are focusing only on the main plot, but Allie has clearly decided to stay in Calgary by about the middle of the book. She has some of her friends working on the apartment

above the store pretty much continuously throughout the book, and every so often Huff will remark upon how much is getting done. Not only is Allie investigating the machinations of an amoral sorcerer; she is making the apartment and store her own. (The moment she consciously realizes this, and accepts it symbolically by disposing of the monkey's paw, is awesome.)

There's also a lot to be said for the development of the supporting characters, like Joe. He starts as a surly, suspicious leprechaun who can't wait to get out of there. As Allie shows him more trust and respect, he returns in kind. I would have liked to see Joe figure in the plot a little more—if not as a participant, then as a source of information—but I enjoyed seeing him used as a signpost for Allie's effect on the people around her.

Allie herself grows up a lot. Until now, she hasn't really confronted her own ambivalent feelings about the way the older Gale women manipulate and control the younger ones. Much of her time in Calgary involves recognizing this problem and trying to figure out how to deal with it—as it becomes apparent, Allie still relies on her aunts for help dealing with the situation, but she starts to realize she can still be calling the shots. There's no question in my mind that the book would have ended a lot differently if Allie had simply sat back and let the aunts take charge.

Speaking of ambivalence, I'm not sure how I feel, on balance, about the romance between Allie and Graham. I like Graham well enough, and I recognize that Huff was trying to create some confusion, with him torn between his compelled loyalty to the sorcerer and his attraction to Allie, not to mention all the baggage that Allie brings with her in the form of ritual. Perhaps this was my problem—Huff never quite explains the rituals as explicitly as I would like, so it all still seems kind of uncertain for me. This issue resurfaces throughout the book. I'm quite intrigued by the Gale family, but I wish Huff had been less cryptic in her revelation of how their abilities work.

Similarly, I wish there had been more complex interrogations of the gender dynamics at work, both within and without the Gale family. Allie couldn't bring Michael into the fold because, being gay, he understandably didn't want to marry her and father some babies. It seems like the Gale gender roles are pretty prescribed, though—women make pie, men do what the women say and have lots of sex. What happens if a member of the Gale family is gay? (Mind you, there seems to be some implication that everyone in the family is just pansexual, so there's that.) Huff has no problems portraying Allie with the realistic, healthy sex drive for someone her age, but she comes up short when it comes to fully illuminating the connections between attraction, sex, and power that seem to be present within the Gale family.

Power is a major motif in this book. The Gales have it; the sorcerer has it; the Dragon Lord has it. It's all about who has the power. And, according to the aunts, power corrupts and can't be trusted in the hands of one person—that's why they always dispatch sorcerers. However, Huff remains unclear just what the Gales are doing with all this power, other than baking pie. Why have this power if they don't use it? Is there something more sinister going on here? I'm disappointed this isn't directly addressed, and I find it problematic considering the role that power plays throughout the rest of the book.

On the plus side, I liked how *The Enchantment Emporium* is very comfortable with its contemporary setting. It's easy to stick an "urban fantasy" label on a book, but in my experience, a lot of contemporary urban fantasy takes on distinct tones from other genres that might be anachronistic to its setting. (For example, *The Dresden Files*, my gold standard for urban fantasy, often takes on elements of the noir, and Butcher intentionally limits the amount of technology his characters can use.) Huff is able to create a strong impression that this could all happen now, in everyday Calgary, right under people's noses.

Oh. And did I mention there is *pie*? All kinds: apple, key lime, rhubarb ... sorry, but I really love pie. And the magical, ever-filling pie fridge in Allie's apartment made me very jealous and very hungry.

I enjoyed *The Enchantment Emporium* a ridiculous amount, especially considering all the flaws I've found in it. (Sometimes I think that's one of the best measures of a book's quality—how much you enjoyed it despite recognizing its shortcomings.) I will read the sequel, which looks like it's about Allie's cousin Charlie, and I look forward to another interesting tale.

My reviews of the *Gale Women* books:

The Wild Ways →

Cait says

...Well, *that* was far more quasi-incestuous sex magic than I expected to meet this side of fanfiction.

I really liked this book. I'd hit a bad run and started to forget that the urban fantasy equivalent of the B movie can actually be *good*, but this is definitely a good book. It's cheerful and sexual and funny and well-built, and it definitely improved my week.

Amanda says

I hate that these books keep disappointing me. I felt like this book was one big inside joke. First of all, the horn manifestations and copious references to sex=magic powers goes back to the pagan beliefs about the Green Man and May Day celebration and whatnot. However, if I wasn't a big brainiac and knew about that stuff already, I'd be super confused. So, perhaps I just don't have enough trivial knowledge, but so much of this book acknowledges these Gales and it really just doesn't make sense. Everything is attributed to the "Gale girl way" or whatever and nothing is explained. Even some of the dialogue has this mystery about it which would make sense in real life, but in a book, the lack of backstory really cripples it. The author assumes the reader has a varied knowledge of magic and doesn't explain too much about anything. Like the monkey's paw. If one had not read the short story in high school, one wouldn't know that a monkey's paw grants you three wishes, but the wishes all end in horror and regret. Also, some of these references are clearly incestuous and while that was good enough for King Arthur, I was slightly squeamish. Some parts were just so awkward. I don't know. But I really hate that these books are not good. Why can't anybody write good fantasy anymore?

Carolyn F. says

[first cousins on first cousin action with the aunties keeping track of who can get pregnant (hide spoiler)]
