



A Soul to Take

Emily Taylor

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The world has changed: demons of legend now live among humans, integrated into society through Government programs, wishing for peace.

Elixia Albelin, however, isn't sold. As an Agent-in-training, she knows firsthand the blood-thirst of demons and isn't jumping to befriend the monsters plaguing her dreams.

But when a mission sours, Elixia's sister is caught in the crossfire: taken. Abandoned by those meant to protect her family, Elixia is left with only one option if she wants to retrieve her sister—a taboo option that goes against everything she believes in.

She must sell her soul.

Now, bound to a beast and living on borrowed time, Elixia has to navigate the demonic world to find her sister within a cesspool of human traffickers and serial killers. Enemies control her fate, the simplest truths are questioned, and misperceptions must be shattered. Only one thing remains consistent—Elixia must find her sister before time runs out. Or become the very thing she fears most: a soulless monster.

Gritty, powerful, and exciting, A Soul to Take is a gripping debut that explores prejudice, justice, and the consequences one family faces when those two collide.

A Soul to Take Details

Date : Published April 4th 2017 by REUTS Publications, LLC

ISBN : 9781942111078

Author : Emily Taylor

Format : Paperback 523 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Paranormal, Demons, Fantasy, Romance, Science Fiction, Dystopia, Fiction

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From Reader Review A Soul to Take for online ebook

Kristie Elston says

Review Originally Published at Dark Faerie Tales: <http://darkfaerietales.com/early-revi...>

Quick & Dirty: Solid start to a new series that has a feel of urban fantasy, alternate history and science fiction.

Opening Sentence: The goblin's tar-black skin reflected the blood moon as it scaled the old museum's exterior.

The Review:

A Soul to Take by Emily Taylor is a promising start to a crazy new trilogy about demons and the humans who have to deal with them walking freely in the world. I really liked the idea that humans knew about demons in this dark, dreary and quite rainy world. The story wasn't quite what I was expecting but the more I read of the story the more that I got invested in the character of Elixia and what was happening to her. I would recommend this story for those who like reading from authors from other countries that use their lingo and slang. I love experiencing other cultures this way especially since I will probably never be able to travel there. (In this case, the author is Australian, at least that is what Goodreads says.)

Elixia has a grudge against demons. This grudge has fueled everything that she has done in life which includes joining the Agency, a job that lets her track down demons within the law because demons now have rights like all human beings. Elixia is in the middle of an assignment when a demon derails her job by killing her and kidnapping her sister, Shellie. When Elixia is "killed" she made a deal with the devil, in a manner of speaking, which brings her back Marked. As a Marked, she is under a contract with a demon who keeps her alive until she can get whatever task that she made a deal about is done. Except not all is as it seems and Elixia's deal isn't at all what she thought it was. Shrouded in a bunch of secrecy, Elixia is led down a path that forces her to look to her past if she wants to get her Mark removed and her sister found.

Elixia's demon guardian/escort is Sebastian. He is a sexy, tormented demon who tries to look after Elixia's welfare but she certainly makes him work. Sebastian won't tell her anything, just that he will help her get her sister back but they still have to figure out who is holding her and why. The story that follows has Elixia dealing with deceptive humans, sadistic demons, terrifying humanoids and stolen souls.

Elixia is heir to a Media Empire that has her sitting pretty but she is no socialite. She hates everything about the society and only uses what she needs to do to get by. She only started uses the sources available to her to help her find her sister. Elixia can be a bit abrasive at times but when it comes to her sister she is quite selfless. She is convinced that her life is over after her sister is found so she makes sure that her sister has everything that she will need when Elixia is gone.

My biggest beef with the story is I'm not entirely sure the time period this is set in because the date the story takes place is in the 1860's and in the 17th century there was the demon revolution or whatever but there is clearly modern technology and even more advanced technology talked about. I guess because it is clearly an alternate world, they had the advances in technology way earlier? I would have like to have more detail how this world developed especially with the dates being what they were because I honestly thought it was set modern day until they showed the date. After this twist, I couldn't decide if carriage meant car or a vintage

horse drawn carriage because the author did twist between car and carriage in the story.

I read an ARC of this novel which was riddled with missing and misspelled words. Also, the format didn't work well with my Kindle so I did have a hard time with conversations, I couldn't tell if sentences went with one person or someone else so I did have to reread a bunch of conversations over and over again. With ARC's I try not to let this get to me because I hope the released version will be fully fleshed out.

There is one other thing that I never quite understood and I hope it will be explained better in the sequel but I never quite understood the whole Sebastian/Damien thing. I was confused how she didn't recognize him at first but if there were looks involved I don't think it translated well to what was going on. I won't spoil anything else here and it could have gotten lost in my formatting issue because there were several characters that were called by two different names and I would get confused. There was one character who was referred by his first name only most of the time but then it got changed up to referring him only by his last name. It wasn't until she said his full name that I realized it was the same person.

I recommend this one for the older young adult crowd or for those who like new adult novels. The story really isn't explicit or anything. There is barely even a romance at all. I would almost say this is more of an urban fantasy type novel with the first person POV. The story elements are pretty harrowing and dark. I'm really looking forward to seeing where the story goes from here. There were some questions that were never answered and I really want to know what happens. I'm really glad to know that this is a trilogy. For my rating, I would say it is a solid 3.5 but I will round up to 4 because I did think it was a good, solid effort for a debut novel.

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"Hey, if that stuff mixes with the rain and someone accidentally gets it in their mouth, or their eyes, does that make them a cannibal?" Verity's gaze turned thoughtful on the house as she rested a hand on her hip.

"Well, I don't think your skin absorbs water unless you're in a bath or something..." I began before stopping, realizing what we were discussing.

"Yeah. So, like anyone caught in this area is stuffed when it rains."

"Verity, really?" I asked, incredulous.

She looked at me, but didn't stop. "Demons eat humans—well, we did. Do? Whatever; you're with me. My question is: Elixia, am I a cannibal?"

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Emily says

Overall I loved this book. I was constantly on the edge of my seat wondering what was going to happen and trying to piece together the mysteries in my head.

Elixia is a noble heiress to a media company, only she's pretending not to be. After her parents were attacked by demons she became an agent. This is where our story begins as her team tracks down a human trafficking scheme run by demons. I loved her team here and I wish we had more time with them throughout the novel. It's clear that there is a lot of thought out backstory here between the characters and it is unfortunate we don't get to learn more about it, but hopefully more about them will be revealed later.

Then when Elixia returns home to her sister Shellie, the worst possible thing could happen. Demons show up to kidnap her sister and pretty much kill Elixia before they vanish. When Elixia awakes she discovers, to her horror, that she's been marked by a demon. (To my understanding this means that she must forfeit her soul in order to remain alive until her contract is fulfilled, which in this case means saving Shellie) Her demon master, who remains a carefully guarded mystery, has also assigned her a guardian/consultant named Sebastian who is to help her in retrieving her sister. I'm especially excited about the next books because I'm sensing a slow burn romance with Sebastian here...

The reason I docked a star is because throughout much of the book I felt like I had missed a prequel or some important backstory to the characters. It never becomes entirely clear why Elixia wanted to become an agent, especially since they played a rather small role in the book. Also Michael Mason in particular was one of those intriguing (and attractive) characters that left me thinking "what what?" half the time. (Can he be another love interest, pretty please?) I didn't really understand why Elixia hated him so much and it seems like she warms up to him a little, but I really didn't understand the initial animosity there.

Same with the world. I wanted to know more about what "demons" exactly were and I'm assuming that as an agent, Elixia would have a wealth of knowledge on the subject at her fingertips. I want to know more about this briefly mentioned Great War and just generally more backstory. I also feel like Elixia being marked could have been a bigger problem than it was. We are repeatedly told at the beginning that any agent could kill her at any time for her mark, but these threats aren't continued through the rest of the book and it seems like the agency just doesn't care.

Still, I really enjoyed this book. Fantastic start to a series and I can't wait to find out more in the next books!

C. Erani Kole says

voluntarily and honestly reviewed the ARC I received from REUTS Publications

Wow. I loved the tone of the story, how mysterious and exciting and frightening everything was for Elixia. The whole time she journeyed through the end goal of getting her sister back, I felt as lost as she did but at the same time got the subtle clues that pointed to what was going to happen. I think one of my favorite parts about this writing style was how the clues weren't too obvious but not completely oblique, giving me the chance to either figure it all out alongside Detective Jones or just go with the story and enjoy it.

Either way, I am totally invested in this series. I loved the writing, the pacing, how it kept me enraptured at every page, but best of all... Damien. Her lovely fiance. Need I say more?

Dianne says

Imagine a world where demons co-exist with humans. Is it possible? Can there be peace? Are demons as vile and evil as we have always been taught or are they simply “misunderstood” and “different?” Elixia doesn’t buy into the notion that demons are just different, she knows they are blood-thirsty beasts that crave nothing more than a human soul and that is why she is in training to be an agent for an army of soldiers formed to keep them in line. But can a human ever best a lightning fast demon, no matter the weapons used? They have magic and ruins, hyper-speed and super-human strength...but they have never faced Elixia on a mission, a young woman who is more than just determined.

When one mission goes belly up, Elixia’s younger sister is taken and it is up to Elixia to bring her home safe, alive and with her soul intact. Shellie is all she has left and she will do anything to save her, including selling her soul, binding her to one of the very beasts she despises. Time is running out for Elixia and trusting in a demon is her only way to get to her sister through the hellish maze of demons, human trafficking and serial killers, not to mention unholy cyborgs that will not die. Will Sebastian prove to be more than the Demon master’s right hand monster?

What Elixia discovers on her mission to hell and back is that just maybe there are as many kinds of demons as there are humans, good, bad and filled with deceit. How many must die to ensure her sister is found and saved? What will Elixia become now that her soul has been stolen? Just when she thinks she is finally able to steal back her sister, her world will fall out from under her completely when she is witness to what remained of a man she once looked to to protect her at any cost, not to mention the truths that have been withheld from her. As Elixia torments herself over who and what she really is, or what her future will hold, everything will take a back seat to saving Shell.

Emily Taylor’s **A SOUL TO TAKE** is not a quick, fly through the pages read. It is a fast-paced, but very detailed tale of a young woman on a mission in a world gone dark and dangerous. Elixia’s journey is richly detailed, from start to finish, as Emily Taylor forgoes a short tale for an in-depth saga that never lets up. Fall into a world that embraces multiple genres from the paranormal to a mix of steampunk with a futuristic feel. Characters that range from quirky to mysterious to bull-headed, much like Elixia will take you on a journey you will not see coming with a fresh take on heroines, demons and so much more. Definitely add this one to your must read list!

I received an ARC edition from Reuts Publications in exchange for my honest review.

Trilogy - Soul Stealers - Book 1

Expected publication: April 4th 2017 by REUTS Publications, LLC

No further publishing information available at this time

For Reviews & More: <http://tometender.blogspot.com>

Silanna says

A must read. Action packed couldn't put it down.

The main character Alexia has to rescue her sister who has been kidnapped by evil demons and held in an unknown location.

Alexia finds herself in a position where she has to work with demons to get her sister back.

Very well written story with lots of action and plot twists. Once I started reading I couldn't stop.

Alexandra says

I received an e-ARC from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. Review and Blog Tour can be found on **Milky Way of Books**

It's rare to see a book, which began as something quite different, becoming something new, something more. I've known Emily Taylor since 2012 when I had made my first steps in Wattpad and she was (and still is) one of the top authors of the site. She made many covers for my books and I adored her writing style.

"A Soul to take" was just a good draft then, with many hints of favorite anime characters and a dark, almost noir atmosphere. Now, as an ARC reviewer, I can admit that I never expected so many things to be cut or added to the finished plot.

Needless to say that this book surpassed my expectations.

If "Black Butler" met with Jessica Jones and had a baby along with "Beauty and the Beast", that would be "A Soul to Take". Too much?

Let's take it from the beginning.

Elixia is the heiress to a media company. After the death of her parents, she and her sister Shellie live an almost quiet life, save for the fact that their world is roamed by almost civilized demons and Elixia works as an Agent. Agents are kind of the demon police for this world.

When a tragic incident leads to Shellie be taken and Elixia "almost" dying, she will do anything to save her sister even sell her soul to the enigmatic Master and work side by side with his Right Hand, Sebastian.

There's a good mix of steampunk, an idea of the Victorian era, matched with the advanced technology you'd expect in the 21st century. There's action, mystery and some very sweet moments. The romance is slow-burning and counting also the many male characters, I had a hard time, at first, figuring for whom Elixia would fall.

And Sebastian; you can't miss the reference (since both Emily and I, are huge fans of the anime character) and the mannerisms of his. There's quite a strong world-building, which may be confusing at the first pages but as the story moves on, it becomes clear.

I was glad to have the chance to read Emily's work. And I'll still cheer her as she continues her writing journey. Well played my friend, VERY well played! :)

Dark Faerie Tales says

Review courtesy of Dark Faerie Tales

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Jolie says

I have been on the fence about New Adult books. I have read some that could have been classed as a true Young Adult and then others that made me wonder why it was classed as New Adult. Not that I didn't like reading those books, I did, but I thought that they were miscategorized. Luckily, *A Soul To Take* definitely fits into this category.

I really liked Elixia. She just didn't stop....even when she was told too. She was determined to find Shellie (Sarafina) after Shellie was abducted from their shared apartment by demons. During that same abduction, Elixia was basically killed but brought back and Marked by an unknown demon. Her being Marked had unexpected ramifications. She was put on leave at her job and had to cover the Mark up. She was also reckless and took unnecessary risks. But that is what made the book, in my eyes. She also had a bad temper and was basically persona non grata at any of the events that the noble's had.

The whole demon aspect fascinated me. To me, the demons acted like vampires. They needed blood to survive, like vamps, but unlike vampires, they could go out in the sun. Actually, according to the book, they loved the sun and had a whole nation in the sunny part of the world (where Elixia lived was kinda like Seattle....always raining and gloomy). They had saved humankind during a war and all they asked was to be fully integrated into human society. Not that they weren't bad, I mean they are demons after all, but some weren't as bad as others....if that made sense. The evil demons, called The Network, ran human trafficking rings where children and adults were sold to the highest bidder. All for their blood. These same demons were the same ones who kidnapped Shellie and when Elixia found out, I could totally understand why she was frantic to get her back. See, those adults and children were only used for their blood. They were drained, or Kissed, and discarded. So totally understand Elixia's fear.

Sebastian/Damien was such a tease during the book and I loved it. I loved how the author kinda strung you along with him. I mean, you know nothing about him except he was a very powerful demon and he worked for Elixia's Maker. It took until about 40% into the book or so for the author to drop a couple of big bombshells about him (read the book if you want to find out what). I also couldn't figure out if he had feelings for Elixia or not. I thought I had it figured out when he fed on her but he wiped her memory and the next chapter picked up after she blacked out. Drove me absolutely bonkers but again, I loved it.

The sub-storylines in the book (all of them) were all wrapped up by the end of the book except the one with Angelica and the humanoids. That should make things interesting in the second book because of what the humanoids contain (again read the book if you want to find out what). Angelica was also very interesting and kinda creepy. I am going to go out on a limb and say she will be in book 2, along with the humanoids.

The last part of the book, notice I didn't say ending, had a few plot twists that I didn't see coming. A couple of them are huge and I am wondering about those (don't want to spoil the book!!) and how they will play out in the trilogy.

How many stars will I give A Soul To Take: 4

Why: This was a great, action packed book with an awesome take on demons. While some people might think that it's too long, its 418 pages, I thought that it was the perfect length. The characters are intriguing (notice I didn't say likable because some of them weren't) and the storylines were compelling. Definitely looking forward to reading the next two books!!

Will I reread: Yes

Will I recommend to family and friends: Yes

Age Range: Older Teen

Why: Violence, some mild language, and one sexual situation

****I chose to leave this review after reading an advance reader copy****

Flavia says

This is a review of an ARC. As you may be able to tell, this did not impact my opinion or weigh on my review.

My full review is too long for goodreads, and may be found [here](#). Would highly suggest checking out, as I explain a few points with a little more detail.

I hate to leave a negative review, especially for a book I'd been excited for, especially for a book by a debut author, especially for a book from an indie press... but here we are.

This book was right up my wheelhouse- wait, scratch that, it was parked in my garage. Urban fantasy? Demons? Demon-human integration? (with promise of political-social implications of that?) Beauty and the Beast type romance? Soul selling? Gothic cyberpunk? Yes. Yes please. It was on my 'to-read' list before I'd gotten myself an ARC.

When I'm reading, I'm often drifting to sleep drafting a review, no matter how far I am in the book. It helps me remember what stands out. And early on, I really liked *A Soul To Take*. I sincerely did- it was hovering at a solid four stars. And if you know me at all, those stars were hard won.

What worked in the beginning? And what caused it to spiral down?

Well, the premise helped a lot. I've written something where an outsider race had to settle with unhappy natives (angels living with demons, but still), so I have a keen interest in seeing how someone else would pull it off. I like politics, I like demons, I like social commentary. Even when we were in the early phases (first 150 pages or so), I was interested in the world. The level of cyberpunk with some gothic, steampunk themes (Balls, nobility, status, a constant thunderstorm) was neat. The first chapter was well set, a good introduction to the main cast, and the first few events set up the rest of the book in an even, paced manner.

There was a golly-lot of potential. The difficulty was, the book never hit that promise, the potential of its premise or even its initial plot points. One of the biggest factors in this was plainly the length, but more on that later.

A big thing, right off the bat, even in the parts I enjoyed: The summary on goodreads/general use does not reflect the actual book.

The summary on goodreads implies a world like our own, where 'demons of legend' integrate into society- but this is a fantasy world, and demons have always existed in the public's mind. They potentially used to be at war with the humans, but it is never clear- it's certainly been about a century at least.

And a big thing, for me: Lex doesn't sell her soul. It would have been so much better if she had, if she had broken taboo and her own morals, and sold her soul in a desperate attempt to find her sister- but she doesn't. She wakes up and is Marked. She had no consent in the matter, nor is there any way to break it. The demon who did it wasn't even in the same room as her, and it's never quite explained how this happened.

It removes a good deal of agency Lex has, or could have had- she has no power in this matter, and as mentioned, no real choice. Instead of a tough decision of her own prejudice and morals VS having to save her sister, she... wakes up contracted to a demon who luckily also wants to save her sister.

Lex similarly isn't 'bound to a beast'. We do see mild hints of demons being bloodthirsty, but certainly not the one she is bound to (who we never in fact properly meet). Her handler, who works for her new 'master'- he perhaps is the beast in this scenario. But no, not really either. He's quite well behaved, attractive, and nothing about him is 'beast-like'.

And she isn't on borrowed time, either. When the contract ends, she isn't due to die, nor does she lose her immortal soul, nor does she have any time limit. In fact, she is in no hurry.

Similarly (SIMILARLY): Lex is not at all in threat of becoming a soulless monster. There's no hint of that being a problem for the contracted humans, and certainly it isn't something Lex worries about or considers. It does come up, I supposed, about 65% in... but not quite in the way the summary implies.

And lastly, this book does not explore prejudice, or justice, or consequences, or really even family.

Ho hum.

THEMING

The prejudice part of it is a big issue for me. Lex hates demons! Maybe rightfully! But her handler (Sebastian) is a demon, and she gets over that very quickly. In general, her hatred of demons rarely manifests in any meaningful way, and there isn't one moment of 'maybe I was wrong'. The issue is just entirely a non-issue. She is rude to demons, sometimes, but is generally okay dealing with them.

Demons are kinda evil, too. We never meet a 'nice' one. Lex's handlers- Sebastian and Verity- are both good, but still killers, still with mild psychopathic tendencies. Otherwise, every demon we meet is evil, involved in crime, one of the bad guys... there is a bar owner who is normal, but still very shady. For a story about integration, there is nothing about... integration! Nothing about regular demons who actually want peace, or demons trying to live a normal life. No mentions of what day-to-day life is like in the city when there's two very adverse populations trying to coexist.

On the subject of theming, as mentioned, I'm not sure 'justice' or 'consequences' really comes up either. I can't remember anything that's be relevant to the two. Family may be about the bond between Lex and her sister... but even that is underdeveloped, certainly not a theme.

LENGTH

Now. To get down to the biggest problem with this book, the root of all error, the reason it lost all esteem in my mind: It's too long.

Way too long.

We're talking about 165k.

I'd always thought it was one of those rules: you can't sell a book that long unless you're a well established writer. Certainly not for a debut. And certainly not in a genre like urban fantasy. This is NA, but you still

rarely see books go over 100k unless they're epic fantasy.

The book has no need to be this long either. The plot is so stretched out, so meandering. You could easily cut 50-80k from it- there's so many short scenes that go nowhere, so much bulk and bloat to no real aim.

At some points, the plot felt like it was episodic. I even sketched out a brief hit map of how events would play out:

1. MC is tracking some suspicious man
2. MC spends some time getting ready
3. MC is caught/seen, gets in trouble
4. fight. MC is not very strong, is beaten up or nearly killed or actually killed
5. she wakes up somewhere else and it's been taken care of. we potentially see or at least later learn Sebastian saved the day

This happens at least three times, exactly. Lex is constantly investigating things, going to balls to sus out suspects, staking out locations... something is always happening in the first half of the book, but it doesn't often make sense. Instead of a solid mission plan- here's what we know, here's how we're going to find the sister Shellie- things just. Happen.

Lex investigates human trafficking, spends a lot of time instead learning about a serial killer, kills him, and... it doesn't help her find Shellie at all, and in fact, doesn't matter again. That's a large chunk of the book, essentially useless. We're thrown scene to scene, and Lex always seems to know what's going on, why she's there- but we rarely do. And never, even towards the end, did I really feel she was that focused on finding Shellie. Instead, she's focused on whatever is happening now.

And what is happening now is often bizarre, and even more often, unimportant. A whole side plot about status and wealthy girls drops out past the halfway point. A charming but enigmatic childhood friend seems to cease to exist after the serial killer plot is through. We meet and befriend a lady cop, a wealthy housewife, the demon bar owner- only for them to not reappear for hundreds of pages, or at all.

It feels like it might as well have been two books, but even if you'd split it (serial killer half, and um... second half) neither would be cohesive plots. The seeming pull of the story should be Lex looking for her sister while having to deal with demons, and being Marked. But it isn't. I'm not sure what it is- the book is far too bloated to have theme or cohesion.

Characters come and go for scenes that have no importance. Lex angsts about the same things time and time again. There's far too many characters in general. Plot threads are picked up and dropped freely, some never coming back (Matt, from her team, is a good example of someone shows up once to be mysterious and important, only to never appear again, or be explained). There is absolutely no overarching urgency at all, and any that there was quickly depleted past the 150 pages mark.

PACING

The pacing is whack. Because of the bumpy, near episodic quality, there is no rising action towards the climax. The climax is, in fact, just another mission. There's no stakes, no urgency. And the ending? No falling action, and certainly not a good ending. It felt like a page was missing. Not sudden, just... lethargic.

From a standpoint of 'things happen', things are, at least, always happening. It's an easy enough read (will

cover the writing later on), and it does move along. It's just rare it seems to be moving towards any certain goal.

UNEXPLAINED EVENTS

I kept waiting for exposition. It's not a bad thing to have a fantasy story with minimal exposition; many people complain that most books have too many. But it has to then be clear within the text if it isn't going to be explained. While I could guess what most things were, I was never certain. There was barely any worldbuilding at all, and with how long this book is, you'd think there would be a little room.

Demons have 'levels'- unexplained. The network- unexplained. The Agency- unexplained. Soul stuff- barely explained. Contracts- barely explained. Demon blood levels- explained only right before they became relevant, at about the 80% mark.

There is no worldbuilding, no effort put into developing a culture for a city that dearly needs it. Instead, it's just... a city. The text is very lax on descriptions, too, so I cannot tell you much more than that. It's a city. There's a countryside area near a river where the rich people live. I presume there's skyscrapers.

We really only learn things right when they become important, which leads to an explanation of half-bloods coming comically late. Demons have a king- that's a late revelation. It seems like demons have several rulers, actually, one for each country? But that's never really explained! Demon kings have their right-hand men fight on their behalf to deal with civil complaints? What? That's another thing introduced a page before it comes into the plot, and never really explained further.

When I think of various countries, a city, I think of cultures. What are people like in this country compared to the neighbors? What is the political climate? We know there's a president, a congress, a senate... and a human king, also. What's the history there? Do people speak other languages? How big is this country anyway?

And demons! What about them? Their culture? They must have varieties. How are they adapting? How does their culture clash? What are demon children like? Where is the demon 'homeland'?

There's mentions of Catholics, churches. People say 'God' and mention Heaven. Er. So how does religion cope with demons? What is a real life religion (Catholicism) doing in this fantasy world, again?

We don't know. We know nothing! There is really so little worldbuilding, it's nearly mind-boggling, especially for how long the book is.

Same with the main character, Lex: she has secrets. She knows people, but won't tell the reader how. She knows about the world, but doesn't explain anything to us. It gets remarkably frustrating very quickly. She sees a man at a party- Damien! Who is he? Why does he seem to know her? Why does she know him?

¬_(?)_¬

It is something we eventually get an answer for, but it's very late coming. We only learn what is plot relevant at the time (Which ruins many late game 'twists', where I flatly didn't know how the revelation mattered, or what they meant.)

Worse, possibly: The entire book, no one tells Lex a goddamn thing. They refuse to, repeatedly, and while

Lex gets upset... she still gets nothing. There isn't even a good reason for this refusal. It's all plot motivated, to keep her in the dark. Even by the end, she doesn't have all the answers. (Verity and her lollies, anyone?)

Not even in a 'save it for the sequels' manner. Major plot questions are completely unaddressed, and she basically doesn't get any answers, at all. Revelations that do happen are rarely explored (A big reveal about Sebastian around the 50% mark warrants a lot of questions that Lex never asks). I'd say we start getting a few answers about 80% in- and remember, this book is huge. 80% of it is like 135k of words.

There are many, many things Lex's demon handlers seem to know about that they will not tell Lex about, and you know? They never do.

Notes on end game revelations: there's several 'twists' near the end, big reveals that absolutely do not land. Even a smaller reveal about halfway, about Sebastian, relies on information the reader had not been informed of before that point. I won't spoil it, but this is true for everything we learn at the end about what was going on- it's so messily plotted, it's hard to follow, but what there is is only things we'd just been informed of a page before.

I.E.: there is no set up for any big reveals, no hints of what is to come before hand, making the twists feel utterly irrelevant.

LEX IS A FAUX ACTION GIRL

I am glad Lex wasn't top of her class, best in the world, a young prodigy- at the start, her team even advises her to train more before taking her exam. But the demons are very, very powerful, and also, her main foe. How can she possibly square up against them?

Simple: she can't. And that'd be okay, if she wasn't so darn determined to try, anyway. Lex starts off being a fighter who isn't top of her class, but good. The rest of the book, she acts like a weapon-obsessed badass with one flaw: she's not badass. She repeatedly is beaten to the ground, shot, stabbed, injured. She survives about three explosions. She should be dead, but her contract prevents her from dying- and she has Sebastian, an extremely powerful demon with healing powers, on her side.

He (or Verity, the other demon) save the day. Everytime, without fail. Basically, we have an action-focused protag who can't actually do anything action-focused, and instead has to be constantly saved. Despite all her love for knives and guns, Lex isn't capable of anything.

Lex seems to be sold as the tough, badass action girl... but is unable to hold her own at all, and has to rely on others to save her.

CHARACTERS

Most of the writing is focused on the action, and Lex's inner thoughts. Still, for a book this long, you'd think... there'd be some character development, right? Some changes, or arcs, for someone?

No. Lex at the beginning and Lex at the end are nearly the same person, some plot revelations aside. Sebastian does not change, nor does Verity- and neither seems to warm to Lex either. The other characters come and go so frequently and unreliably it'd be asking too much for them to be developed.

The route for Lex should have been easy, right? An Agent (presumably like a police officer in this world, it is unclear) who hates demons, but is forced to work with them. She's weak and has to rely on them, and also solve mysteries in an effort to save her sister from a mysterious fate. In theory she'd learn more about demons- learn about their culture, accept and change her prejudice- as well as strive to become stronger, and adapt to her powerful foes.

But nope. This book is waves of the same, over and over again, including the same character beats. Lex angsts a little. She is determined to figure things out, frustrated no one is telling her things. She gets into a fight. She is saved by her demon pals, but then annoyed that they fail to answer questions. The scene ends and we move on.

WRITING

My mind was boggled and blown by the use of colons and semi-colons in this book. Every single paragraph seemed to sport at least one of each. There is a semi-colon on nearly every page- over 700 in total. This is something that is liable to change in final edits, I need to note, but I am surprised it got this far. Colon use is not much better (600+ in the ARC). Never have I ever read something with that quantity. It was jarring and unsettling, honestly. Strange.

The writing style is short and snappy the entire time. While this means there isn't any sloppy, flowery prose to wade through, it becomes tiring soon enough. For action scenes, short sentences help convey urgency. For regular scenes, they often become awkward and stilted.

The writing was very to the point, as well. There weren't any moments that stood out as a lovely bit of prose, a nice bit of insight- you know, the sort of thing you might quote on an aesthetic post. While I found it very easy to read, and at first enjoyed it, it definitely lost its appeal as time went on.

(The general gist of this review does come down to the book being so long.)

There was a lack of description and exposition, as well and as covered. Scenes were often mostly dialogue, with a lot of emphasis on character movement and Lex's internal thoughts. There wasn't much scene dressing, or atmosphere building- just dialogue and action.

And the action was... sometimes difficult to follow. Generally I got the gist: bullets were fired, some people die. A few scenes were well done, interesting, to a degree tense. As it went on, more seemed to simply happen, not play out, and I wasn't very engaged in it.

CONCLUSION

While I was interested in this book, and it nearly had me for the first part, I was soon lost and soured by its length and seeming purposeless ambition. It feels like it needs another round of edits- if 60k were to be cut, several characters, several plot threads.... quite a lot were to be cut and restructured, I could have really like it. I think for now I can just say: refer to the above.

As unfortunate as it was, there were too many things that failed me in this book. The lack of worldbuilding, the repetitive action, the lack of drive, the lack of urgency- it seemed to meander until it came to a jarring, tired end. In some ways, I am confused by this book, which clearly could have been good after a few more edits. In some ways, I've even been hoping there was a mistake- that I'd accidentally been sent the first draft, not final.

As nice as it'd be, no. And I hate to leave reviews like this, but it appears I have to.

Can you still enjoy it? Perhaps. I've been very intrigued to see hyped five star reviews for this already. I'd like some people to. I just can't recommend it to anyone. It's too long, too sloppy (there is one explicit plot hole)... if you think it sounds interesting, and like action-focused stories about mysterious demons, maybe this is the book for you. Potentially.
