



Amaranth & Ash

Jessica Freely

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In a world where everyone has their place, Amaranth & Ash belong together.

Amaranth is a vasai, born with both male and female characteristics, and a soul that can reach out and touch the souls of others in order to heal them. But a vasai's services are only for the Elai, and they demand sexual satisfaction as well as healing from their beautiful servants. Frustrated with these constraints, Amaranth wants to use his talent to help those who really need it.

Ash is a chel. Considered devoid of souls, chel are the lowest of the low. Not content with his lot, Ash steals from the middle class pel. One night he's caught and brutally punished.

A soul in agony calls out to Amaranth from across the city. When he discovers that it belongs to a chel, it only confirms his worst suspicions about the lies of the Elai. Amaranth takes Ash home and heals him, an act of rebellion that could cost both their lives.

Amaranth's compassion for Ash soon turns to passion. Ash treats him like a person, not an instrument of sexual gratification. Neither of them have much experience with mutual pleasure but together they embark on an exploration of intimacy and desire that carries them to the heights of passion and love -- and shakes the very foundation of their world.

Note: This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations some readers may find objectionable: Intersex relationships, violence.

Amaranth & Ash Details

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Author : Jessica Freely

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From Reader Review Amaranth & Ash for online ebook

Wendy Ann says

For the majority of this story, I was feeling equal parts fascination and hesitancy with the whole notion of beings that have both male and female characteristics. I've grown more and more away from m/f romance books over the past few years and I felt like this one teetered on the precipice of that line. I also found it a bit challenging to contend with the gender neutral pronouns despite the intro and explanation at the beginning of the book.

During the second half of the story, I grew beyond some of my hesitancy as the story picked up pace and hit a more dramatic turn of events. I definitely credit the author with lots of imagination and coming up with something that challenged my boundaries a bit!

Elisa Rolle says

Well, this is for sure an author, and a novel, that was very lucky with its cover. Just looking at this cover I'd want to buy the book, no matter the genre. And well, even when I found out it's a Fantasy, not exactly my preferred choice of reading, I read it anyway.

This is probably a book that lays in the middle, in every meaning of the word. It's not strictly a gay romance, since actually, one character is bisexual, Ash, and the other is androgynous, with both sexes, man and woman. To tag it as "gay" you have to trust Amaranth's words, and the simple fact that he identifies himself as a man. There is even a nice note at the beginning of the story where the author explains that for people like Amaranth she would have preferred to use the neutral pronouns of sie and hir, but it would have been difficult for the reader.

In any case, the world where Ash and Amaranth are living is strictly divided into castes. Ash belongs to the poorer one, the Chel, so lowlife class that they are believed to have not soul. Then there are the Pel, basically paid workers for the higher class of Elai. Above them all, or better cross, there the Vasai, the androgynous breed of Amaranth; they are both healers than prostitutes, since they were taught that they souls healing can be performed only through sexual contact. They are paid for what they do, but Amaranth is not satisfied of the nice apartment and warm clothes, he would like to really touch the souls or at least one soul.

When he finds a battered Ash on a cold night, he immediately understand two things: that what he was taught was wrong, since not only Ash has a soul, but he can also heal him without sex, and second that, if he doesn't bring him home, Ash will be dead in the morning.

The difference in caste is not only political, Chel, Pel and Elai are different also in their body structure, with Chel being the smaller of them all. On the other side, Vasai are the taller of them all, and so, it's quite strange to see the tall and lean Amaranth takes care of Ash as he was a little child, cuddling him in his lap. But aside from this, with Amaranth being the only one with also the female sex, he is for everything else considered the woman in the story. And yes, here there is for sure a man in a woman body, but also a woman in a man body, Amaranth is both of them. But even if Amaranth considers himself a man, he is kinder and more compassionate of most men, he has, in a way, the attitude of a Mother, who wants to heal all her

children.

Once Ash is recovered, he will play the role of the man, but again, his attitude towards Amaranth is of respect and worship, he considers Amaranth like a precious jewel, someone who at first he thinks to have nothing in common. But as Ash will understand, and say to Amaranth, both of them are forced to do things they don't like, they are forced in restriction they don't feel. From the exact opposite of their world, they will find a common ground in the middle, and while the world around them will be upset by the change, they will basically walk away, letting other deal with it, while they will build an unlikely family together.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1607377411/?...>

LG (A Library Girl's Familiar Diversions) says

This book sat in my wishlist for months because 1) it's kind of expensive and 2) I had some feelings of trepidation over how the author would handle the intersexed characters. In the end, I'm glad I bought and read it.

I was surprised at how often *Amaranth & Ash* made me think of Ariel Tachna's *The Inventor's Companion*. I wouldn't have guessed that the two books had very many similarities, but both star a character who is basically viewed as a high class whore by others (Lucio is a courtesan, Amaranth heals through sex, dealing primarily with patients who he feels aren't in need of healing and just want the sex) and both feature a caste system and a cross-caste romance. As far as how the romance was handled, I found I enjoyed *Amaranth & Ash* more.

The romance between Amaranth and Ash was very sweet. This book was published by Loose Id, so of course the sex scenes were explicit, but Amaranth and Ash didn't fall into bed right away. Ash was still recovering from a brutal gang rape (which was fade-to-black – no worries about reading an explicitly described rape scene), so, initially, all Amaranth worried about was healing him and convincing Ash to trust him. Even after he started to feel attracted to him, he was hesitant about acting on his attraction. Amaranth and Ash's relationship began more as one of mutual comfort rather than sex – Ash allowed Amaranth to sleep with him and learned to trust that Amaranth wouldn't do anything that made him uncomfortable, while Amaranth finally had someone around to help relieve his loneliness. The one thing I can think of that might make some people uncomfortable about Amaranth and Ash's developing relationship is that it occurs while Amaranth is acting as Ash's healer – even though I thought their relationship was sweet, I couldn't help but think of the Florence Nightingale effect.

The caste system was another area where I thought this book was well done. I particularly liked finding out more about how things worked in Chelon (the area where chel live), and I found the idea of soul sellers fascinating. The vasai, too, were interesting. They weren't all perfect little angels – although they were healers, there were still jerks among them. Also, although some characters put them on a pedestal, not everyone did. I had wondered what would happen after the lower castes found out there was a vasai among them. Some people reacted almost worshipfully, but in some cases things did turn darker.

Speaking of the vasai, I liked how Freely handled them as well. The vasai weren't just an opportunity for Freely to write sex involving different combinations of male and female genitalia without having to incorporate menages. I liked finding out more details about vasai life, and I was fascinated by the idea of hidden vasai. In an author's note, Freely writes about the thought that went into pronouns and, now that I've

finished the book, I have to say that I'm relieved that Freely chose to use gender neutral pronouns for only one of the vasai – otherwise, the book would have been a slog to get through, since my brain couldn't see to adjust to seeing “sie” and “hir.”

Those of you who hate the soulmate trope may dislike one of the minor romantic relationships that pops up later in the book. (view spoiler)

Although I did really like this book overall, that's not to say that it didn't have its weak points. The first one I noticed was that characters voices weren't as clearly defined as I would have liked. At first, I thought Amaranth spoke in a more refined way than Ash, which, considering their castes, made sense. Then Amaranth had a scene in which he started cussing, and he once berated himself by calling himself a “perv.” It didn't seem to fit in with his usual speech patterns. I would have preferred for characters' voices to be more consistent.

Some of the things I disliked about this book were tied in with things I liked about it. For instance, while I was happy that Freely did not write about rape in detail, her vagueness when it came to darker moments in the story sometimes made it difficult to figure out what, exactly, happened. There is a scene later in the book where Amaranth is being forced to heal others. Although it's stated that most of the people just touch Amaranth, I had a difficult time figuring out whether one of the characters had gone further and actually raped him.

Also, while I appreciated that the dream scenes allowed for Amaranth and Ash to continue to have scenes together even after they were separated, I'm one of those readers who tends to prefer fewer sex scenes in my romance novels, and those dream scenes were nothing but sex. It's a personal preference, but those scenes got to be a bit much for me.

I mentioned earlier that some aspects of the world-building could have used some work. It wasn't always clear to me what people did or did not know about vasai. Amaranth had to explain to Ash that vasai are technically neither male nor female and that some choose preferred gendered pronouns while others wish to be referred to using gender neutral pronouns. You'd think this would mean that other chel would be as clueless about vasai as Ash, and yet, later in the book, not one chel stumbled over the gender neutral pronouns and everyone seemed to know which were the proper pronouns to use. The pel that Amaranth encountered were as clueless as Ash had been, sometimes referring to him as “it.”

Then there was the feeling I had, that this book was similar to a video game where the environment seems to be rich and well-defined, until you bump up against the invisible edges of the map and see that there's nothing out there. I found myself wondering about things like whether Amaranth and Ash's entire world was just one big city and whether there was some kind of purpose to character names (chel seemed to have earthy names, like Ash and Soot, pel had task names, like Push and Pull, Elai got more familiar names, like Darien and Elissa, and vasai got...I'm not sure - “Amaranth” and “Grail” both have meanings, but I don't think “Evanscar” does). One of the reasons why I hated that the book ended with a “four years” later epilogue was because I felt a sequel could have opened up the world a little more.

Overall, I enjoyed this book, although I'm not sure it's one I'll ever reread. Amaranth and Ash's relationship was sweet, but there was some quality missing from the book that kept me from really connecting with it. That said, I plan on reading more of Freely's works and would jump on a sequel to *Amaranth & Ash* if she ever wrote one.

(Original review, with read-alikes, posted on A Library Girl's Familiar Diversions.)

Flora Smith says

I absolutely loved this book. This was a love story that transcended society, caste, and gender. Set in a world reminiscent of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* as it is a planet that millennia before had been populated by humans and the population had split into caste one of which was hermaphroditic. Racial and ethnic barriers were very much a part of society where the elite had it all and the Chel which were the lowest had nothing even denied medical treatment. In such a society where races didn't mix Amaranth and Ash went against such societal norms and fell in love. This was an awesome book that was so much more than their love story. The societal differences, altho exaggerated, are so relevant in our own where people can be biased based on differences. Certainly not for anyone under 18 due to erotic content, but done so tastefully its very much important to the story. You truly feel the love they have for each other. A wonderful book that is relevant in any generation.

~ Lei ~ Reading Is An Adventure ~ says

☆☆☆☆½

In Amaranth and Ash's world, each have proscribed roles that they are not supposed to step out and neither is happy. One night, Amaranth, a vasai feels a soul in pain calling to him and he finds a very injured Ash, a Chel.

Chels have been held down by beliefs that they don't have souls so when Ash finds Ash, he realizes that once again, those in charge have lied. Amaranth as a vasai lives in better circumstances but it's still a gilded cage. Is he a healer or just a highly-paid prostitute?

As Ash heals, their souls meld together and when they are torn apart, this starts a domino effect and turns everyone's world upside-down.

This was a beautiful story and had interesting overtones to current times.

Bookwatcher says

This book gave me a wonderful new concept of *Soul Mates*

New and MARVELOUS, new concept...

In a fictional time and place society is divided in casts. From the higher, the **Elai** to the lower, the **Chel** every single individual know their rules, and no questioning is allowed. Between this two great different classes there are the **Pel** and **Vasai**.

How this division is explained? By the souls... higher you are in the class, more souls you could have. From Elai, with many "rooms" to Chel, without soul. That's how things must be... and obviously that the main problem of our main characters.

Ash is a short and thin head haired chel and being such low class human being his days are search for food, and be out of anyone way. In a hungry impulse he will try to still food from a Pel... and will be brutally attacked.

Amaranth, a tall, slender with golden hair is a Vasai. He is something between a woman and a man, being an androgynous human, like all Vasai. Their unique healer gift is used ONLY and EXCLUSIVELY by Elai. But Amaranth is not happy or neither satisfied with his life. He is tired of use his soul healing power in spoil persons, in Elai that really don't need it... and he is starting to question his real life... he is a healer or nothing more than a well payed whore?

Ash mortal injured will be found by **Amaranth** and nothing, in the world will be the same... yes, not only their, but maybe it's time to a change in all the world.

Is impossible love strong enough to triumph?

Read to know...

5 stars... heartbreaking story

Tara says

Tricky book to categorize. I'd give it a 3.5.

As the title suggests this is the story of Amaranth & Ash. Amaranth is part of a caste born hermaphrodites. They have healing abilities through the sharing of their souls and serve the upper caste. Ash is from the lowest caste, believe to not even have a soul. These two meet by chance and together they set their society on a path to change. It was an ambitious story and it took an interesting look at a caste system society and how people can be controlled by beliefs.

We start out following the developing relationship of Amaranth & Ash. They meet, we see their difference, their similarities, they meet their obstacles and we encounter the story's "bad guy". But some time while our two heros are trying to figure it out, the story shifts and it becomes a story about the different castes and what happens when what they believe true is disproved. During this time a secondary character that up until that point hadn't received much story time and another character become the focus, and we watch another relationship develop and characters make major character growth without much room for it to happen. Finally when our heros get it together to solve the problems of their society we jump ahead to see how things turned out.

I think there were a lot of things that the author wanted to cover and the story got it its own way. It was

almost for two stories. The first the story of the romance between Amaranth & Ash. And the second how their love changed people and the society as a whole. Because both stories were interesting- the how things changed really needed more time to develop.

Not bad, not great.

SueM says

3.5 stars

YullSanna says

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Ms. Nikki says

A good story. The writing was a little dry; nothing made me "react".

Vicktor Alexander says

Slight spoilers

This book was an unexpected delight for me. I must admit when I first began reading it, I was slightly confused by the descriptions of the various types of social classes and their distinctions but once I got it I was able to enjoy this story.

I love how Amaranth and Ash both hesitate to really trust each other but then cannot help but fall in love with each other in spite of the scandal it will cause. All of the misunderstandings, the prejudice, the lies that had been believed by all and most of all the way that neither Amaranth nor Ash ever truly gave up on each other in spite of what separated them, made this a truly sweet read.

And yes, "The Epilogue Whore" was satisfied with the way this book ended. Extremely satisfied. Not only did I get to see that the love Amaranth and Ash went beyond the resolution of their immediate problems, but

that that love extended well into their future...and what a happy future it was.

Mrs Freely did an excellent job on this story. I don't even need to ask for a sequel. I'm satisfied and can get up from the table without dessert or another course.

Gina says

Very interesting world. Pel and chel's reactions after the revelation was very really world. It would have been better, in my opinion, if Amaranth were more of a fighter. It reflects him as a bit of a pushover and a victim to me.

But all in all, I enjoyed the book immensely.

Ah, by the way, Amatanth is technically not a male, but a true hermaphrodite. Because it was very clear from the beginning, the mpreg part didn't come as absurdity.

Bark says

4 1/2 stars, just missed the 5 because of a way too long separation.

Great book with some fantastic world building and a strong love story. I only wish it had been longer though. I wrote up a thorough review for a newsletter that I can't repost but it can be seen [HERE](#) .

DarienMoya says

This book is very different from all the books the m/m genre and I don't even want to call it m/m because it's so much more than that. Characters are intersex and I think this was written way before anyone was really ready for it. I enjoyed reading it years ago and enjoyed reading it now.

I was thinking about putting warnings but everything in this book is nothing that should be warned about. Gender is nothing to warn about and neither is vaginal sex so ?????

Amaranth and Ash is a beautiful love story.

SideNote: if you look at my older status posting for this book you'll realize all the fool shit I said. When I first read it, I wasn't ready for it, but I've grown since then and have learnt to be better. Like my earlier statement, this book was ahead of its time and I wasn't ready and didn't understand back then.

Mountie says

I just finished this book. It is a wonderful Sci/fi, book which IS definitely my kind of read. **Amaranth and**

Ash is set in a world where a genetic plague has split the dominant race into 4 distinct subspecies of humans. The book opens with a member of the soulless Chel, the lowest member of society, looking for a way to obtain some food through stealing. In the aftermath of the punishment for being caught our Chel, Ash is discovered by a Varasai, Amaranth, who hears Ash's soul cry out. Amaranth has spent his life using his soul, within sexual encounters to heal and believes as he has been taught, that Chels have no souls, hence can't be healed with his powers. This is the first societal lie of many, that Amaranth and Ash uncover in their journey, first to heal Ash, then to heal their society.

This lie is one of the many twists thrown into the story. Though a good sized eBook, there was so many things I wanted to know that could not be answered within the context of the book. I really wanted to know about the mutations, about the history about how the society developed the way it did and who made the decisions that effected this society that started so egalitarian but developed so skewed. I wasn't disappointed with the story at all, based on the length, just that like all wonderful Sci/Fi books, it made me want to know more. I was captivated by the story and would recommend it to any reader who enjoys a good other world tale.

I was surprised with Varasi Amaranth. The Varasai mutation, makes them androgynous in looks but they really are multi sexed. The dominant sexual gender identity for each Varasai is more based on which gender a Varasai relates to rather than any physical characteristic. Once I thought the mutation through, I can understand why Amaranth is built the way he is. It actually follows quite closely human biology. Though humanity doesn't have complete androgyny, like the Vasai, the mutation is completely believable in a developmental way. As Amaranth identifies himself as male, a M/M "tag" has been given to the book by the publisher. Once I let the sexuality of the Varasai go, I felt it added to the story and made it more of an interesting read.

Expect the unexpected, and enjoy.

First Read Aug 21, 2010, Second Read Jan 3, 2012 Just as wonderful the second time,
