

From the back jacket

Prince Tiran of Silverglen may be heir to the throne of all Asteria, but he's always felt more at home among the villagers, no matter how many lectures he gets from his father. But when the elk-lord Roden slaughters the royal family and claims the throne for himself, only Tiran is left to avenge their deaths and take his place as the rightful king.

His journey will lead him from the shadowed heart of his forest home into the treetops with the squirrel-clan of the Drays, across the western plains, and among the mysterious and deadly wolves of the Northern Reach.

With his allies help, Tiran must become the king his people need him to be – or risk fulfilling an ancient prophecy that will spell the end of Asteria itself.

My Thoughts so far – From the description I expected a fairly entertaining fantasy story involving a mostly formulaic but not entirely predictable series of events. From what I know of this writer, she takes her work very seriously and as such I expect at worst a skillfully told tale that will not make me regret picking it up and reading every page with rapt attention.

Overall: A journey from a young prince who knows little of the adult world that awaits him to a future king and ruler is what awaits anyone who opens the pages of this book. The story features a wide variety of species and characters that appear over the course of the story from friends to enemies and everywhere in between. The chapters are short, enabling easy readability.

A novel written for adults, this book manages to use that to its advantage. Romantic scenes are thrown in as a matter of character development, rather than being unnecessary events that do nothing to move the plot along.

With an entertaining fantasy world and medieval setting painted for readers, one is treated to an idyllic world thrust into chaos when order is upset by a villain unhappy with his due.

Filled with well constructed characters, a moderately straightforward plot, and a few surprises, this is one you'll definitely want to read.

Characters:

Prince Tiran of Silverglen – A young male unicorn, the prince is an instantly likeable character, who begins his journey covered in dust from getting his hands dirty helping the villagers by working by their side. Even during his moment of grief, he bravely offers his help to a stranger. Tiran is instantly the sort of person I respect, who even before he is forced into his situation, has always been a man of the people. He is a leader who will just as soon lend his back to help you as he would any favor a royal could offer. He leads by example, and rather than being an arrogant prince self assured of his own superiority, even with a silver spoon in his mouth he pushes it aside to help the villagers with a shovel. When given the opportunity to run, Tiran simply cannot do so, as it is not in his nature. Honor so demands, and even in his worst hour he remains loyal, in every sense of the word.

Aldric is the prince's protector, and a fiercely loyal individual. Though his role in the story is relatively minor, he fulfills an essential function in that he serves as an anchor for Tiran to focus on when he finds himself uncertain on where he belongs next.

Rikka is a female squirrel and one of Tiran's first allies against Roden. She joins with him to take him to Aldric from the treetop homes of the squirrel clan. They are quickly separated, but on her return she spreads the legend of the prince and his return to the throne. She is one of the primary members of the army that Tiran leads to retake Silverglen, and is a strong female character who does not back down when threatened. As her father knows, arguing with her is useless, as she is her father's daughter.

Sarid is an oryx that trained the prince in the use of his sword. He joins Tiran after his separation from Rikka instructing him in sword use.

Tara is a young unicorn maiden that Tiran meets in Willowsett, a safe haven on his journey to gather allies. At first a stranger, he learns there is more to her than he realizes. They grow close quickly as she searches to remember her past.

Asfour is an eagle messenger that ferries information to and from the prince, finding him even in a safe haven to pass on messages from Aldric.

Zeta is a female wolf from the northern lands, and one of the warriors that returns with Tiran to Silverglen as a result of his search for allies. She is one of the first to see the unicorn as a potential benefit to her people, and does all she can to convince her father that offering their aid is essential to their prosperity.

Var is a feral but sentient large cat that Tiran discovers while visiting the wolves in the north. Fiercely loyal, the animal immediately bonds with Tiran in a master/pet relationship, and having been alone so long, at last finds someone with whom he can communicate. He takes advantage of this, lending his skills to his newfound master, determined to protect the young prince.

Analysis: A well written novel, the story carries out every essential function. The hero starts out as a young man and grows into an adult though trials and tribulations he cannot escape. Every major character serves an essential function in the story, though due to its length some of them are underutilized though not marginalized. The story allows for a small amount of plot convenience at times, but nothing that ruins the sequence of events or the feeling of struggle as the prince travels on his journey.

Magic is referred to as *erys*, and is generally utilized in the form of illusions and glamours to allow the prince to travel undetected. It is described as being ever present, but mostly only able to be manipulated by the royals of the land, and requires effort and concentration to maintain.

Religion is lightly touched upon, with frequent references to the Lady and an in universe origin story provided for the anthros that exist in the universe presented. It was a great pleasure to me that the species used in the book were of a variety of races and not clustered among a group of foxes or cats or similar race with all others being ignored.

The villain is not overused, with a realistic motivation. Consequences for ignoring his efforts are made clear to the hero even without the personal motivation provided by the story itself.

All the characters act realistically based on their circumstances, with no instances of action out of convenience or with skills appearing out of nowhere.

The only flaws I took with the story was that there were a character death or two that I felt was unnecessary and did not really add much to the story in terms of emotional impact or story requirement. Since both deaths were effectively 'off screen', the effect is the same, and while one would have been perfectly acceptable, I felt two was unneeded.

All in all, a well written novel.

Story Structure: The story is neatly divided into three textbook acts, a beginning, a middle, and an end. Separated clearly by three overarching themes, the opening chapter shows a hero that has barely begun to understand his own destiny, never mind a person ready to accept the mantle that has been thrust upon him. The center act changes everything, passing from one point of no return to another, as Tiran evolves into the person he must become in order to restore order to his kingdom. The final act sees all come to a head, perhaps a little neater than is ideal, but more than satisfactory to anyone looking for a good fantasy story.

Dialogue: The characters all have their own voice and timbre, with each one having a certain signature to their speech. One would certainly not mistake one for another, in both the words they use and the attitudes conveyed behind each statement. Avoiding such basic mistakes like 'as you know' dialogue, the story is expertly crafted particularly for a first attempt at a novel, which as any writer has to know is excessively difficult.

Introduction

Plot

Chapter One features the prince returning to the castle after a day of helping the villagers with a day of hard work. He is chastised by his father for doing such a 'common' activity, citing that it is his station to govern them, not to toil by their side, as a future king has more universal concerns to consider. He is informed that an elk-lord Roden will be visiting later that evening. After his father tells him he is no longer to be served in the taverns by order of the king, among other things, Tiran leaves in frustration.

Chapter Two features the unicorn prince traveling to the Cup and Crown, an inn some two hours away. After securing a room for the night, he meets his friend Moki, a young buck who joins him for a meal and a card game. During the game, he senses a sudden shift which tells him that his father is dead. He wraps up the game as quickly as possible and prepares to leave, but not before he is unexpectedly stopped by Moki.

In the third chapter, Tiran finds himself betrayed by Moki, managing to escape and at first uncertain of the arrival of his old teacher, Aldric. He is instructed to run as far away from home as possible, though the need to know eventually overwhelms the prince, and he heads back for his home kingdom.

Using magic to disguise himself, the prince returns in the guise of someone else and manages to enter the area unrecognized. Though he already senses what he will find, he discovers the fate of his family, a discovery that will change him forever.

Chapter five sees Prince Tiran arrive in Oakton in search of word of Aldric, but instead he finds a rabbit mother in an argument with a soldier. He intervenes to spare her from a potentially unjust punishment, and in turn, she offers him shelter.