



The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse

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A princess and a peasant girl must embark on a dangerous quest to outwit a centuries-old warning foretelling the fall of the Monarchy in this modern fairytale.

In the center of the verdant Monarchy lies Dreadwillow Carse, a black and desolate bog that the happy people of the land do their best to ignore. Little is known about it, except for one dire warning: *If any monarch enters Dreadwillow Carse, then the Monarchy will fall.* Twelve-year-old Princess Jeniah yearns to know what the marsh could possibly conceal that might topple her family's thousand-year reign of peace and prosperity.

Meanwhile, in the nearby town of Emberfell, where everyone lives with unending joy, a girl named Aon hides a sorrow she can never reveal. She knows that *something* in the carse--something that sings a haunting tune only Aon can hear--holds the cure for her sadness. Yet no matter how many times she tries to enter, the terror-inducing dreadwillow trees keep her away.

After a chance meeting, Princess Jeniah and Aon hatch a plan to send Aon into the heart of the carse to unlock its darkest secret. But when Aon doesn't return, a guilt-stricken Jeniah must enter the carse to try and rescue her friend--even if it means risking the entire Monarchy.

The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse Details

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Author : Brian Farrey

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From Reader Review The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse for online ebook

Angela says

This was not at all what I was expecting. I was expecting a fantasy and got something much closer to horror. There is very real menace and disturbing concepts and images in the book. I'm sure many children will love the ghoulish aspects but it's not really made super clear in the book blurb. There is a central issue hinted at in the summary that is very original. Somehow, through a device we discover later, the people of the kingdom--except the royal family--feel nothing but happiness. There is no sorrow or grief or discontentment. Except for peasant girl Aon. Aon feels a pervasive sadness that she hides and feels guilty over. Somehow she feels that the answer lies in Dreadwillow Carse. The carse both draws and repels her. Princess Jeniah has a problem with the kingdom's safety that she feels somehow stems from Dreadwillow Carse but, due to an old legend, she is afraid to enter the carse herself. Aon negotiates with her to take Jeniah's place. This seems pretty simple and leads us to expect something magical with maybe some mild danger and big surprises. Instead we get life-threatening danger, gruesome images, and deep tragedy. As you can tell, I really didn't like the book, despite the good writing style and engaging story setup. I wouldn't hesitate to try another of the author's books however. This one just wasn't for me and maybe not for the youngest of elementary age readers.

Sand-Witch says

The book was really mysterious. I recommend it to fairy tale lovers. The ending was really happy
Happily ever after for everyone, the end.
It's a really good book, quick read, and really interesting.
And ja, thats it
Happy Reading kids!

Fafa's Book Corner says

Fafa's Book Corner (Wordpress)
Fafa's Book Corner (Blogger)

I received this E-ARC via Algonquin Young Readers and Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. When I saw this on Netgalley I simply assumed that it would be a sweet middle grade story. I did not expect this to be slightly creepy and so engrossing. I am happy to be proven wrong.

The book begins with princess Jeniah. Jeniah is 12 years old and in short time she will soon be queen. Her mother is going to die soon leaving Jeniah orphaned and the only heir to the throne. By the beginning of the book Jeniah is queen ascendant.

Aon is a very different person than those in her village. The only emotion her townspeople seem to have is happiness. Whereas she has all emotions. More often than not she is sad. Her mother left her and her father years ago, for reasons unknown in the beginning. Since then she has been sad and lonely.

Jeniah is terrified of ruling and her mother dying. She has no idea how to rule and fears messing up. And she doesn't understand the Dreadwillow Carse. Why can't the royals enter? How will entering causing the monarchy to fall? Who came up with that warning? She desperately tries to find out all these answers while also getting tutored by Skonas who isn't doing a very good job of teaching her how to be a good queen. Jeniah decides that if she is to be a good queen she must understand the Carse. And to do that she decides to get someone to go inside and report to her.

Aon has a secret. Behind everyone's back she tries to walk into the Carse. Every time she does so she hears singing and that actually makes her happy. She only walks a few steps every time before the fear stops her from entering. She has not been able to enter. One day she hears a scream of help coming from the Carse. She saves the unknown girl. The girl turns out to be Jeniah. As she and Jeniah talk, the princess explains that she must find out what is inside the Carse and what is so bad about it. Aon offers to do so.

I actually had intentions of DNFing this. It was so disturbing to read about how the people were always happy and felt no other emotion! But because I liked the characters and the story I continued on. And I am very happy that I did so.

I felt so bad for both of the characters. They went threw so many struggles. Jeniah had so many fears. And they made sense. I could understand why she thought that she wasn't ready to be a queen and that she was afraid of disappointing her mother. Skonas was frustrating in the beginning. But his lessons started making sense later on in the book.

Aon's obsession with the Carse was also disturbing. It had a way of calming her down almost like a cure to her sadness. When she started making frequent trips to the Carse she found out that she is very much tied to it. Her friendship with Jeniah was sweet and it was nice that they both had an understanding of each other.

The Carse was terrifying! I had no idea that there was even a history behind it and some of the stuff in there along with the discoveries the girls make... To say the least it was completely unpredictable. The Carse is not your typical scary forest. It has a lot of mystery to it which I feel the author did a good job exploring.

There was a lot of character growth in this book. I was so surprised by some of the decisions and things Jeniah said towards the end of the book. She didn't sound like a 12 year old but a grown, mature woman. Readers do find out why Aon's mother left. By the end of this book Aon is happy and has another job to for Jeniah.

My only complaint would be is that there were times when I wondered why characters wouldn't ask certain questions. Despite this the book had a nice ending.

Overall this was a sweet story with a bit of a mystery and creepy factor! I would recommend it to anyone who wants to read some middle grade creepy books, fans of middle grade, and anyone looking for another halloween story. It is still on Netgalley so you can request it.

Joe says

I'll keep this brief, because there's not much to say beyond that, for a comparatively slim middle grade fantasy novel, this one packs a punch.

Refreshingly, it is not a Harry Potter retread, and it never strays from its central, albeit slightly obvious, conceit: it is a profound and moving meditation on depression.

A worthwhile read, and one that will be quite valuable to many silently suffering children.

Phoebe says

Readers may have to look up the word "carse" (I did), but will have no trouble getting immediately absorbed into this tale of a princess forced into ruling the kingdom before her time, (but warned by her mother that no monarch can ever enter Dreadwillow Carse, or the kingdom will fall) and of a kingdom that is living the dream: everything is perfect! No one goes hungry; everyone is happy. If tragedy befalls you, life goes on and you don't worry about it too much. Aon, a village girl who lives with her father after the disappearance of her mother, knows that there must be something wrong with her, because she does feel sorrow and sadness. The only place she can go to express it is the creepy Dreadwillow Carse, a depressing bog that everyone else stays out of. And it is her help that the Princess Jeniah, who questions everything, will soon need. A good middle grade adventure fantasy by the author of the exciting Vengekeep books.

Morgan (The Bookish Beagle) says

3.5 stars. I really enjoyed this when I started and then put it down for 2 weeks. But once I picked it up again, the mystery really held my attention. The princess is a POC and the other main character (also a girl) suffers from depression, which is treated in a really nuanced, interesting, age-and-fantasy-setting-appropriate way. It really infuses so much of what the book is about. I must have a thing for mysterious forests lately! I loved learning about the Carse and its connection to the Monarchy. It actually reminded me very much of Uprooted albeit in a MG fantasy setting. The ending felt abrupt but I really enjoyed most of the book.

Katherine says

This review is also posted on kidsreads.com!

Brian Farrey's *THE SECRET OF DREADWILLOW CARSE* is a short-but-sweet fantasy tale for middle-grade readers that would be a perfect jumping-off point for young readers in this genre. This novel tells the story of a 12-year-old princess named Jeniah whose mother, the queen, has fallen ill. Jeniah is told that she must never enter the mysterious place called Dreadwillow Carse --- if she does, the monarchy will fall. Meanwhile, in the town of Emberfell, where everyone is ceaselessly happy, a young girl named Aon is the only one who seems to feel sorrow --- and the only one who feels a strange connection to the Carse. The two girls meet by chance and form a strong friendship so that together they can discover the Carse's dark secret and save the kingdom.

Farrey's novel seems to me like an homage to Ursula K. Le Guin's famous short story "Those Who Walk Away from Omelas," and, if so, it is a strong and worthy tribute. The story is quickly paced and exciting with lots of twists and turns; I was able to breeze through it in a single sitting, eager to learn what happened next.

As the two girls learned more about the Carse I occasionally found myself a bit lost and re-reading passages, or thinking that the happiness vs. sadness theme was too heavy-handed. Once I reached the end, however, all of my questions and concerns were satisfyingly resolved. The overall tone of the story is fairly dark as Jeniah and Aon suffer many losses and hardships, but their strong bond provided an uplifting and hopeful contrast.

The friendship that built between the two main characters was my favorite aspect of this novel --- I always appreciate and root for girls teaming up and being the heroes of their stories. I also applaud the author for creating complex and diverse characters who take leading roles; middle-grade and young adult literature always needs more characters like these. Farrey's ability to create a simple but immersive fantasy world populated with interesting characters, secrets, and a touch of magic makes *THE SECRET OF DREADWILLOW CARSE* an excellent fantasy story for young readers who are already fans of or new to this genre.

Hope Sloper says

Oh, my gosh, what an awesome, incredible, brilliant book. After Laila and I read it the first time, we went back and read it again - we loved it that much. Page after page, this story kept us turning. There wasn't a single night that I read to her where we didn't wish for more time to read this book. It's beautifully well written and thought out. It's a strong story, with lots of little twists and turns.

Not once did we have to stop, not once did we have to slow down, and not once did we want to.

Out of the all the books I read to Laila this year, this one was by far our favorite, so much so, she begged me to buy her copy when it releases so she can share with her friends.

I intend to hunt down more books by Brian Farrey, so that Laila and I are guaranteed more great adventures before bed.

Jordan says

Find this review at [Forever Lost in Literature!](#)

While perusing my Goodreads shelf for this year, I realized I have read quite a few younger-aged aimed books this year - and that I have been enjoying it immensely. These books aren't just fun to read, they are also extremely well-crafted stories that handle a variety of difficult topics in a way that younger audiences can understand. The most interesting aspect in each of these books, however, is that they seem to have messages for all ages and can be easily enjoyed by adults as well as younger kids.

The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse is an exciting fairytale that unfolds itself in a variety of delightful layers as the story progresses. It covers a variety of heavy topics in imaginative ways with such a deft hand that I am simply in awe of Farrey. The story focuses on Aon, a girl living in the town of Emberfell, and Jeniah, the princess of the land who is soon to become queen as her mother passes on.

Everyone in Emberfell is happy. If someone dies or goes away, that person is basically forgotten about so as not to have any sadness regarding their loss. Sad things do not happen and there is no crying because

everything is happy. This sounds like it could possibly be a good thing, but it also sounds, quite frankly, creepy. Aon, however, does feel sadness, which thus makes her feel like an outcast and that something within her is 'broken.' I assume the author intended to use this as a metaphor for depression, but even if he didn't, I think it works itself into the storyline extremely well. While awareness for depression is increasing in the media, it is still somewhat of a taboo in certain families and culture, which makes those that do experience such negative feelings feel like there is something wrong with them. I felt that Aon's struggle with feeling differently than the rest of her town shed an interesting light on how experiencing different moods or emotions than what others think of as 'normal' can really make you feel alienated. I think this book does a good job showing that feeling differently from others is not wrong, but is instead normal and it is important to talk to others about these topics.

Jeniah, on the other hand, is largely separated from the town (until she goes to explore the Carse and meets Aon) and struggles to come to terms with her impending status as queen. Jeniah does not feel that she is mature enough to yet be queen - which I actually find to be quite mature of her - and she struggles to come to terms with how to be responsible for an entire kingdom, as well deal with her newly appointed tutor that does nothing but frustrate her. Throughout the course of the story, Farrey subtly and expertly crafts Jeniah's character from an insecure and unaware girl into a more self-aware and knowledgeable young woman.

Farrey's writing style is very accessible and a joy to read. It is not written in an overly simplistic manner, nor is it too advanced. His words flow smoothly, and there are moments of true beauty within his writing.

I feel as though every kid - or adult - should read this at some point because of the important topics it covers and for its reminders that it's okay to be sad, it's okay to be inexperienced, and it's okay to not always have the answers.

As a result, I am giving *The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse* five stars!

Diane says

"It has been a land of peace and prosperity for a thousand years. Your first duty as queen is, and always will be, to protect that."

Queen Sula - wants all her subjects to be happy ... and so they are. Her subjects don't even know what nightmares are. But Queen Sula is desperately ill and it seems her daughter, Jeniah, will soon be taking control of the kingdom. The only thing her mother will tell her about being the Queen is that "If any Monarchy enters Dreadwillow Carse, then the Monarchy will fall." Jeniah is full of questions and wants to be a good queen, so her mother supplies her with a tutor to help complete her education. His name is Skonas and infuriates Jeniah to no end. He never really answers any of her questions or tells her anything. Instead, he tells her that "You are your own best teacher."

Aon Greenlaw of Emberfell, who lives near Dreadwillow Carse, isn't like any of the other villagers. After all, everyone else is blissfully happy all the time. Yet Aon "hid a sorrow that no one in Emberfell would understand." Things only become worse for Aon when her father is chosen by the Crimson Hoods. They are envoys of the queen and it is an honor to be selected "performed duties vital to the continued prosperity of all in the land." It does mean, however, that she will never see her father again.

Both girls face unanswered questions in their lives... For Aon, it is questions about her mother who left when

she was very young. For Jeniah, it is questions about magic and Dreadwillow Carse. "Following a rule just because it had always been followed felt strange. She liked to understand rules. She needed to." When Jeniah and Aon strike a deal to help each other with their struggles, it sends the two on a course that could change the monarchy forever. "Funny how truth changes, depending on who says it."

Can there be love without sorrow? Can there be happiness without pain? Should the peace and prosperity of 1000s be more important than the suffering of a few? "Could you risk the safety of the Monarchy to save one person?" A fantasy, reminiscent of *The Giver*, poses these questions and others to its readers. Two strong female characters and several interesting plot twists highlight this book.

Martha says

What is the secret of Dreadwillow Carse worries Jeniah, the future queen of the Monarch? Her mother always warns her to never venture inside the Dreadwillow Carse, an ominous dreaded dark patch of woods, strangely situated in the midst of a thriving forest. Janiah lives in Emberfell, the Monarchy she will one day rule, populated by people who are always happy with not a trouble in the world. Jeniah believes she is the only one who doesn't share their carefree lifestyle, until she meets and befriends a girl from the village named Aon, who also experiences deep periods of sorrow. They both share an overwhelming curiosity about the mystery of Dreadwillow Carse. Their quest to discover the secret within the foreboding Dreadwillow Carse is skillfully told. Mesmerizing until the very end, this captivating tale of bravery and courage empowers the reader, reaffirming the universal need to always ask questions and seek your own answers. A powerful unforgettable fairy tale.

Rachel Stansel says

The Secret of Dreadwilow Carse is the story of two girls living in Emberfell, Princess Jeniah and Aon. The 12 year old Princess' mother is dying and Jeniah must quickly learn to be queen. Her mother warns her that she must never enter Dreadwillow Carse, the dark forest in the center of the Monarchy or the Monarchy itself will fail. Emberfell is filled with people who only know how to feel happiness, with the exception of Aon. She feels a full range of emotions and believes she is "Broken."

Both girls know there is something in the carse that they must see. Aon has entered the Carse, but the dreadwillow trees keep her from going in very deep. The Princess realizes she can send Aon, who she meets by chance, into the Carse to find out what it holds.

What unfolds is a mysterious adventure to learn of what the Carse holds and for the Princess to prepare for Queendom. The friendship the girls form revolves around the shared ability to feel while everyone around them cannot.

I really enjoyed this story. It reminds me somewhat of the Spiderwick Chronicles. There is a bit of magic, a bit of mystery, a friendship and the question of how to best serve your fellow man. A great book for an later

Elementary or Middle School reader.

Full Disclosure: I received an ARC from NetGalley and Algonquin Young Readers in exchange for this honest review.

Bailey says

Rating: 4/5

"Questions are the lamplight that lead us from the darkness. And you know what lamplight really is, yes? Fire. You should tread carefully your highness."

~Skonas (The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse)

What is a young girl to do when her beloved mother, the queen of an entire kingdom, suddenly falls ill, leaving the girl with no other choice but to take up the throne much earlier than expected? This sudden horror has just become Jeniah's reality. She's a headstrong individual with a curiosity like no other and a desire to do her kingdom justice, a kingdom that has known nothing but prosperity for centuries upon centuries. However, she thought she had years to learn about becoming an efficient ruler before officially taking the throne, but this luxury is suddenly taken away from her as she is left with no other option. As time is quickly running out for her to understand how to fairly rule just as the current cherished queen does, the overbearing remembrance of her sickly mother is constantly hanging in the back of her mind. As a result, the fact that she is told the entire Monarchy will fall before her very eyes if she ever steps foot in the forbidden Dreadwillow Carse isn't exactly making the situation any better. **Put a mystery in front of Jeniah, and she won't let the subject go until she figures it all out.**

Aon is just a village girl living under the kingdom's rule . . . but she's not like the other villagers. No, Aon's got a secret of her very own that alienates her, even from her own family. **Nobody else in the entire kingdom, save for the royalty, knows what sadness is or can even fathom the concept, let alone define it. Yet, Aon's the exception.** This makes her drawn to the Carse (the one place in the entire kingdom that every other villager refuses to step foot in) where she is strangely comforted.

By a twist of fate, Jeniah's and Aon's lives intertwine, leading them both on a journey they never could have imagined! **In return for a personal request to Jeniah, Aon agrees to figure out what goes on inside the enigmatic Carse for the princess, as no one else will dare go near the bog of unnatural darkness in a world that only knows light.** However, something goes terribly wrong, and Jeniah is forced to put her entire kingdom at stake for one subject!

***The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse* will take you on a journey that not many fantasy Middle Grade novels have ever gone on before, challenging the reader to face hard-hitting questions while going on a creepy, topsy-turvy ride into a kingdom that never could have been imagined except by Brian Farrey!** My favorite MG novels have always been in either the fantasy or contemporary genres, my ultimate favorites being *The Thing About Jellyfish* (contemporary) and *The Thickety* (fantasy). The fact that this book even rivaled my deep love of *The Thickety* by J. A. White, which is ridiculously hard to do, shocked me to my genuine, bookish core. **I honestly had no idea how much I would come to deeply love and appreciate this delightfully spooky novel!**

Farrey painted an eerie picture of a happy little kingdom that made me question just how far a conscience mind was willing to go in order to stay in a complete trance of bliss. For example, if a local villager was to die, he or she would immediately be forgotten by those around them, their house abandoned, and their children taken in by an adoptive family, as if there was never a loss to begin with. And the worst part was that the villagers had no idea that they were actually doing this. They knew no other way or emotions to conjure in these traditionally sorrowful times. Aon was the only one who noticed how messed up life truly was, but voicing her observations would have made no difference to the contented people who surrounded her every waking moment. I'm sure that everyone can easily agree that, hypothetically speaking, being in a constant jovial state without any stress or sorrow would be a blessing, but this book almost made it seem like an unwanted curse!

The two great female leads were much appreciated, as they were able to represent different struggles and opportunities throughout the book, as well as showcase that girls can have just as awesome of adventures as boys ever could and be equally brilliant and strong! (Haha Happenstance (the *Books of Umber*), Conn (the *Magic Thief* series), Beck (the *Pillage* series), and the *Time Warp Trio* dudes!!!! Guess not all books are dominated by males! Those are all really good books, though, guys. Check them out. Seriously. They're awesome, and that last part was not sarcasm!) For example, Aon communicated that being different had its own strengths, even though being different made her an outsider. If she hadn't been an outsider who had no qualms about going into the Carse, Jeniah would have never been able to investigate the Carse through a secondary party.

I also loved how Farrey demonstrated that being able to feel sadness wasn't something to be ashamed of. Instead, he tried to make the audience understand that it was normal and something that one shouldn't have to hide, which is a great message for the book's directed age range. In fact, the author tried to express the positive side to being unhappy or melancholic (if you can imagine that!). **He conveyed that it is important to grieve and remember those who we have lost, and while recalling past loved ones may be painful, it can also bring about closure, fonder memories, hidden strength, and creative outlets.**

Two other fabulous and thoroughly explored themes that I adored in *The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse* were curiosity and decision making.

Answers are the pyre that banishes darkness altogether.

~Skonas (The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse)

Despite the fact that Jeniah was constantly told to not question specific subjects (particularly the Carse) she couldn't help herself. However, she later discovered that some questions may be hard to answer and/or even fathom. Perhaps you may even wish that you never found out the truth to begin with, yet without truth, life would be a lie. I absolutely loved how this concept was explored and laid out. **The story couldn't have unfolded in a better way, with a creepy, slightly unsettling atmosphere that only deepened as the book came to a finish, which makes *The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse* enjoyable for all ages. I couldn't have asked for a better ending!**

I highly recommend this book if you're looking for a unique MG experience with a surprisingly ominous atmosphere, an addictive mystery, a kick-butt female relationship, and amazing themes. Look no further! This is the perfect fit for you!

Please note that I received a free copy of this book from the publisher (Algonquin Young Readers) in

exchange for an honest review. However, this in no way influenced my review.

You can see reviews like this one and more at <http://knightingalereviews.blogspot.com/>.

Carla Johnson-Hicks says

The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse is the story of two girls living in Emberfell, Princess Jeniah and Aon. The 12 year old Princess' mother is dying and Jeniah must quickly learn to be queen. Her mother warns her that she must never enter Dreadwillow Carse, the dark forest in the center of the Monarchy or the Monarchy itself will fail. Emberfell is filled with people who only know how to feel happiness, with the exception of Aon. She feels a full range of emotions and believes she is "Broken." Aon, is now an orphan. Her mother disappeared when she was small and her father was taken by the crimson hoods. When Jeniah tells Aon that the crimson hoods do not work for her mother she is more determined to find out the secret of Dreadwillow Carse. Aon enters the Carse and pretends to be Jeniah. She stays longer every time she goes in, until one day, she does not come out. Laius goes and gets Jeniah as he has been instructed. Can Jeniah save Aon? What is the secret of Dreadwillow Carse? Will the monarchy fall if Jeniah goes in after Aon?

The story is a mysterious adventure to learn of what the Carse holds as well as a time for Princess Jeniah to prepare to be Queen. The friendship the girls form revolves around the shared ability to feel emotions, specifically pain and sadness, while everyone around them cannot.

I really enjoyed this story. There is fantasy, mystery, and magic. How friendship survives all and helps to solve the problem of the carse is a learning tool. A great book for an later Elementary or Middle School reader.

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Shadowdenizen says

Middle-grade fiction has come a long way and seriously evolved over the years, and that evolution is part of why I enjoy the genre so much to this day!

The Secret of Dreadwillow Carse promises a rollicking fairy-tale adventure, and it delivers on that, in spades. But it also goes above and beyond that simple definition and brings us the suprisingly adult tale of 2 sympathetic female lead characters and friends, each wrestling with sadness and depression in their own way. (Having recently read The School for Good and Evil trilogy, I couldn't help but subconsciously compare the two books, which is a good thing!.)

More than the obligatory quest, the friendship and bond between the two girls is truly the crux of the book (much like the aforementioned "School for Good and Evil"), but through the power of that bond, the author deftly manages to illustrate some much larger concepts and philosophical questions as well, such as "What is the price of rulership?" "How far would I go to save a friend?"

And, of course, a shout-out for the wonderful cover art, which perfectly accentuates and sets the stage for the reader.

A thought-provoking, well-written, surprisingly intelligent, and (most importantly) *entertaining* novel! A solid 4 stars for this charming middle-grade novel.

Full disclosure: I received this digital copy from NetGalley (with my thanks!), in exchange for an honest review.
