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There were two secrets in Varenx House, and Alizhan was one of them.

Alizhan can't see faces, but she can read minds. Her mysterious ability leaves her unable to touch or be touched without excruciating pain. Rescued from abandonment and raised by the wealthy and beautiful Iriyat ha-Varensi, Alizhan has grown up in isolation, using her gift to steal secrets from Iriyat's rivals, the ruling class of Laalvur. But Iriyat keeps secrets of her own.

When Alizhan discovers that she isn't the only one of her kind, and that a deadly plot threatens everyone like her, there's only one person she can trust.

Ev liked having a secret. None of the other girls in the village had a thief-friend.

Evreyet Umarsad—"Ev" to her parents and her one friend—longs to be the kind of hero she reads about in books. But the rest of the world feels impossibly far away from her life on a farm outside Laalvur. Ev will never lay eyes on the underground city of Adappyr, the stars of the Nightward Coast, or the venomous medusas that glow in the dark depths of the sea.

At least on her weekly trip to the market, Ev gets to see her thief—the strange young woman who slips by her cart and playfully steals a handful of thornfruit. When the thief needs help, Ev doesn't hesitate. Together, they uncover a conspiracy that draws them all over Laalvur and beyond.

Thornfruit is the first book in *The Gardener's Hand* trilogy.

Thornfruit Details

Date : Published February 27th 2018 by Etymon Press (first published February 8th 2018)

ISBN :

Author : Felicia Davin

Format : Kindle Edition 354 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Lgbt

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From Reader Review Thornfruit for online ebook

Penny W says

This was the first book in YEARS that I just sat down and read basically cover to cover (I took a break to sleep & run a dnd session). It's wonderful - the worldbuilding is masterful, the prose smart and funny and occasionally absolutely chilling. Also when alizhan lifted up ev's shirt to stop her bleeding and was like "wow u have a lot of muscles" it was a lot for me

Mike says

Wow, this was really good. The world-building was so well thought-through, but the reader can figure it out without being handed a big "here's how it all works!" chapter-or-more of explanation. The characters were well-developed, and it felt like I was reading a lost Tamora Pierce novel from her secret sci-fi days, but the only sci-fi element is the world itself, which underpins everything but never makes the reader uneasy, because it never makes the characters uneasy. All the unease comes from character interactions and secret motivations. I can't wait for the next one.

kari says

It's difficult to write a less-than-enthusiastic review of a book you really wanted to like; the premise of Thornfruit sounded like just the kind of book I wanted. Alas, despite the ambitious worldbuilding and so many good ideas, the characterization felt unconvincing, and the prose was just not right for me.

Jenny says

Wonderfully lush worldbuilding with evocative descriptions of places and atmosphere. Fascinated by the separation of night and day by space rather than by time and loved how naturally it wove into this world. The intercalated letters lent to the intrigue and gave weight to the ongoing story. Loved the characters and can't wait to see what lies ahead in the next book.

Marie says

I don't normally write reviews because I feel like an inarticulate mess but this book deserves a review. At the beginning I was kind of doubtful because I didn't know in what direction it was going and if I'd end up slowly making my way through exposition after exposition and a plot that is completely overpowered by it (which is something that, in my experience, tends to happen often in the fantasy genre).

But I was positively surprised and, truth be told, what I most feared in the beginning ended up being one of my favourite aspects of the story:

Namely the world building.

The world created in Thornfruit brings something refreshingly new to what I've come to expect from fantasy novels and while it admittedly can be quite confusing, I was intrigued by it and wanted to learn more.

The language in the story helped too, whether it was just the names or the subtle hints of other languages that exist in the universe, it made the world much more real to me than I'd have expected.

And I won't really get into plot or characters, here, I enjoyed both, but that's not why I loved reading this so much.

I am also not the most critical reader so someone else might be bothered by things I didn't even notice.

But I was captivated and, personally speaking, that's all I really need from a book.

So, my final words?

Just read it. (If you want to.)

Ava says

I was recommended this book as "Tamora Pierce but queer" and was NOT disappointed. I haven't been this captivated by a story in a long, long time. I immediately bought the second book, which I'm halfway through. If you like high-seas hijinks, queer relationships (romantic, platonic, and otherwise), magic, and well-meaning but corrupt female antagonists, this is the book for you.

Jade says

Something new

Unexpectedly intriguing! This tale is woven masterfully and the more that gets revealed, the more I want to know. I would definitely recommend this to others looking for a very different take on adventure and fantasy.

Elizabeth Smart says

There is a lot to love about this book. The world-building is incredible, from the different ways time is told to the various countries and islands discussed within. The characters are also fantastic: Ev may be one of my favorites of all time (she's peak fantasy aesthetic for me), and everyone feels fleshed out and real. I think my only beef with this book is that the plot could have been a little tighter. There's a lot of buildup (GREAT buildup) for a somewhat less-than-satisfying conclusion. Towards the end it just seems like a lot of convenience getting the characters from place to place rather than action that felt true to the characters and the story. There's a little too much expository info dumping as well, both at the beginning and the end.

That being said, I am absolutely DYING for the next book. I'm so interested in where the story is going and I'm obviously deeply tied up in Ev and Alizhan's relationship. All-in-all, this is a really lovely, interesting book and I would recommend it to pretty much everyone.

Cornelia Gordon says

Read. This. Book! I've been following Davin for a while now and was really excited to read her debut novel. It did not disappoint me. Thornfruit showcases everything I've loved about her writing, from her incredibly nuanced grasp of character - all the characters and their relationships felt real and carefully examined, and I never once felt like Davin took any shortcuts - to her phenomenal pacing - it reads like a page-turner and Davin never wastes words, giving you the descriptions (often beautiful ones) that you need and then moving forward. I'd recommend this book to anyone, but especially anyone who loves stories about queer characters, unique magic, and strong female protagonists. (Note: I use "strong" here in the sense that the characters are well-written and compelling, not to imply they're superheroes.) I'd also recommend it to those who like science fantasy. While the setting is largely fantasy, the world is set on a planet that's tidally locked, which is unusual and well done here.

I think the only part I found slow was at the very beginning, and that's not really a fault of the writing/plot - I understand completely why Davin did it, as it sets up a few key relationships - as much as it's my personal preference, as I tend not to enjoy prose with a child narrator. I mention this only to say that if you feel the same, KEEP READING! It's only one chapter from that POV and the rest is written from mature POVs.

Finally, one last note: I got a hard copy ARC and ordered the ebook. I would really recommend getting the hard copy if you like that kind of thing, as it's gorgeous.

Chris says

as a gay, i find it really difficult to enjoy lgbt-themed books. usually they're too sad, or hit too close to home, or too clearly written by a straight person. but on a weak-willed, mildly drunk night after an office party filled with too many heterosexuals, i caved and signed up to receive free copies of a bunch of lgbt books (and i re-downloaded tinder, but that's a whole different horror story), including this one.

i'm sure y'all can read, so i won't recap the summary, but i will say that the worldbuilding was a large part of what actually convinced me to read the book once i sobered up. the premise of thornfruit isn't particularly wild (and i mean this as a positive - there's no point in the book where i said, "this is off the fucking rails and i can't believe you expect me to just go with it," which is a trap i feel a lot of fantasy books fall into), and it all progresses very logically and easily. it's an easy book to read, which is certainly helped by the author's writing style - very clean and concise, not a lot of unnecessary detail. the author clearly has fleshed out this world, but doesn't dump in unnecessary facts just for the sake of it, and trusts her readers to read between the lines a little.

i enjoyed the characters, as well. neither of the main characters are caricatures or cliches, and both have interesting three-dimensional personality traits.

as for my usual warnings: there is a little internalized homophobia, and the implication of societal homophobia, but as the romance isn't resolved in this book (spoilers? but it's a series so idk what you expected), that wasn't focused on. however, if you're also gay and looking for a completely sexuality-based-drama-free reading experience, i would say that 99% of thornfruit avoids that.

all in all, i enjoyed reading it and i'll definitely try to read the sequel.

Haley says

actual rating: ★★★★★ ½

Siavahda says

Sometimes there are books that are hyped for months, that you hear about the moment the publishing contract is signed and anticipate for years before they're finally in your hands. And more often than not, in my experience, those books tend to be a let-down. (In fairness, it's hard not to be. Nothing can live up to *that* much hype.)

And sometimes there are quiet books, that seem to enter the world without a ripple, that you stumble upon by complete accident, that open up into jewels as you turn the pages.

Thornfruit is one of these latter books: I didn't hear about it before it was published, I wasn't anxiously waiting for its release - I didn't even have it recommended to me by a friend or one of the few book blogs I actually trust. I just happened upon it, with its beautifully elegant cover and its attention-grabbing blurb - and it was queer, too? *Clearly* something I had to check out.

And I'm so glad I did, because it's *wonderful*.

I don't want to spoil too much, so I won't talk about the plot. But Davin creates amazing characters - with an authentically diverse cast, which I was so grateful for (facial blindness! Ace rep! Non-white characters! And Alizhan reads as someone with autism or Asperger's to me, you can't convince me she's not on the spectrum, nope) - complicated, realistic, strong, clever, driven by very different and very human motivations. There were awkward moments! Do you have any idea how rare it is to see an awkward moment in fiction? It's as though writers forget that real people say or do the wrong thing sometimes, that conversations don't always flow as if scripted - but Davin absolutely doesn't forget. Not that these characters are *constantly* mis-stepping or anything like that - but they feel real enough to walk off the page.

And the world-building! It's intricate and interesting and *so cool*, and Davin never needs to info-dump the reader, just weaving in details of geography and culture so deftly you hardly realise you're absorbing them, until suddenly it feels as though not only could Alizhan and Ev walk *off* the page, but that *you* could walk *in*, too, if you wanted.

Look, what can I tell you? This is an absolute gem of a book, a hidden treasure I'm so glad I found, and I'm writing this because DAMN IT MORE PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS BOOK, but I'm in a rush because *I have to go grab the rest of the trilogy RIGHT NOW*. Davin works magic with words, and if you have any interest at all in fantastic world-building and morally grey characters and fascinating magic, if you want your girls fab and bold and brilliant, if you want a story with a queer romance that isn't about *queerness* but is instead about *adventure*, and *truths*, and *doing the right thing no matter how much it hurts* - then go buy this book already.

Seriously, what are you still doing here? *Go!*

Betty BoomBa says

4.75

Loved this story. Epic Fantasy, with a lovely and intriguing use of "magical" or paranormal abilities. It works well. Look out for lacemaking, I think this is a brilliant idea.

There are very few errors, which is excellent, and the story is well written and engaging. I like the two main characters and the romantic element is so well woven into their interactions that it slips into the story without diminishing the main story line.

This is not a romance so some might be disappointed, but as I said, the romantic element is there, and I will hope that at some point they will see a way over the obstacles placed before them.

If there is any flaw it is that sometimes (and not often) I just wanted the story to move a little faster, it veered towards a little repetition in the plot. But then it veered away again and all was well in the world.

As is often the case, some issues could have been overcome if characters talked to each other, but in many ways this was a part of the charm of the character. So although I wanted to say come on, just spill, another part of me thought no, these characters wouldn't do that, yet.

This is the first book in a series, so I have already bought the next book. There is a great deal of world building in book one, and it is all good, but I expect the action to speed up in book two now that we are aware of how the world works.

Highly recommended.

E says

Queer female leads and thief-spies and telepathy with face blindness and secret orphanages and everything about this book was wonderful! I love how everyone's stories ended up linked together, I love Ev's patience and Alizhan's impatience - they work so well together and they're baby queers in loooooove!! I'm excited to read the second book, and the third.

Nichole David says

Evidently my goal for the new year is reading books that have been on my to-read list, but I was too emotionally invested in liking to actually read them.

I loved this book so much. I fell in love with every character. I am ready to recommend it to everyone!

I'm looking forward to finishing the series as soon as possible.
