



Castle of Lies

Kiersi Burkhart

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Thelia isn't in line to inherit the crown, but she's been raised to take power however she can. She's been friends with Princess Corene her whole life, and she's scheming to marry Bayled, the heir to the throne. But her plans must change when an army of elves invades the kingdom. Thelia, her cousin Parsival, and Corene become trapped in the castle. An elf warrior, Sapphire, may be Thelia's only hope of escape, but Sapphire has plans of their own. Meanwhile, an ancient magic is awakening within the castle, with the power to destroy the whole kingdom. Can Thelia find a way to protect her future--and her life?

Castle of Lies Details

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From Reader Review Castle of Lies for online ebook

Zoë says

I received a copy from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Castle of Lies is a young adult high fantasy story that involves themes of political intrigue, romance, and magic. In a lot of ways, *Castle of Lies* was unexpected and even surprised me. But unfortunately, I found a lot of flaws with this book that could have largely been avoided with more editing.?

CW: incest, abuse, violence/gore, questionable LGBTQ+ rep.??

Plot & Setting?

This story seemed to want to go too many places at once. On the one hand, this is a political intrigue story. The Holy Kingdom is ruled by a drunkard king who basically bankrupted the whole country. His daughter, Corene, is of marriagable age, but his ward, Bayled, has been promised the throne. Thelia is from a family of nobles, but she grew up alongside princess Corene. Thelia was raised to be a warrior and conspirer by her mother - believing that the one purpose of her life is to become Queen. Bayled seems the perfect path to the throne. But everything gets thrown into chaos when the King reveals he has promised Corene's hand to a Southern Lord to secure their alliance.?

On the other hand, we have the element of the elves and magic. Sapphire is an elf recently promoted to an elite elven fighting group. Their mission is to invade the Holy Kingdom and gain control over an out-of-control wellspring of magic that the humans are completely unaware of.

?Once the elves make it to the Holy Kingdom, the storyline of who will be king/queen is largely forgotten about, and a few major questions I had were left unanswered. One of which was about the magic problem in the Holy Kingdom: why was the magic overflowing? Additionally, Corene's engagement to the Southern Lord is a plot point that is completely abandoned, despite the many unanswered questions and contradictions there were.

Characters

?The characters in this story I have very mixed feelings about. Honestly? This read a lot like a messed up fantasy version of Love Island. All of the characters are a little bit trashy - and not in a way that's wholly entertaining. Because of the political conspiring, none of them really trust each other. Towards the end of the story, they begin to build some trust, but it wasn't quite enough to make up for rest.

➤ **Thelia** - The main character and one of the POV characters. She is definitely fits in the “badass tough girl” fantasy trope. She was trained in martial arts by her mother, but she was also abused by her mother and other members of her family. Despite that, her mother’s training defines her life, and she strives to become queen one day.?

➤ **Corene** - The princess. Corene and Thelia grew up together, and are practically sisters. But when the story starts, Thelia absolutely hates her guts because of an unspeakable thing Corene did to Thelia. I honestly thought Corene was the most pointless character. Of all the characters, she manipulates and uses people the most. But she also sees the least development, and a lot of what she does is left without motivation or

explanation.?

► **Bayled** - Originally from a kingdom to the North, Bayled's parents were emissaries to the Holy Kingdom. When they died, the King took Bayled under his wing as his ward. Because of the King's favor toward Bayled, he has been promised to inherit the throne. Bayled grew up with Thelia and Corene, and is madly in love with Corene. Honestly... Bayled was the most clueless of all the characters. He wasn't my least favorite, but I really wanted to slap him at times - He is entirely unaware of the way Corene and Thelia manipulate him.?

► **Parsifal** - Parsifal is from a family of nobles left bankrupt by the King's spending. Parsifal is described as disfigured, and uses his sense of humor about his own looks to get his way with others in court. Parsifal struck me a little bit as a cheap Tyrion knock-off - he is sexually wanton, drinks too much, and makes people laugh. He also deals in secrets, and uses people's misconceptions about him to his advantage. Of all the characters, I thought Parsifal was the most interesting, and sees the most development throughout the story.?

► **Sapphire** - An elf, and the one elvish POV character. Sapphire is non-binary - the elves get the choice to choose their gender at a certain age, and Sapphire never felt completely right as a man or woman. I thought this was an interesting concept that wasn't explored enough. Of all the elves, Sapphire is the most genuine and compassionate - but at some points their naïveté got on my nerves. Their relationship with Thelia and Parsifal is a key part to the story.

Romance?

Castle of Lies makes a genuine attempt at LGBTQ+ representation, which we definitely need more of in high fantasy. However, I don't think it was completely handled the right way. (I am not a part of the LGBTQ+ community, however, so please correct me if I'm wrong about any of this.)

?There is a bi character, a non-binary character, and a polyamorous relationship. The bi character unfortunately is written into the stereotype of bi people being "promiscuous" or "perverse". They don't really challenge this problem in the story. As for the polyamorous relationship... there is just a huge part of it that really bothered me, that I can't really explain without spoiling the story.

?Sapphire is the non-binary character, and I found the concept of this really interesting. However, it isn't really developed in the story. The author definitely could have used this character as a platform, and I think that opportunity was missed.?

Moving away from the LGBTQ+ aspect, there was a particular romance in the story that I found really problematic. Two of the characters that get involved with each other are cousins. Okay, I guess you could argue that in a medieval setting, getting involved with your cousin wasn't so strange. However, we are in 2018 - do we really need to be writing *fantasy* stories where cousins love each other?? I was also disappointed because without the aspect of the characters being cousins, this romance would have been one of the highlights of the story for me.

Writing?

The writing was a big miss for me. There was a lot of potential, but some serious, heavy editing was needed.?One of the major problems was the dialogue. In some parts it's just... so cheesy and cringe-worthy. One of the things I hated the most was the fact the characters refer to their parents as "Mommy/Mom" or "Dad/Daddy". Maybe this is very nit-picky of me, but it just felt... so wrong in this setting.?

"I sit across from Daddy, who ignores me even though he hasn't seen me all week."

?There are also some really bizarre and at times disgusting analogies for certain situations. One example is when one character kisses another, making someone else jealous. The character who kissed uses this sentence to describe their guilt:?

"I am the shit and piss overflowing in the poop garden."

?(Poop garden being the castle's sewer system.) Like.... okay?? Is this visual necessary?? There were numerous instances of very weird analogies like this, and I don't understand their purpose. Are we supposed to laugh? Supposed to feel disgusted? I wasn't sure whether the author wanted us to take the story seriously in instances like this.?

At other times, the vivid descriptions worked really well, such as this instance at the beginning, where Thelia's hatred of Corene is being established for the reader:?

"Corene isn't made of queen material - never has been. And illustrating my point: she can't even hold her liquor. She worms across her bed in her silk nightgown, spilling wine across the blankets."?

This description makes me feel kind of gross - but in a good way because Corene is so miserable.

Conclusions?

I think this story had some solid bones. But covering that are a lot of flaws - it's just unfortunate it wasn't edited a little better. I liked the political intrigue, I liked the magic. Heck, I even liked how miserable and trashy the characters were. Some of the characters did see some decent development throughout the story, which I appreciated too. Unfortunately, the things I liked just were enough to outweigh what I didn't like. I don't know if I would continue this series, but I could see myself giving this author another try in the future.?

Review also posted on my blog!

Claudie Arseneault says

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

Book tw: mentions and threats of rape, violence, disfigurement, anti ace/aro/sex work content, incest (cousins), alcoholism and generally lots of drinking, explicit sex.

I asked for it because YA castle intrigues with queer teenagers sounded amazing. I was told one character

was demisexual (Thelia) so I was super excited to see how that'd play out.

Unfortunately, this book doesn't deliver on ... pretty much everything? It's not *awful*, but there was really very little to keep me interested. 'Court intrigues' here is synonymous with 'petty teenage romance plots', and it's hard to really dig these characters when they have so little depth. They eventually develop a bit of it, especially Bayled who grows from the most bland love interest into an actual person, but that's ... it. I guess if CASTLE OF LIES was just very standard fantasy tropes mixed with undeveloped characters, I might have given it three stars.

I wish that was it, though, but apart from the polyamory, so much of the representation within CASTLE OF LIES is ... let's go with lackluster. The nonbinary character is, of course, the non-human one (the elf). Parsifal hits so many Promiscuous Bisexual flags it's not even funny, and he's only beautiful when people see 'past' his disfigurement. The elves as a whole are exotified constantly and frequently felt like Native caricatures.

Then there's Thelia, the demisexual character. I'll keep this short. The ace was of course the most manipulative of them and was described as 'cold' and 'heartless' by others. Yikes. In the first half of the novel, Thelia is established as a generally sex averse person, with the exception of the Baron, with whom she developed attraction. It's a Big Deal that he was the one she felt comfortable kissing. That was all fine, but the characterization flies out the window to ham-fist sexual encounters with Sapphire first (a kiss), then Parsifal (daily sex for comfort!! with her cousin!). Thelia never reflects on how different this is from previous experiences, never questions anything, and it's essentially like she was never previously described as anything close to demisexual or sex averse. It was incredibly off putting to have her identity vanish like this. It read like demisexual people just ... become allosexual, and like sex averseness or sex repulsion are only present when sexual attraction is absent. While I can imagine several stories where this could be respectfully explored, CASTLE OF LIES unfolds without any introspection, except perhaps that Thelia is a better person now that she loves and has sex. Good message there. /sarcasm

Overall, CASTLE OF LIES was a bust on all accounts for me, and I'm really disappointed for all the lost potential.

Samm | Sassenach the Book Wizard says

ho shit dat cover...

Pamela Stennett says

<https://iwriteinbooks.wordpress.com/2...>

Backstabbing, plotting, sword wielding, and magic abound in Castle of Lies, Kiersi Burkhart's forthcoming Young Adult fantasy adventure. Told through four points of view, the story is a race against time that gracefully weaves in elements of acceptance, understanding, and empathy.

It took me a little bit to get into this story (I'll explain why in a minute) but the ride was definitely worth the rocky start.

The start of the book is a little disjointed. The story flips through slightly too many points of view, though

that's only really a problem in the beginning. By the end, the flipping back and forth creates a far more well-rounded story.

The other downside, for me, was that most of the characters were fairly unlikable. The four main story tellers had my heart but everyone else was pretty horrible. I suppose, in a sense, that made cheering for the protagonists that much more likely.

All of that said, the positives, outweighed the negatives. There was a strong theme of forgiveness on a larger scale. Yes, there was some personal amend making but the element that captured my heart sat squarely in macro redemption. In a moments when we are so completely incapacitated by large swaths of Hate for entire populations, Burkhart's ability to see goodness in our "enemies" warmed my little soul.

Kylie says

So I didn't really enjoy this one unfortunately. It took me forever to read because it just didn't capture my attention at all. I didn't feel connected to any of the characters at any point in the story. I almost DNFed it but pushed through.

I felt like this book had a lot of promise, but just didn't do much. I liked the take on the elves being the "evil" and keeping the humans prisoner in the castle. I didn't like all of the POVs (I think there were at least 5). It would switch POVs in the same scene so I would forget who I was reading because several of them felt almost like the same person.

The thing that bothered me the most was the elf whose POV we get (Sapphire) has not decided whether to be a male or female, so is referred to as "they" or "them." It was very confusing when, for example, it said "they jumped out the window" but it was only Sapphire. It made any scene with Sapphire in it so hard to read.

Several of the characters were very cruel to the point where I dreaded any scene they were in. Also, there are cousins who are in love which is weird.

I am assuming from the ending that this book is the first in a series, and unfortunately I don't think I will be continuing on.

Francis says

ARC provided by Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

As usual I needed time to get into the story, especially since Castle of Lies is one that involves an entirely new world and is told from the perspective of four different characters: Thelia, Parsifal, Bayled and Sapphire. We follow the characters as they are faced with an evil overtaking by elves who want to purge the city from all Magic. Unfortunately I never managed to immerse myself completely. A multitude of different plots and ruses were wound together and there was too much going on at the same time. It seemed overly complicated in setup, but lacked in depth. A very strange paradox of you ask me.

In my opinion this novel was trying too hard to resemble great series like Game of Thrones and Throne of Glass, but it never even got close to reaching that level. Especially since two of the characters that told the story were constantly in the same place. This added only confusion as to who was speaking at the time, especially with so many changes in point of view. Additionally, none of the characters got enough page time to truly develop them properly. This left them flat and cliché and made the story unimaginative.

Finally there was the involvement of the elf Sapphire, who was constantly referred to as 'them' instead of

'him' or 'her'. Apparently, in a strange reference to gender neutrality, this elf never choose whether it was male or female and therefore had to be referred to as 'them'. It was very difficult to wrap my mind around the fact that it was still just one person, not more as the plural 'them' would suggest. Also, why the strange love triangle between Thelia, Parsifal and Sapphire? Completely unnecessary.

This story could have been great, unfortunately it wasn't in my opinion.

Sally Maxwell says

Thank you to Lerner Publishing Group for the arc of this book.

I loved it, it held me from the get go, such a refreshing take on Elves and Magic.

It was amazing to read how all the characters developed, and how they each had them own point of views told in the book,

Olivia Wildenstein says

A fantasy reminiscent of Game of Thrones. Although the characters are unlikeable, they are some of the most interesting I've read.

Kaya says

3 stars!

This author shows a LOT of promise! The idea for this is so unique, and I was shocked by a few of the plot twists. However, while I was surprised by a few, most of the twists left something to be desired. The ending was a bit predictable which was rather disappointing. That said, I was so interested I read this in one sitting!

I also think that the character development could have been done a bit better. I enjoyed a lot of the characters themselves but never really felt a connection. I loved the world, it was amazing! But the characters didn't quite fit.

I haven't read many books like this but it shares a tiny bit of similarities to Three Dark Crowns!

I received an e-ARC in exchange for an honest review!

Petra says

Arc provided by NetGalley

Review to come once I force my lazy ass into writing one

Izzie says

Full review to come!

Elizabeth says

I received a free arc of this from NetGalley.

It sounded very intriguing, but ultimately I was very disappointed with the directions this book went. And it just ... wasn't really that great in general either. Honestly I would probably rate this 1.5/5 stars if I could.

The plot synopsis sounds so intriguing. But don't expect any legitimate court intrigue. Nope, in this story, the plot is ham-fisted romance with some half-hearted, pedestrian level political scheming and a dash of basic fantasy tropes.

Let's just get into some of the basics:

+ The Characters: They're just not well-developed; it's only been a few days and I can barely remember most of their names. And there's too many of them (and too many POVs) to have enough time to dig into all of them. Some of the characters are hardly developed at all. The four POVs we see are Thelia (cousin to the princess, Corene), Parsifal (Thelia's cousin, not related to Corene), Bayled (Corene's love interest-ish), and Sapphire (a non-binary elf). Thelia is scheming (but secretly has a ~good heart~), Parsifal is a mouthy cad, Bayled is Basic Bland Male Love Interest (tm), and Sapphire is warrior conflicted between their feelings for duty and the humans they meet. And that's it. They're never developed beyond that. Forget about Corene -- she ends up being possibly the worst person, but we never see her POV and her actions are just never explained at all. There's some minor characters like the King, Thelia's brother, Nul (Corene's other LI), but they're completely forgettable. They don't contribute anything.

+ The Representation: So you've got Parsifal, who's bisexual (and runs afoul of the Depraved Bisexual trope because sure, why not). And then you've got Sapphire, who is non-binary. Their gender identity is explored a tiny bit in the beginning, but that's all. Maybe possibly Thelia is bi/pan, but that's never touched upon at all in any regard.

+ The Relationships: Oh, boy. Corene/Bayled is as boring as you can get. Corene/Nul is never explained, never expanded upon, and I honestly don't know why this relationship exists other than to show how good and pure Bayled is and how Corene is just a ~bitch for playing with his feelings. And then there's Thelia/Parsifal+Sapphire. Look, I don't like poly relationships in fiction. I just don't. I can't relate and I've only ever seen it done once in a way that didn't seem forced. Parsifal has been in love with Thelia since forever, but Thelia isn't interested at all -- until 2/3 of the way through the book she decides Parsifal is her true love (and of course they have fantastic chemistry and everything is magical). Plus there's the factor of Sapphire, who has insta-love with Parsifal (though the author did set up the feelings between Sapphire and Thelia). Don't worry though, Thelia/Parsifal+Sapphire is all handwaved with the explanation that it's "all the magic" that's making them attracted to each other. Nevermind that no one else is affected by all of this ... we're just supposed to expect that feelings can be changed/turned on with the flip of a switch.

+ The Writing: It's fine from a technical standpoint. I felt like seeing medieval-ish characters saying "mom" and "dad/daddy" sounded weird, especially since the characters aren't children. It just felt out of place.

+ The Overall Plot: I mean ... nothing really happens. Thelia wants to rule the kingdom, so she tries her darndest to make it happen. But her plans are spoiled by the elves attacking because ... there's too much magic in the human world. The how or why of this is never explained. So the King decides to send Bayled and future-son-in-law Nul to go fight the elves. But of course, Nul wants to kill Bayled (because ... I don't know why? It's never explained). The elves successfully attack, they capture the kingdom and take everyone prisoner ... yeah, we've seen this all before.

The final verdict: There's nothing here in this book that's new or groundbreaking. The LGBTQ representation is questionable. Characters aren't fleshed out (or particularly likeable), motives are never developed in any natural way (if at all), and the plot is just such standard paint-by-the-numbers high fantasy fare. It's a shame, because I do think some of the concepts introduced are interesting (like the goddess and her priestess), but of course none of that is ever expanded upon or explained at all. This sounded like an interesting story, but nothing interesting ever happens.

Sarah says

I received this copy from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Fantasy is not one of my favorite genres. When I do read fantasy though, I want to be transported. I want to feel like I could just get up and buy a plane ticket to the places in the book.

World building is very important.

This book however, didn't have much world building at all. Come to think of it, this book didn't even feel like a fantasy. Sure, there was magic and elves but... really this book could be classified as a historical fiction. It felt like it was set in medieval times.

One thing that I found really threw off the fantasy vibe was how the characters called their parents dad/daddy or mom/mommy. It felt too contemporary for this book.

As for the characters, I didn't really connect with any of them, they seemed aloof and not personable.

The romance in the book was strange (not because of the genders but because of the other thing... I'd say what it is but I'm trying to make this spoiler free), I'd never come across that situation in a book before so it was really... weird. Also some of the love interests were cousins, sorry but, ew!

Some things I did like about this book was the one fight scene between Thelia and Sapphire, the author did the elf's agility justice (I'm a Tolkien nerd and his elves are the ones I judge all other fictional elves by).

Another thing I liked was how the author handled the ancient magic thing mentioned in the blurb, it was creative (again, sorry how vague this is, but I refuse to spoil!).

All in all, I didn't hate this book, but I didn't enjoy it much either. The author could have done better, I feel like she only scratched the surface of the world she created and she should have dug deeper for the book.

Dana-Adriana B. says

I found a bit hard to remember all the names and the relationships between the characters. The plot was nice, fantasy - romance.

Thank you Netgalley for this book.

Tara ? says

ARC kindly provided via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review

The synopsis for Castle of Lies intrigued me, I had such high hopes for this book yet I was left feeling indifferent about it all. I had no connection with any of the characters and even though the story had twists and turns galore I struggled to push through to the end.
