



Brood of Bones

A.E. Marling

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Cursed by constant sleepiness, Enchantress Hiresha has no time to marry and raise a family. From virgin to grandmother, all the women in her city are in their last trimester, power drained by a lurking sorcerer. Only the Lord of the Feast, a dangerous yet charming illusionist, is uncivilized enough to help.

Brood of Bones Details

Date : Published October 17th 2011 (first published September 28th 2011)

ISBN : 9780984022311

Author : A.E. Marling

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Magic, Fiction

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From Reader Review *Brood of Bones* for online ebook

Kelli Musser says

I stumbled upon this completely by happy accident, via Twitter...nd I'm extremely happy I did. As a lifelong fantasy reader, I found myself bereft and sad in between books from current authors I enjoyed. I decided a new author would be worth a try.

Trust me, its worth the read.

The world of the Enchantress Hiresha is at once similiar yet astonishly different from your 'standard' fantasy world. Magic in this realm cannot be used in the waking world - which puts the narcoleptic Hiresha at a distinct advantage. The fact that Enchantresses use laboratories and gemstones in their work pushes it remarkably close to the edge of science fiction, which I found a nice change.

Poor Hiresha, while incredibly powerful, finds herself lonely at times for the idea of the family she dreams of - pushed rather rudely into her face by the sudden unexplained pregnancy of every woman over 12 in her hometown of Morimound. I found it rather interesting to see how the different factions reacted to the 'divine' pregnancies, actually. Any road, Hiresha must find out what caused all of these pregnancies, and soon, or the city would be in the grip of whatever brought them about.

While some reviewers complained about Hiresha's acerbic nature, I found it rather refreshing to have a flawed heroine instead of a perfect one. Her constant questioning of herself and her sometimes brittle treatment of her servants show a deeper self-conciuousness than you would expect in a fantasy heroine.

Small warning that it does get a bit bloody and brutal towards the end, but that is fairly part and parcel in good fantasy.

Also, Kudos for being a fantasy author who dares to write and exclude elves.

Carol. says

“I never learned the knack for waking. Consciousness hung over me like a sodden rag, weighing on my eyelids and muffling my ears, yet even my stifled senses did not spare me the indignity of hearing my name screamed across a public place.”

Sounds like me...

Brood of Bones is the first in a series about Hiresha, an expert in jewel enchantment and sufferer of severe narcolepsy. She has journeyed back to her hometown, Morimound, at the request of the Siri the Flawless, city arbiter. Accompanying Hiresha are her protector, the Spellsword Deepmand, and her servant, Maid Janny. The tale begins as their carriage travels through a city bazaar where they discover Siri is imprisoned—and pregnant—at seventy. Soon Hiresha realizes every woman she sees appears to be pregnant. As she works through her own envy and regret, she investigates the puzzle of the pregnant women of Moribound. Could the city be facing the foretold “Seventh Flood” of disaster? Protecting the women and

Moribound may mean an alliance with forbidden magic—and the malevolent Feasters.

It is hard to review a single book in a series, especially from a beginning author, as each book ends up being compared to the series development as much as the genre in general. I enjoyed *Brood of Bones*, A.E. Marling's first novel, but I suspect that my enjoyment was related more to the character and world background than the story. That sounds as if I'm damning it with faint praise, but truly, it is because I'm comparing it to two of his other books which were quite wonderful in story and imagery. Some time ago, Marling offered me a reviewer's copy of Fox's *Bride*. I enjoyed it a great deal, and ended up with two other of his books in the series, *Brood of Bones* (free on Amazon at the moment) and *Dream Storm Sea*. So I approached this book looking to fill in the history of Enchantress Hiresha. The storyline centering on a plague of pregnancies, and Hiresha's own emotional conundrums held less resonance for me.

The fantasy setting Marling has created has pleasantly unusual—but constrained—magic systems. Most of Hiresha's magic takes place in a dream-laboratory, where her skills there allow her recreate observations and further analyze people's reactions, much as a detective might replay an interview tape. I enjoyed the combination of reasoning and magic as an approach to problem-solving. In terms of world-building, not much in the world is explained outright, but rather pieced together as one reads. It occasionally gives the sense that one might have dropped into the middle of a series, with the fallout of earlier events still resonating and relationships already in place. As I'm rather fond of the immersion school of world-building, I didn't mind, but it may prove frustrating to those who prefer a more explicit style. On the bonus side, it means an absence of "as you know..." type explanatory conversations.

I find Hiresha an extremely interesting heroine, and look forward to reading more about her story and her unusual magic. One of Marling's strengths is characterization, but characters here feel more underdeveloped compared to his normal high standard. Initially, it felt as if the descriptive flourishes were too frequent and contradictory, making Hiresha sound more than a tad over-dramatic and mercurial. It could be, however, that it was partially an issue of her immaturity. While it was pleasant to have some of Hiresha's story filled in, particularly an eventful meeting with a Feaster, I found her thoughts tended to be repetitive. So young! So over-confident! So certain in her morality, so focused on her thwarted dreams and jealousy for those who can achieve the 'normal' instead of accepting and embracing herself.

As always, I love the flourishes of humor throughout the story:

"Morimound's second priest, Salkant of the Fate Weaver, I believed, had slunk behind me in a manner most discourteous. If one had the habit of sneaking up on people then bells tied to one's feet would be a matter of simple courtesy."

Dialogue with the Lord of the Feast was particularly amusing, and I confess that I mostly read for their interactions and developing connection. Their dialogue bears a pleasing similarity to a Benedict-Beatrice dynamic, with Maid Janny playing a bawdy Dogberry-type (*Much Ado About Nothing*).

"He raised his voice:and said, 'And you needn't wear all those ridiculous gowns.'

'Excuse me?'...

'Your gowns are overdone. And I say that as a man with rubies on his shoes.'

'I have never been so offended!'

'I am sorry,' he said, 'to hear it. You should have been offended more often.'

'Well! Those are spinels on your shoes, not rubies.'"

Overall, I'd recommend consideration of it if you are a fan of unusual fantasy, or looking to fill more blanks

in Hiresha's world. If you are just starting in the world, I'm very fond of Fox's Bride and Dream Storm Sea.

Anzu The Great Destroyer says

Weird O_O pregnant women freak me out. But it's an interesting book, you should give it a try.

Free today*, 13th May 2013, on Amazon. Get it here.

**might still be free after this date - give it a try and see*

Kristi says

I was expecting there to be more romance in this, but Hiresha's gowns made it a little impractical. She has a strange relationship with Tethiel that i hope to see further developed in the next book, but this was more about Hiresha coming to terms with her past and coming out of her laboratory into the real world. Just because she sleeps a lot doesn't mean that she isn't a powerful enchantress capable of helping the less fortunate and solving a compelling mystery. I'll admit, i guessed wrong about who the culprit was (which is rather unusual for me), but clues were there. The setting is beautiful and scorching and Tethiel is tortured and (hopefully) redeemable. Hiresha is a bit naive and definitely a dreamer but i think she's grown up a lot.

Elsbeth says

I am finding this book hard to review.

The writing was good, the story was interesting its just that I found the main character an asshole.

In the beginning of the book you find out that before she was this all powerful, and rich enchantress she was poor. As well as being poor she was made fun of due to her narcolepsy, and made to feel not quite worthy of a normal life.

You would think this would have had some sort of lasting effect when she came into power. She could have taken that childhood, and have been bitter about it. Grown up to be a complete douche bag. She could have used her past and seen how not to treat people. She could have been a good person, and try not to stoop to the level of her tormentors.

I don't know what the author was thinking at this point, cause at first you think she went the compassionate route. This is not the case, she is a selfish child that wants her way and thinks others deserve to give it to her. She keeps putting down her maid, treating her less than a person. She takes a family heirloom from her servant, and tells him she will buy a new one with her gold. She keeps threatening to fire her guard for doing his job, and not doing what she tells him too.

She is a spoiled, petulant child, and I didn't like her very much.

So in saying all this, the main character ruined the book for me.

Phil Leader says

I got this book because I wanted to read some of Marling's work and it seemed a good starting point. I downloaded it at the same time as a lot of other works, intending just to skim the first chapter of each and then decide which one I was going to read.

I read the first part of this novel and I was hooked. The story unfolds really well and there is real suspense. The writing is a joy to read and the descriptions of the world are really evocative.

The story revolves around Elder Enchantress Hiresha who having become a powerful practitioner of magic is requested to return to her home town. There she quickly realises that something is very wrong - all the women are pregnant, and all are due around the same time. Clearly this is not normal, but what is the cause and why has it happened?

Hiresha must unravel the threads to work out what is going on and exactly what the threat to the town is. Perhaps the pregnancies are the divine work of a god, but for what purpose? Or perhaps the dark Lord of the Feast is involved so that he may dine on the fears of the population in the night? Hiresha must find the truth - and quickly - and along the way she will make both questionable alliances and bitter enemies. But who can really be trusted when the fate of the city is at stake?

The world is immersive, and Marling does well to convey just enough information to ensure the reader is not overwhelmed by some of the stranger aspects of his world. I have read other (more well known) authors who struggle in this regard. The characterisations are good, particularly impressive is Hiresha who despite her mastery of magic is very human, with many faults and failings which she must overcome during the course of the story. The supporting characters are also well drawn and have a depth. There is a real impression that they are leading their own lives outside of the story.

The story itself is mainly a fantasy 'whodunnit' with Hiresha gathering evidence and suspects, as well as finding out exactly what the pregnancies entail. The main twist is that she suffers from a form of narcolepsy and finds it hard to keep awake - and when awake she is not very perceptive. But when sleeps she is able to perform her magic and analyse what she has seen while awake.

Once the culprit is revealed, the ending is hard to put down as Hiresha has put herself - and possibly the whole town - in grave danger in order to find out the truth. The final part of the story is a breathtaking battle as powerful forces fight over the fate of the town.

I really could not stop reading this book. I looked forward to picking it up and was reluctant to put it down. The story is really very compelling and despite having a lot of swords and sorcery in it, this does not fall into any of the well trodden paths of fantasy. The writing moves the story on at a good pace and is full of fantastic descriptions and little details that really bring the world alive.

I rate this book very highly. I know it is only January but already I feel that this is easily one of the best books I will read this year. Very highly recommended.

A.E. Marling says

A story without fantasy is like a holiday without fireworks.

The fantasy genre has always lit my eyes with wonder, whisking me away to lands of great frights and greater friendships. I knew since my sophomore year in high school that I loved writing tales crackling with magic, and that passion only grew into a relentless pursuit of the craft of storytelling. I would like to thank my faithful readers, who have always encouraged me. I have learned so much from you. The praise directed toward this novel must also be yours.

I am also indebted beyond measure to my illustrator, a Russian grandmaster of Adobe Photoshop, whom I would trek through frozen wastes and quarrelsome blizzards to work with again. Her portrayal of Enchantress Hiresha is awesome on stilts.

Most of all, my thoughts and best wishes go to the Idiopathic Hypersomnia support group. The condition steals away lives with a crushing weight of sleep, and those who must endure it are just as much heroes as the story's protagonist.

To those considering reading *Brood of Bones*, I can only wish you half the fun I had writing it. Any more than fifty percent might cause an acute hemorrhage of bliss.

M.L. Chesley says

This is a well crafted, intellectual piece of High Fantasy. I feel that my review might clash with the intellect level with which it was written. A. E. Marling has created a very unique fantasy world, at least from my viewpoint, and well thought out characters.

Elder Enchantress Hiresha is a powerful magic user, but with many flaws. The largest being her inability to live in the waking world. She has been gifted twelve gowns and her station requires she wears them all. That alone would make me exhausted, but what causes her drowsiness is not the physical activity, but the magic.

The Lord of the Feast is a very interesting chap and I could see he and Hiresha marrying. (If he were not a damned being.) His cryptic humor as he aids the Elder Enchantress helped keep the story moving forward.

I really enjoyed this book. I can't give too many details without giving the entire story away, as much as I would like to prattle on about it. The world was well thought out, the characters were well rounded and flawed deeply. The story itself flowed well and progressed at a decent pace. Most stories you read where a lot of sleep is involved are usually boring, but Marling presents Hiresha's problem with wakefulness in an interesting manner without putting the reader to sleep as well.

Did I mention I LOVE the cover?

Very clean, well written, highly intellectual.

Ariel says

The Good

The writing style is excellent. Many times, especially with fantasy, there can be a tendency for the words to get in the way of the story. Thankfully, Marling avoids this. Some of the word choices, while a bit strange, became the way I connected with the main character, Hiresha.

I also appreciated how the romance in the story was handled. To be frank, you aren't slapped in the face with a lovesick insufferable walnut. It's nice. I enjoyed it.

The most notable, and my personal favorite, part about *Brood of Bones* is how magic works. It's never all explained in an 'exposition break,' but Hiresha comments enough about it on and off throughout the story that I could pick it up, understand its strengths and failings, and then FALL IN LOVE WITH IT.

The Meh

Meh, instead of bad. The main character, Hiresha, is most certainly not the easiest to understand at first, which is strange, considering she's the main character. She's overly formal yet tactless. Think corduroy tuxedo. It was about halfway through the story before I started to really appreciate her. Having finished the story, I appreciate a protagonist who has definite character flaws, yet remains sympathetic.

A solid 4.5

Overall, I liked the book a great deal and will *definitely* be picking up the other books in the series. The main character is definitely a different flavor than a lot of other fantasy novels, and while it may be initially off putting, sticking with the story is definitely worth it.

Beth says

I've been interested in reading some self-published books recently, but wasn't keen enough on the hunt, or confident enough in its success, to brave the wilds of the Kindle freebie woods myself. Luckily here comes Carol with a nicely positive review of A.E. Marling's *Fox's Bride* to lead me to this first book about Enchantress Hiresha.

The blurb will give you a pretty good idea of the basic plot of the book, so here are a couple of impressions.

Hiresha is a really interesting character. Her disability, which seems like a severe form of narcolepsy, makes her muzzy when she's awake, lucid when she's in the magic laboratory she inhabits in her dreams. She has problems dealing with normal human interactions, and tends to describe her emotional instincts in purely physiological terms like sweat or a rapidly beating heart.

Her attendants, Spellword Deepmand and Maid Janny, get scenes that show their affection for and frustrations with Hiresha, and Janny is particularly good for a laugh. Hiresha's potential love interest supplied much of the emotional heft of the book, and I'd like to see more of him.

The descriptions are quite vivid at times, especially Hiresha's gowns and the magical gems. I didn't get anywhere near as good of a picture of the world at large or even the particular society Hiresha belongs to--it has both religion and magic, for example, but how either affects the average person (aside from what's necessary to the plot) isn't made clear. Things like that could have been filled out with more detail without bogging the pace down, I think.

The story's a hybrid of horror, mystery and dark fantasy, and the mix came across well. The villain was one-note in his villainy but his magic was interesting (and gross). The pace of the first 3/4 of the book was

somewhat languid, and maybe a bit repetitive--notably in talking about wombs every few paragraphs. I had no problem with the pacing overall, though. The mystery and the character beats were more than intriguing enough to keep me reading, and there were some nice big splashy action scenes at the end!

Definitely better than expected, though I'm hard pressed to think of a single person on my friends list I'd unreservedly recommend it to.

Kelsey says

Brood of Bones is worth reading for its unique characters, world, and storytelling, but ultimately it's pleasant, not wowing.

The main character Hiresha is like a magical Lisbeth Salander. Both Hiresha and Lisbeth live in their own detached realities. They see people around them as illogical or inferior. They feel no compulsion for human interaction, and when they do seek companionship, they struggle to connect to others. They are also extremely powerful: Lisbeth can hack into any computer system with a flick of her wrist and Hiresha can do amazing enchantments in the laboratory in her dreams, including reliving every sight and sound of conversations, ensorcelling gems, and performing major surgery on herself and others.

Except Lisbeth is a Swedish gothic genius with Asperger syndrome and Hiresha is an enchantress who can barely fight off sleep, yet whose magic can only be done in slumber.

In *Brood of Bones*, Hiresha tries to figure out how every woman in the city has suddenly become pregnant, told in her own words. The "brood of bones" refers to the fetuses being not altogether human. Helping her are a collection of rich, flawed characters: the sarcastic and bawdy maid Janny (makes me laugh every time!), the dedicated guard Deepmand, and the disturbed, disturbing, and oddly tender Tethial.

The novel is as much mystery as fantasy, as Hiresha sifts through clues and interrogates suspects. There's also a little romance, though it takes her a long time to recognize it. It's not that she's unfeeling: she experiences sorrow, horror, and guilt at the fate of the pregnant women. She just calculates the fluttering of her pulse in beats per minute and notes her sweaty palms as a need to rehydrate.

Marling did an excellent job with his protagonist. Hiresha was at times frustrating and hilarious. I laughed out loud at the dry wit of the writing. An example:

Regretfully, said goddess had yet to provide any clue as to how I could help [one pregnant woman] and the other thousands. If I but knew how a letter might reach the Fate Weaver's cavern palace at the center of the world, then I would have written a stern complaint.

And another:

"I fell asleep with my throat cut. I am a professional."

At other times, I wanted to tear out my hair as she misinterpreted what was obvious to a normal person. Here is Marling's strength: he built an absolutely convincing and intact character. Never once did I feel like I stepped outside her head. In the end I liked her, but as with Lisbeth, she would not be my BFF in real life.

In addition, the world is enchanting and distinctive. Marling always shows instead of tells, again as if you were seeing the world through Hiresha's eyes. She would not recite the encyclopedic entry for each god or type of magic but merely interact with the priests and enchanters as she goes about her work. The gods and magics are definitely unique, as are little details about the city: architecture, history, customs, an individual's habits. An excellent example is how Marling uses gems. Hiresha is fascinated with them, but instead of the typical red rubies and green emeralds, she takes us from ametrine to zircon. There are diamonds of all different shades and both scientific and mythic explanations for the colors. Hiresha designs geometries for gem cuts and evaluates a stone's weight and refractive index within her dream laboratory. The details are not interesting flare, difference for difference's sake; they add meaning to the story and make everything real. Marling knows what he's talking about, and you can't help falling headfirst into his world.

In fact, I would particularly recommend this book to aspiring fantasy authors. One can learn from his world- and character-building. No knock-offs here.

To finish up... The beginning was slow, but it got more gripping over time. The mystery part of the plot seemed chunky. I'm not a fan of otherworldly characters dropping in with half-clues to nudge the detective along. Still, it may make this a good crossover novel for mystery-readers.

I'd be interested to read another book by Marling, preferably not a sequel. A second novel from Hiresha's perspective might be tough, but I'd love to see how he crafts his next creative character and the world she or he inhabits.

Christopher Kellen says

Brood of Bones is the story of Hiresha, an enchantress with what appears to be narcolepsy. However, instead of treating this with humor (as so many works do), Mr. Marling treats it with the utmost seriousness. In fact, for Hiresha, it's actually an advantage in her line of work — but I won't go into any more detail so as to avoid spoilers.

In the past two months, I have undertaken to read five different books, and have finished none of them. With some of them I barely made it past the first few pages; with others, I read halfway through and bogged down in the middle. I've been finding it harder and harder lately to finish something that I just don't like.

It took less than ten pages to draw me into Hiresha's story, and once I was drawn in, I didn't stop reading until I was forced to by outside influence — and then I went back as soon as humanly possible to find out how it ended.

Mr. Marling's characters are deep, interesting and flawed. His world-building is fascinating at many points, including the introduction of the Bright Palms (who are essentially "paladins", but with some very intriguing extrapolation added in). The stakes and challenges that Hiresha faces seem very strikingly real. Everything from the city of Morimound to the gods and the strange ally/adversary that Hiresha must deal with are engaging, fascinating and sometimes downright funny.

The ending of works has been a particular point of contention for me lately, and I am happy to say that Mr. Marling does not disappoint.

Brood of Bones is very well-edited and highly polished. I noticed only a few minor changes that I would have made in the usage of punctuation, but no typos and no obvious grammar mistakes. This is a book to make the indie fantasy movement proud.

Whether his next book returns to the city of Morimound, elsewhere in this fascinating world he's built or a different place entirely, you can bet that I'll be buying Mr. Marling's next book on launch day.

Dawn says

I admit I approached this novel with some reservations. Despite the fact that my own husband's work is "self published" and that a few friends of mine have gone the "small publisher" route, there is still a nervousness in stepping away from the taste-makers at the Big Six. Not that they don't publish plenty of lousy stuff, but at least you won't get something written by two goldfish via translation through a Kazoo.

So when I stumbled across a link to it for free download in Goodreads' new Ebook Section I thought, to hell with it and gave it a chance.

Random House, Penguin, if you sent this man away you are bigger fools than I thought you were.

"Brood Of Bones" has the most original premise I've seen in fantasy writing in a decade. It starts a little rough, perhaps only because I've grown so accustomed to gentle introductions to new fantasy settings. Marling doesn't pander in that way. He pitches us into the deep end right off the bat, confident that we can all swim by now, and gets right to the storytelling.

The writing could use a touch more polish but not outstandingly so- It's unclear if the slight formality of the language is a style choice, the lack of an editor or inexperience. Also, chapters are short enough that they're jarring* to those accustomed to more traditional formatting. The pace however races like a bullet train, pulling you along faster and faster until you find it nearly impossible to put the book down. This is not your fluffy wizards and woe novel.

Overall I strongly recommend this novel, and can't wait to see what Marling offers up next, and how he expands upon this universe.

** This might have had more to do with the epub version I read. My Sony Touch PRS600 had some formatting trouble with the decorative elements used at chapter headings, and it would lock a few seconds at each chapter break.*

Robin says

Newcomer A. E. Marling does a bang-up job with this novel about a magic-wielder afflicted with a sleeping disorder. Her drowsiness does not equate boredom for the reader. On the contrary, "Brood of Bones" is a fantasy whodunnit, with Enchantress Hiresha cast in the role of arcane detective. The setting and the magic are skillfully portrayed; the characters are complex and not always predictable. Hiresha struggles not only with her sleeping problem, but with the past that has formed her; her position is her armor and her purpose.

Maid Janny is a gem of irreverence, while the Lord of the Feasts is both charming and terrible. The deposed arbiter of the city is exasperating at the same time she is delightful, and the two city leaders (a pair of priests representing different deities) are not what they might seem. I could wish the bodyguard were better developed, but it is a small complaint. The story is told from Hiresha's point of view, depicting her insecurities and fears in a very personal, very *human* way embroidered with the mores of her particular society. I'd have given this book 5 stars but for an unfortunate (though not crippling) tendency toward repetition of information, and I am looking forward to Marling's next book.

Christina Kessler says

I love this!

The plot and characters in this book are so original and engaging. I love the sharp contrast in writing between when Hiresha is asleep (and hyperintelligent and powerful) and when she is awake (drowsy and confused). The Feasters are creepy and fascinating. I was on the edge of my seat until the last page! It's so hard to find fantasy that has strong female characters and tight plot. This is it.
