



Dreamer's Pool

Juliet Marillier

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In exchange for help escaping her long and wrongful imprisonment, embittered magical healer Blackthorn has vowed to set aside her bid for vengeance against the man who destroyed all that she once held dear. Followed by a former prison mate, a silent hulk of a man named Grim, she travels north to Dalriada. There she'll live on the fringe of a mysterious forest, duty bound for seven years to assist anyone who asks for her help.

Oran, crown prince of Dalriada, has waited anxiously for the arrival of his future bride, Lady Flidais. He knows her only from a portrait and sweetly poetic correspondence that have convinced him Flidais is his destined true love. But Oran discovers letters can lie. For although his intended exactly resembles her portrait, her brutality upon arrival proves she is nothing like the sensitive woman of the letters.

With the strategic marriage imminent, Oran sees no way out of his dilemma. Word has spread that Blackthorn possesses a remarkable gift for solving knotty problems, so the prince asks her for help. To save Oran from his treacherous nuptials, Blackthorn and Grim will need all their resources: courage, ingenuity, leaps of deduction, and more than a little magic.

Dreamer's Pool Details

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From Reader Review Dreamer's Pool for online ebook

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2014/10/27/b...>

“Spellbinding” is the only word to describe Dreamer’s Pool. Reading it was like walking into a gorgeous, living fairy tale. I just loved this book, it’s probably one of the best I’ve read all year...and I’ve read A LOT of books this year.

This is the first in an adult series by Juliet Marillier, called Blackthorn and Grim. Blackthorn is a woman we meet at the beginning of the novel, imprisoned for speaking out against a wicked and corrupt chieftain. Hours before she is to be executed, she is visited by the fey, who offers her a chance to escape in exchange for her promise to set aside her desire for vengeance. Reluctantly, Blackthorn agrees and makes her way north to Dalriada to start her new life. She is trailed by her fellow prisoner and escapee Grim, a hulking man of few words. Unable to turn away anyone who asks her for help, Blackthorn also recognizes Grim’s potential as an ally, and the two of them strike up a tentative partnership.

Meanwhile in Dalriada, Prince Oran prepares to wed. He has never met his future bride the Lady Flidais, though he has seen her portrait and they have written extensively to each other. However, the crown prince is convinced that the sweet, compassionate and intelligent woman he has come to know through her letters is his perfect match, which is why he is dismayed when the Flidais who arrives at his castle is nothing like the Flidais he thought he knew. Had he been taken for a fool, merely blinded by youthful naiveté? Or is there something stranger, more mystical afoot? Perhaps the newly arrived wise woman and her big strong helper could be of some assistance in this mystery.

This is a tale of magic, set in a world where one imagines myths and legends can come to life, but it also feels surprisingly grounded at the same time, almost like a fairy tale infused with a bit of realism. These elements gave the world more depth and kept it from feeling too simplistic, but they were also muted enough not to be overbearing or risk completely obliterating the magical nuances. Marillier tackles the craft of world-building meticulously and flawlessly, striking the perfect tone. I’m beyond impressed.

Dreamer’s Pool is told through the perspectives of Blackthorn, Grim and Oran. These three characters made this book a joy to read, and there’s no hemming and hawing about it – I loved them all equally. They’re very different people, and the way they’re written by Marillier, you would never mistake any one of them for another. Each person’s voice feels unique and extraordinarily real and powerful. The reader perceives the world and various events through a character’s eyes, at the same time watching him or her develop along with the story. We’re with Oran as he grows from a young, carefree man into a thoughtful and worldly leader. We’re in Blackthorn’s head even as she is blinded by her own personal biases and unaware of her flaws. And Grim is just Grim. He’s simply an amazing and special man and there can be no other like him.

This book made me wonder why I waited so long to pick up something by Juliet Marillier. She writes so beautifully, with every word like an enchantment or spell drawing the reader deeper into the story. There’s a mystery here I couldn’t wait to get to the bottom of, and then as we drew closer to the conclusion I didn’t want this story to end!

Alas, it did. But I’m also glad this is going to be a series because I can’t wait until we can return to the world of Blackthorn and Grim. Until then, I’ve bought other books by Marillier because I just can’t get enough of

her writing. Dreamer's Pool gave me a taste, and now I'm hooked.

Frances says

Her name is 'Blackthorn', a skilled magical healer falsely imprisoned and chained to a wall. Nearby in another dank filthy dungeon is Grim, who watches her intently fearing she may soon be taken away and hung. Having barely survived the year, Blackthorn is ready to give testimony to the counsel in the morning which she believes will finally set her free. As the evening falls, one of the guards appears and taunts her with his knowledge that she will never face the counsel, but only a quick blade before sunrise. Just before dawn destiny steps in. Blackthorn is escorted to meet a man, Conmael, who has paid handsomely for the privilege of speaking with her. Conmael is a fey with a proposition and three conditions. She must use her skill to help others; give it to anyone who ask; and not seek vengeance to those who had her imprisoned. But there was one final stipulation; she must do this for seven years, and if one of the terms is broken another year will be added. Award-winning author Juliet Marillier has written an enchanting fantasy tale with many dominant characters. It's a tale to get lost in, and to embark upon a journey into the realm of magic.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Dreamer's Pool, the first in the **Blackthorn & Grim** series by talented author Juliet Marillier, is a solid medieval magical fantasy/mystery. It was also, truthfully, a little too slow-paced for me; I got bored and did a fair amount of skimming in the last half. In fact, I was bored enough that I wrote half of this review two years ago, set it aside and never finished it. But I'm trying to remedy that now.

A woman who (a little later) calls herself Blackthorn has been in the local despotic lord's dungeon for a year, falsely accused by him of a crime to hide his own habit of raping any of the local women he chooses. It's a horrendous experience that has broken her in most ways, other than the desire for revenge. She's looking forward to one thing: the day she gets a hearing in court, scheduled for the day after the story begins. So it's a bitter pill indeed when she learns that he plans to have her killed before the hearing.

An elf lord appears, deus ex machine-like, and offers her a choice: he'll break her out of prison if she will agree, for a period of seven years, to (1) go live in a place of his choosing and exercise her healer craft, (2) help anyone who asks her for help, with or without expressly saying so, and (3) completely abandon her plan for revenge. It's the last condition that almost kills her. But with no alternative, she agrees.

The prison duly falls apart, a few prisoners escape, and Blackthorn heads north with Grim, one of her fellow former prisoners. There she comes into the realm of a prince named Oran, who has a problem that he brings to Blackthorn: He's been corresponding with his promised bride, Flidais, who he's never met. But from all their letters he's certain she is a sweet, sensitive, honorable lady.

Now she's finally traveled to his kingdom to meet and marry him ... and she's not what Oran expected. AT ALL. She acts in a uncultured, promiscuous, lowborn manner. Oran can't break off the wedding, but he can't help but think something's very wrong here. Perhaps Blackthorn can investigate and help him? Blackthorn rather reluctantly agrees (binding elf lord promise kicks in).

It was, in fact, an interesting mystery with an unexpected resolution; it just took a little too long for it to get

there. I didn't feel like it justified all 400+ pages. There are some disturbing themes explored here - rape, abuse, damaged souls - and perhaps I was just mentally veering away from those dark waters. Marillier also spends time developing Blackthorn and her companion Grim, and they're well-rounded characters, if very rough around the edges. They just weren't quite appealing enough to me to want to spend more time with them.

Dino-Jess ★ The Book Eating Dinosaur ★ says

WHAT A WAY TO START OFF MY 2016 READING YEAR

LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE LOVE

Firstly, lets just get this out of the way. Everybody back the hell away from Grim. I want to marry him and have his babies. He's the new leading man in my life. Sorry Terrible . Grim has stolen my heart. **LOVE HIM.**

This was a wonderful story. Yes, I knew where it was going 100 pages in. Yes Blackthorn lives up to her name, being prickly at times, she's quick to anger, slow to trust and sometimes is downright unlikeable. But she learns from her mistakes, does the best she can and the way she is with Grim is just heartwarming. Yes Prince Oran is quite the idiot and creates problems for himself often. But in the end, **it all worked.** It all clicked and it all flowed and it all came to life around me and I could barely put it down.

The only reason I didn't give this five stars is that the world building and lore of the magic seemed a little sketchy to me, it was all a little bit *ambiguous* and as result I couldn't give it top marks. Grim deserves five stars all to himself though. **LOVE YOU GRIM.**

This was a wonderful fantasy tale that had a little bit of despair, a touch of magic, a pinch of hope, a sprinkling of mystery and a bunch of love.

I thoroughly enjoyed it, I had trouble putting it down, and I've already put the sequel on hold at my library.

4 marry-me-grim Stars

Thanks for the buddy read you wonderful people over at **MacHalo** !

XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

?? **BR** with my MacHalo Freaks starting January 1, 2016.

? **DNF at 41% ?**

My first DNF of the year!!! Get the maracas out of storage, people, this calls for a celebration!!!

I'm sure this is the first of many, many DNFs to come, I'm so excited right now! And Ange picked this book for us, which means I get to choose a penance read to punish her for putting me through this, too! Oh, I think **2016 is going to be a great year!**

Okay. Let's do this quickly, shall we? Things to do, places to go, potential DNFs to read and all that crap.

So most of my **slightly demented fellow buddy readers** really enjoyed this story. What can I say? They're good people, really they are. It's just that they **keep reading books wrong**. Well, I have to admit it certainly doesn't help that they have such **atrocious, dreadful, lousy, substandard** taste in books. But hey, they're good people, really they are. So I guess I shouldn't complain, right? **Right.**

But anyway.

Why didn't LOVE this unequaled masterpiece, you ask? Let's see...

① **Boredom. It's a thing**

Juliet Marillier, you should be awarded a **Nobel Prize for finding the cure to insomnia**. I could tell you that the story is slow paced but it wouldn't do it justice. I mean, I stopped reading the book at the 41% mark and I was still waiting for something to happen. Oh these people here talk and think and ramble, that they do.

They also talk and think and ramble sometimes. Mind you, that's only when they don't talk and think and ramble. It's really fascinating. You'd think an alternating POV-type book would at least offer some variety in terms of tone and voice of character. Don't be silly now. **It's all flatness, all the time.**

② **Tiresome, tedious characters Inc.**

I couldn't bring myself to give a damn about a single character in this story. **They could drop dead for all I care.** That might be a good idea, actually. That would mean something had finally happened. But I don't think Marillier would have the guts to kill one of her MCs. Nah, she only kills the lowly servants. Because, you know, they're lowly. And servants. **Such scum doesn't deserve to live.** But I digress. So we have three alternating POVs, for three delightfully delightful characters:

? **Blackthorne:** an ungrateful, unlikable, whiny bitch. You know, woe is me and all that stuff.

? **Grim:** think of a grumpy wood log-brown bear hybrid, with the personality of a cardboard box.

? **Oran:** the guy prefers poetry and nature to killing and bloodshed. If that's not pathetic, I don't know what is. I'd call him a wimp but that would be an insult to all the wimps out there.

Now. To be honest, there is one character I actually liked. One character that actually had some personality. One character that was **full of life, interesting**, and with some **great potential** for development. One character that **stole the show** every time he appeared. What character, you ask? Why **Bramble the dog, of course.**

Yeah, we have a pretty stellar cast of characters here. Added to the fascinating story, non-stop action, and insane plot twists, it makes for a **staggeringly spectacular read**.

?? **Anything else to add?** Nope, that's it. Bye now.

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

Let me put it bluntly, okay? Sometimes we must face the facts, as unpleasant as they are : **Nothing in Dreamer's Pool brought me enjoyment. Nothing.** That's why, no matter how skilled Juliet Marillier might be with her words, I cannot rate this book anything else than 1 star.

Yet it all started so promisingly. Indeed the first two chapters (out of 41) awoke my interest : Blackthorn and Grim, prisoners and driven with vengeance, touched me with their hopelessness and I couldn't wait to know what their future would hold.

That is, until that fae dude came in the picture. I'm sure the guy has reasons to act the way he does, but so far his motivations remain in the shadows and I can't wrap my head around the idiocy of it all. This is not a feeling I enjoy. **Deus-ex-machina to its finest.**

Truth is, **15% in and I already knew that something was amiss** - unfortunately it did not get better. The whole thing is **boring** and filled with pages and pages of countryside random life nonsense like,

"I talked to some farmers about a troublesome patch of boggy ground and the need to dig a drainage ditch. They could not agree on its position. I suggested they consider a compromise that would not encroach too severely on either man's farm, and told them to bring it to the council if they had not reached agreement by then."

And it goes on, and on, and on... Blackthorn says it better than I could :

*"There was some discussion. The two fellows set out their arguments, which had to do with rights of way and wandering cattle. **My mind was wandering too, away from a matter that was of little interest to me...**"*

EXACTLY. I do not care about any of this.

Which brings me to : **What is the fucking point of this book?!** I would say, to resolve a mystery...

... But **how in the world can I call this a mystery when I guessed EVERYTHING at 30%?** It doesn't make me proud, but it just shows how obvious the plot "twists" (can we really talk about twists at this point, that I do not know) were. The strings were so flashy and unavoidable that it annoyed me to no end to wait for the characters to finally get it. As far as plot resolution goes, Dreamer's Pool is a big fail for me. This said, even predictable, some books manage to keep my interest because of their wonderful characters.

Dreamer's Pool is not one of those books. **Where are the complex and fleshed-out characters? Because I saw none.** On the contrary they felt one-dimensional to me : having a tortured past doesn't make you layered. If you act like a robot and that I, as a reader, can guess everything you'll do/say, you are not complex. Neither Blackthorn or Grim are, and I just didn't care about what could happen to them whatsoever. Not that they actually *did* something during most of the book, mind you. **They honestly seemed as perplexed as I was about their role in the story.** And don't get me started about Oran, the naive Prince waiting for his true love. What a brat, really.

Finally, I am **so very mad at the way sexuality is portrayed** and how the boundaries between good and evil are linked to it. I genuinely thought that we were past shaming women for sex, and using it as a main characterization point, but it seems that I was wrong. **In this world, if you want to find the Evil Women, just look at those who have sex. As for the others, they're most likely going to be raped.** (view spoiler)

It doesn't help that this book contains **one of my BIGGEST pet peeves** (view spoiler), which led to some idiotic and rage-inducing drama. One might say that the villain's wrongs do not stop at sex, but see, it is not my problem here. What maddens me is the fact that **sexual behavior is what brings awareness on the flaws of a character.** Indeed, sex is supposed to convince me that this person (view spoiler) is the villain. NOPE. Screw this and these double standards.

(view spoiler)

I can already see the arguments telling me that *at this period of time*, women were often categorized as such with the "whores" (who have sex before marriage) and the "good girls" (who wait and do everything in their power to stay virgins). Excuse me but, **WHAT PERIOD OF TIME?!**

- 1) No matter how medieval the world is pictured, **this is Fantasy, not Historical fiction.** We could wonder why medieval settings are so often used in Fantasy, actually, especially because with them come so many sexist stereotypes.
- 2) This book has been written **in 2014.** If I would be more lenient with a Medieval author, this is not the case here. **Why do contemporary authors feel the need to picture worlds where women's sexuality is treated with such shame and Manichaeism?** Nobody forces them to do so, and this is the authors' choice. I am so very tired of this choice.

Fuck this.

Of course Blackthorn doesn't agree with the sex shaming and I really appreciated the way she defended women from these numerous sexist remarks (often from the villains, yes, but the "Good Girls don't" speeches are still way too present for my taste).

But in the end, because of the way the plot is built, **it doesn't change anything.** I am not happy with the ending which I found awfully unfair.

? Dreamer's Pool might be loved by many readers, yet I cannot recommend it, as it was such an utter fail for

me.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Chantal (Every Word A Doorway) says

About a year ago I read Juliet Marillier's debut novel *Daughter of the Forest* and fell in love. The beauty of her writing, the complexity of the characters, the slow-burn romance and the atmosphere created was incredible and I knew immediately that I wanted to read other books by her. **There is something unique about Marillier's style, she has a very distinctive storyteller voice and the way she uses fairy tales, myths and lore in her stories is wonderful to read.** She makes you feel like you're sitting around a campfire in the middle of an Irish forest sipping hot tea.

These things still ring true after reading *Dreamer's Pool*, but unfortunately my enjoyment of the novel didn't even come close to that of *Daughter of the Forest*. I knew going into *Dreamer's Pool* that it would be a long and slow-paced book (as was *Daughter of the Forest*); what I didn't expect though, was that **its length and pace would feel dull, boring and tedious.**

Premise:

The story is told from three different POV's and every chapter changes perspective. The novel starts off with Blackthorn who has been wrongfully imprisoned for a year by an evil and powerful man called Mathuin. Above all else, Blackthorn wants to get revenge for what Mathuin did to her and countless other people, but then she receives word that she is to die before she can make her case in court. The same night however, a fey named Conmael appears and offers her a deal: He will free her of the prison and save her from imminent death if she agrees to set aside her need for vengeance and help anyone in want of her help for seven years to come. She accepts the offer very reluctantly and, along with a prison mate of hers called Grim, she sets off to Dalriada to once again practice as a healer.

In the meantime, Oran, crown prince of Dalriada, is anxiously waiting for his future bride, Lady Flidais, to arrive. He knows her only from a drawn portrait and letters but is convinced that she is his soul mate, his one true love. But Oran soon discovers that things aren't always the way they appear.

The first 50 or so pages of the novel were great. I was immediately engaged in the story and expected a novel full of action, intrigue and mystery. What I got though was nothing of the sort.

Characters:

All of the **main characters in this book were complex and flawed.** Blackthorn and Grim are by no means paragons of virtue, but are in fact quite unlikable at times. **Blackthorn** is a bitter woman with a need for vengeance and generally doesn't enjoy people's company. She is also of mature years. **Grim** is a bit of a brute, a rather ugly man, strong and with a kind heart, but definitely not your typical fantasy hero. He is also of mature years.

See now, these two characters alone should have sold me on this story. They are so unique! When is the last time you have read a fantasy novel with middle-aged characters as protagonists? **But to my complete surprise I didn't feel attached to them in the slightest. I didn't just not like them, I didn't empathize**

with them at all; I didn't care what would happen to them. I found both Blackthorn and Grim to be incredibly repetitive and uninteresting and after a while I couldn't bear to hear their thoughts anymore. I was also very underwhelmed and disappointed by the lack of character development.

Then we have **Oran**. On the surface, Oran seems like the perfect prince. He is well-read, compassionate and just. He cares about his people, wants to be a good ruler. He also has his flaws however. He is quite naïve and a bit of a hopeless romantic. He wants to do the right thing but sometimes he doesn't know how.

Oran annoyed me to no end. He was a total bore and lacked backbone. He just seemed like such a weak character overall and I could never warm up to him.

The **side characters were not at all developed beyond one dimension** and only seemed to serve the immediate story line. None of them were noteworthy or captured my attention.

I think Marillier has a good hand when it comes to characters; they always feel real and are full of raw emotion, however these ones just didn't do it for me.

Plot & Pacing:

As I've already mentioned, this book turned out to be **very boring**. The book isn't atmospheric enough to justify the glacial pace and the **plot was beyond predictable**. I guessed the entire mystery within the first pages of the unfolding events before we're even really confronted with the conflict, which made the **meandering storytelling** even more frustrating. Overall, *Dreamer's Pool*'s length wasn't really worth my patience. The three POV's, although well-done, felt unnecessary and didn't really add to the story.

A few additional comments:

- I appreciated that **friendship was a central theme** in this story. The friendship between Blackthorn and Grim was complex and slow-building, as was the unfurling of the character's back story. Unfortunately, I couldn't love this though because I cared so little for the characters.

- **I had a big issue with the portrayal of female sexuality.** I'm not going to elaborate because it would be impossible to do without spoiling, but basically, Marillier does something here that I think could rub many people the wrong way.

I still suggest you pick up a Juliet Marillier book and I will certainly be reading more books by her, but this one didn't work for me and I don't recommend it.

Milda Page Runner says

Morrigan's britches! This is quite a tale. And I'm still not sure how to classify it.

Dark, dreamy and magical story that is part fairytale part mystery solving/investigation. Two unlikely partners pushed to work together by ever-meddling fey to unravel mysteries that seemed to have stepped straight from the myths. There is a prince looking for one true love, strange personality changes, a misbehaving dog, an ancient wood and a pool of dark magic, disappeared village girl and mysterious death.

Whenever I thought I figured it out - the story surprised me. At first I thought it will be romantic – it turned out much more grim-dark, when I thought it will be all about magic/paranormal threat – dark human nature

appeared to have played a big part. Two main characters aren't exactly level-headed or wisecracking detectives – as they are fighting rage and demons of their own dark past.

Slow burning but engaging and atmospheric read.

Recommend for readers of darker fairytales, fey and Celtic mythology fans.

Manju says

I had my eyes on this book since forever, so when i saw that one of my friends is doing a BR, I joined.

this book has three plot-lines. While Blackthorn and Grim's has been woven together from the start of the book, Oran met them somewhere just before the halfway. Blackthorn is a healer and has been given a chance to live a quite life in exchange of giving up her vengeance mission. She accepts and was freed from the prison. Her fellow prisoner, Grim, joins her. She decides to stay in the forest near Dalraida. Oran, prince of Dalraida, is waiting for his betrothed but once she arrives, Oran started thinking that this is not the girl with whom he fell in love. As the story progressed we see how these three characters help each other.

this is an old school fantasy. curses, fairy tales, myths, and magic, you will get all these in this simple tale. there is also a mystery in the story but after a certain point this get very predictable.

As for the characters Blackthorn is the star of the book. her past was painful and when she thought about it, she let it overshadow her present where I absolutely hated it. She is presented as a strong and independent woman but her past turns her into a whiny women which I disliked about her. Grim was another great character. Though his past has not been revealed yet but I am very eager to know about what turned him into what he is now. Oran's character really made me bang my head into the wall. A great prince and king in the making but Oran as a lover was a big disappointment.

A good book with lovely characters and not so over the top story.

Jessica ✶ ↵ Silverbow ↵ ✶ Rabid Reads-no-more says

3/21/18 - ON SALE for \$2.99:

<http://amzn.to/2fArrPi>

Reviewed by: Rabid Reads

I know I mentioned that I'm a longtime fan of Juliet Marillier in the not too distant past. How I kept reading **Shadowfell** despite it's lackluster beginning, and how **Raven Flight** renewed my faith in her abilities.

There are many reasons for that faith, but the simplest way to explain it is that in fantasy there is a not-quite-

stock character that I'm going to call the Storyteller (original, I know). This character is often a grandparent figure, a leader in an unofficial, but easily recognizable capacity, and is universally revered. They tell their stories both to entertain and to guide, and when they rule the pages of the book I'm reading, I become absolutely enthralled.

Juliet Marillier is a Storyteller made flesh, and DREAMER'S POOL is her most recent tale.

Blackthorn is a woman with the knowledge and ability to heal.

But she is not the typical peace-loving woman who lives in the forest with a beautiful garden of strange and wondrous growing things. No, she is not. She is a woman who has been rotting in a prison cell for nearly a year, and she is a woman who thirsts for vengeance to the exclusion of almost everything else.

So when one of the fey folk visits her--just after she's learned that the man who imprisoned her, the man upon whom she dreams to avenge herself, has arranged for her to be killed rather than having her case heard--and offers her freedom, but at a price: she must swear not to seek the revenge she so desperately desires for no less than seven years . . .

She almost refuses.

But she is, thankfully, not *that* blinded by hate, and when part of the dank underground prison suddenly collapses, Blackthorn knows it's her chance.

She doesn't escape alone.

A giant of a man called Grim also escapes, and the two of them make their way to where Blackthorn promised the fey she'd go . . . together.

Oran is a most unprincely prince. According to his mother, anyway. He is a Romantic who has been avoiding the business of finding a wife, b/c he doesn't want it to be *business*.

And it's seems his wish is granted in the lovely Lady Flidais, but when she arrives . . . he finds her shockingly dissimilar to the woman with whom he'd been corresponding, and he becomes convinced that something nefarious is afoot.

But is that simply wishful thinking?

DREAMER'S POOL flawlessly intertwines these two separate stories so that the whole is much greater than the parts. The slow but sure development of a real partnership between the emotionally vacant Blackthorn and the haunted-by-some-unknown-past Grim is heart-wrenching to witness, as is watching Oran's dreams seemingly crumble to dust. But there *are* strange things happening in Oran's kingdom, and they can all be traced back to a pool in a fey wood.

Will they discover the truth before Oran finds himself wed to a woman he neither likes nor respects?

Read it and find out. Highly recommended.

My other reviews for this series:

Tower of Thorns (Blackthorn & Grim, #2) by Juliet Marillier

Den of Wolves (Blackthorn & Grim, #3) by Juliet Marillier

? Sh3lly - Grumpy Name-Changing Wanderer ? says

Writing = B

Fantasy = B-

Action = C

Plot = C

Angst/Drama = F

Blackthorn and Grim = A+

Oran and Flindais = F! FFFFFFFF-FAIL

When I started this book, I thought, "Wow, this is pretty good. A 'straight' fantasy I'm actually going to finish - and like!" Blackthorn and Grim were stuck unfairly in a rank and nasty prison where they were abused and severely neglected. Blackthorn is approached by one of the **fey** named Conmael, and given a proposition (I never was sure why she was chosen, but whatever, it's fantasy): go back to her old job as a healer and wise woman for 7 years in a small town called Winterfall and he would bust her out of jail. She accepts. Conmael literally busts the walls down and Grim helps her escape. He tags along with Blackthorn and they form an unlikely alliance and reluctant friendship.

Sounds pretty cool. Then we meet Oran.

He's a 22 year old prince. He's a decent fellow, but somewhat immature and gullible. His parents are like, "Yo, you're old, get married already."

And he's like, "But I'm waiting for true love."

And his parents are like, "Eff that, give us an heir. Don't be ridiculous. We put up with you liking poetry and nature walks instead of hunting and killing, but we're putting our feet down now!"

And he's like, "Life is so unfair." So he finally gets a name of an 18 year old "suitable" for him, they start writing emotional letters with poetry, she sends him a painting of herself, and it's:

The marriage is on. The girl is named Flidais (that name, right) and she comes to his town for their betrothal. When she and her team of servants and guards arrive, she decides to stop by a spooky fey pond and *take a swim*. Since she's so **weird** free-spirited, her people are like, "Okay, why not?" After that, things get weird.

So, the POVs with Blackthorn and Grim were excellent. I really liked them. Blackthorn was a strong female

heroine. Not typical, not virginal, not young and pretty. Kind of the opposite actually. Same for Grim. Grim has a gentle soul and is great. But, the problem is, the story kind of steers away from them in the middle and focuses on Oran and Flidais too much. It seriously detracted from my enjoyment of the story.

I hated the drama and the way the story went. It was like a soap opera. I didn't care about Oran. I hated Flidais. I ended up skimming through his parts because they were angsty and self-absorbed.

Overall, this was a well-written book. It could just be that this particular type of drama is just not my thing. (view spoiler)

If this was strictly about the title characters and had another type of drama, not involving someone like Oran, I would have given this 4 stars. As it is, I guess I will give it three. Meh. I am in no hurry to read the next book, but I might, depending on what the synopsis is. This wasn't YA, but the sections with Oran and being in his mind and seeing how Flidais behaved, it almost felt like YA. (view spoiler)

This isn't a romance really, but there were romantic elements. The fantasy aspects were kind of "light" too. Not a lot of magic or magical creatures, but a little bit. Wish I would have liked it more, but the angst and drama. Man.

Buddy read with the MacHalo group starting January 1, 2016. Angela's pick.

Carla *Jen7waters* says

I've been trying to write a review for **Dreamer's Pool** for a long time now, but it's so hard because I never know exactly how to express my love for JM's stories and characters. Let it be known that she's my favorite author of all time, and she can do no wrong.

That said, **Dreamer's Pool** is one of those freakishly unputdownable books, you know, when you can only make yourself stop reading when you desperately need food, a bathroom break, or when, sadly, it's so late that your eyes just give out. The thing is, there's always something happening in the story, something that makes you want to keep reading because *you have to know what's going to happen next*, and, in my case: I just couldn't abandon the characters, because that's what it felt like every time I had to stop reading, "Oh great, now Blackthorn is all alone in the dark, cold, scary forest, I'm the worst!!"

Speaking of Blackthorn, she is a legend, truly one of those characters that I know will stay with me forever. Once upon a time everything was horribly taken away from her, and that turned her into this combination of extremes: 1. angry, badass, unstoppable force of nature, and I believe that there are tornados, and thunderstorms, and earthquakes, and hurricanes, and great floods all alive and kicking inside of her--they're what keep her going, that and an unyielding need for justice and revenge; and 2. lonely, self-destructive, fragile, hurt, and broken, so broken, and really just a touch away to shatter completely, because after all she's human (until JM tells us otherwise), and there's no way a person can go through what she endured and still be *whole*.

It's because Blackthorn is such an intense character that her unlikely pairing with big, gentle, awkward Grim is so appealing—he's the only person that she'll listen to (BARELY), the only person capable of actually

reaching her when she's at the limits of pain and self-destruction, blinded by the need for justice. Somehow, among all the turmoil, Grim can bring her back, he can bring her back from the dark places inside her mind, and make her see things clearly again--and all this just by saying a few words, or by staying as close to her as she'll allow him, and it's both heartwarming and heartbreaking.

And did I mention that they are just friends? Yep, there's no romance between these two, at least not yet, but who knows what Tower of Thorns will bring. (To be honest, I don't even care, I like their relationship the way it is, and would love if they eventually became a couple, but if they don't, I'll still be content, because their friendship, the way it is, is something truly special.)

I'm not even going to say much about the plot--this way I won't spoil it--just that it's a mystery involving a princess, and that it reminded me a lot of the fairy tale The Goose Girl (I don't know if it's actually inspired by the tale), tangled with Blackthorn and Grim's own stories, and their story together. I especially loved Grim's POV chapters, because he's so sincere, genuine, unpretentious, and just... *raw*, and I'd always miss him so much when someone else's POV was up. Of course I also loved Blackthorn's chapters with a passion, believe it or not but she's hilarious, hysterical, really. (Spirit animal!)

A remarkable story, with extraordinary, unforgettable characters. [Go read it!](#)

Nathan says

Fantasy Review Barn

Once upon a time Juliet Marillier wrote a fairy tale and it was wonderful. She didn't revamp an old classic with a new twist. She didn't write something like a fairy tale that twists all the tropes around. She didn't even write a fantasy book with a fairy tale feel to it. She wrote an honest to goodness fairy tale; slightly dark, slightly magical, and completely wonderful.

It starts with a bargain. Blackthorn, who had another name in another time under different circumstances, strikes a deal with a fae; seven years of services for escape from certain death. But the service is not to the fae himself but rather to the service to a community. Followed by a man called Grim, or more often Bonehead in the jail they shared, she is to take on her old role of healer and wise women in a new location far from any home she has ever known.

Or maybe it starts with a tragedy. A prince eagerly awaiting his unseen soul mate first sees her in the worst of situations; right after the drowning death of one of her handmaidens in a mysterious pond on the princes' lands. Where ever it starts these three very different people are now tied together in this fairy game – Grim, Blackthorn and the Prince Oran.

Let's talk Blackthorn first as it is her story. A redemption tale? Perhaps, we first meet her in jail awaiting her time. A revenge story? Certainly not, as much as she wishes otherwise. The very nature of her bargain keeps her from the vengeance she desires for unknown past crimes. Worse, it forces her to help any who seek it despite her lack of desire to do much for anyone. But she is good at what she does, earns respect quickly and

becomes an valuable member of her new community. She is that rare middle aged women who never seems to show in fantasy; the young see her as a crone already but she knows she has a ways to go before she hits that label.

Now Grim. Silent giant, thought to be touched in the head. A violent past implied. Destined to be either a gentle giant or a thug...in another story. But here is just a very human character. He has anger issues but controls them, makes friends in some places and not others, follows Blackthorn like a guard dog but doesn't hover or attempt to control.

Finally Orlan. Idealist. Dreamer. But more practical than he at first seems. He cares for his subjects, rules fairly, and plans his marriage for love around the needs of the kingdom. So it is with surprise and confusion that he tries to understand his betrothed. She isn't the sweet, intelligent girl he has been writing to. There is a cold side, an aggressive side that doesn't make sense. Confusion becomes suspicion and eventually he turns to several women he can trust to help him figure it all out.

Recognizing the fairy tale that was being wove I started trying to out think it. All the clues were there. Look how smart I am putting them all together! Aha you think you are so clever but I have figured out the mystery at the half way point. I am enjoying this so keep on writing but...oh wow. Didn't see that coming. Should have, those clues were there too but I sat there distracted by the more obvious ones. Well then Marillier, this round goes to you.

Nothing fancy here, just great characters and a wonderful story. The only truly evil villains are minor players (though a few others make a run at the title at times) and the fae influence seems to be an easy way to set up the story rather than anything with lasting influence. Those who can't take some fairy tale conveniences in plot set up may be disappointed but once the pieces are in play there is very little to pick at.

Recommended with full enthusiasm. One of the best books I have read this year.

5 Stars

Bradley says

This was a gentle Fantasy with all the traditional, read archetypal, side-characters, but it's real strength is in being a great character-driven novel.

I consider Orlan and Flidais to be side characters in this story, with Blackthorn and Grim being the true gift from the author. With Blackthorn and Grim, this shouldn't be much of a stretch to see, despite Orlan's PoV time, because that guy was just too idealistic and good-natured and romantic a prince to make it as anything other than the subject of the novel and not the real meat. :)

Flidais was much worse: being the put-upon trope princess who serves as a backdrop and not a real mover. Which is a shame, because her real role (Sans Spoilers) did have quite a few more opportunities for fun and mayhem, but alas, this would not have served, likely even supplanting, the true tale of Blackthorn and Grim.

I've spent all this time on the side characters, but what's all the hullabaloo?

Think a revenge-filled wise-woman with a hulk of a devoted man watching over her, forced into service

under the Fae to do good in a small little land, and you've got just the tip of the ice-burg. The novel was complete unto itself, with a good take on an old, old celtic trope, missing almost all of the tripe twists that are expected on such an old tale, resting all of its strengths on characterization, depth of world-building, and serious attention to detail.

I fully enjoyed the novel. It was such a nice change of pace from all the war-driven fantasies I've plowed through, recently, returning to the roots of Fantasy, as in Fairy Tales.

There's a lot of plot-drive about men and women, the nature of justice with rape, with perceptions and misunderstanding, as well as truly good-hearted people being wrapped up in the whole mess. (And bad ones, too.)

What can I say? I think this is no way a flashy novel or ranking up there as anything I'd peg as the standard, but as a very good novel with great characters, I think it's damn sweet. :)

Robin (Bridge Four) says

What if you were slated to die but someone gave you a chance to live? The bargain...give up your quest vengeance/justice for seven years and help people. Do this and they will save you now from death tomorrow. Help anyone who asks, go to a different land and set up a life as a healer. Do this and you live, break your word and you are right back in prison and one step closer to death.

“The day before you died was the longest, slowest day ever. It gave you more time than you could possibly want to contemplate all the things you’d got wrong, the chances you’d missed, the errors you’d made. It was long enough to convince the most hopeful person that there was no point in anything.”

You might think this an easy choice, but when the need for justice and vengeance for the wrongs committed not just against you but those you love is so high it is hard to think of anything else. Blackthorn might have made the deal but it is a hard one to keep and it is even harder to be among people after all her time in the dark cruel prison of her enemy

“Part of me has turned wild, and another part’s turned dark as endless night, and I’m not going to change back just because someone says I must.”

Dreamers Pool is told in three PoVs. Blackthorn who has a tragic past and has had more taken from her than many could survive is a bit harsh and curt to those around her. She doesn't really know how to be among people anymore but must learn and quickly or time will be added to her already long sentence of service.

Grim is a broken man who sometimes seems half crazy. He is a bit of a gentle giant and finds himself the protector of Blackthorn even if she doesn't really want one. They seem to make an unlikely pair but they spent a year across from one another in a hell hole and seen each other through in their own way. So were Blackthorn goes, Grim follows. **I adore Grim!** He has a past himself, but he understands people in a way most don't and for some reason he has made it his mission to protect not only Blackthorn but others that are weak and defenseless.

Together Grim and Blackthorn go to a new place, that seems a bit magical and has a touch the Fae in it, to set up a life and while there is no romance happening between them, I'm hopeful that is a temporary thing and eventually the friendship they have builds into something more.

The mystery of this story is like an old tale and happening mainly in the third PoV of the prince. He has written letters to his potential fiancé for a while hoping to build a bond as he sillily hopes for a marriage not just of convenience but of love.

“Letters tell the truths a person will not speak. They contain the deepest of feelings, the wisest of stories. Letters are powerful. They contain messages of hope, love, change.”

Certain that she is the one for him the plans for marriage progress and she comes to his land. But when she arrives the girl in front of him seems nothing like the woman from the letters. The prince is confused but hopes that it just the journey that her tired. But as time goes on he is more convinced that something strange has happened and the Prince asks Blackthorn and Grim to look into his bride to be since he is sure something is off and he must find out soon or he will be married to this woman who is not at all like the one he fell in love with through letters.

I love the way this is a slow rolling story with small things divvied out over time. It is definitely character driven as we get to know Blackthorn and Grim better. My favorite thing in this was their building strange friendship and how well they take care of each other. The mystery was interesting and not overly magical. I like that there are old magics and tales in this that give the world more depth and make me think of it as a fairytale land, not quite of the Disney variety but also not quite as harsh as Grim's Fairytales either.

I look forward to more stories of Blackthorn and Grim.
