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Nice Dragons Finish Last: Heartstrikers, Book 1



Synopsis

Audie Award, Fantasy, 2016 As the smallest dragon in the Heartstriker clan, Julius survives by a simple code: keep quiet, don't cause trouble, and stay out of the way of bigger dragons. But this meek behavior doesn't fly in a family of ambitious magical predators, and his mother, Bethesda the Heartstriker, has finally reached the end of her patience. Now, sealed in human form and banished to the DFZ - a vertical metropolis built on the ruins of Old Detroit - Julius has one month to prove he can be a ruthless dragon or kiss his true shape goodbye forever. But in a city of modern mages and vengeful spirits where dragons are considered monsters to be exterminated, he's going to need some serious help to survive this test. He only hopes humans are more trustworthy than dragons....

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rachel won me over with her Paradox trilogy, and Nice Dragons Finish Last did not disappoint. It's not only urban fantasy, is kind of post-apocalyptic dystopia too. Sometime in the future, a meteor crashed into the earth, awakening long sleeping magic. The Lady of the Great Lakes, Algonquin woke, flooding the Detroit area and claiming it as her own. Annexed from the US, it has become the Detroit Free Zone (DFZ), home to all manner of spirits, mages, shamans, anyone looking for a place to start over, no matter how dangerous. Her laws care little about humans treat each other (there are vending machines for guns, alcohol and party drugs), but woe to him who dares pollute her waters or endanger her fish. And no dragons. Dragons are forbidden, and she's placed a high bounty on them. Which is too bad for Julius. His mother, the head of the Heartstriker clan, has bound

him in human form and booted him to DFZ in hopes that he will finally make something of himself. The problem is Julius is too nice. There's not much dragon about him. He'd rather pay for services than demand them in exchange for letting you live. He'd rather ask than beat it out of you. And if he's not careful, that kind of attitude is going to get him killed. It doesn't help that one of his (many) brothers, Bob, is trying to help. The problem with Bob is he is a Seer. All knowing, but not all remembering. He sends helpful texts like, "Duck." And then a few minutes later, "Duck." And then, "Goose." Julius quickly finds out that his family has more than one reason to oust him from the nest and throw him into family politics, and few of those reasons are beneficial to him. Julius has to find a way to not betray his nature of trust and caring while still earning the respect of his family. If he doesn't, his mother will eat him. And she means it this time. What I love most about this story is that it's a twist on the whole "tortured soul" hero theme. Instead of fighting his internal desire to be bad and succeeding by defeating those urges and choosing what is good and right, Julius is fighting *external* pressure, when all he actually wants is to allow his good nature to rule his decisions. Most of his life, that has lead him to abstain from any decision making whatsoever, so as not to be forced to choose between societal expectations and internal desire, but to survive his family's machinations, he has to figure out how to reconcile his nature within dragon society. He needs to figure out how to be strong without sacrificing who he is.

I usually try to make my reviews as balanced as possible, mentioning both positive and negative impressions, but I can't really do that with this story. I simply loved all of it. There's enough information about the plot in the summary and the other reviews, so I'll just give you my impression of the book and tell you what I liked most about it. Julius is a wonderful main character. Strong, smart, and kind-hearted. Nice. He's also a little shy, a little lazy, and in need of some more self-confidence. He's got a strong sense of right and wrong, and he does his best not to compromise this. He's someone you can root for and sympathize with. He is one of the main attractions of the book for me, and I think the author has done a great job creating a balanced and believable character. Urban Fantasy novels are often filled with world-weary, cynical, hardened, and violent main characters, so Julius is a strong gust of fresh air. The secondary characters are interesting, too. Just when you think that you understand their motivations and personality, something happens that sheds an unexpected light on them and reveals some new facet of their character. Especially Bob, the seer that sees everything and keeps forgetting it, steals the spotlight whenever he appears on scene. The plot is gripping and doesn't let up. Julius and his friend Marci are in almost constant mortal danger from the moment they meet. The machinations of Julius'

mother and the other dragons are satisfyingly complex without being incomprehensible or confusing. The same goes for the world building. The DFZ is both foreign and familiar. On the one hand, you have ghosts, retail stores full of everyday magical items, and nightmarish monsters. On the other hand, there're some aspects of the city that are very reminiscent of today's world, like the rampant commercialism and worry about pollution and crime. I had the impression that the author has only scratched the surface of her fascinating world with this book, and I'm very much looking forward to finding out more about it. Anyway, I can only recommend this book. It's wonderful, lighthearted fun with lots of action and suspense. It also contains the beginnings of an intriguing multi-book story arc that promises much excitement (and maybe even a little romance) for future books. Rachel Aaron has stated in an interview that the next book in the series, *One Good Dragon Deserves Another*, will be out in November, and I can hardly wait.

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