



## Winter of Ice and Iron

*Rachel Neumeier*

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## **Winter of Ice and Iron** Rachel Neumeier

In this gorgeous, dark fantasy in the spirit of Jacqueline Carey, a princess and a duke must protect the people of their nations when a terrible threat leaves everyone in danger.

With the Mad King of Emmer in the north and the vicious King of Pohorir in the east, Kehara Raehema knows her country is in a vulnerable position. She never expected to give up everything she loves to save her people, but when the Mad King's fury leaves her land in danger, she has no choice but to try any stratagem that might buy time for her people to prepare for war—no matter the personal cost.

Hundreds of miles away, the pitiless Wolf Duke of Pohorir, Innisth Eanete, dreams of breaking his people and his province free of the king he despises. But he has no way to make that happen—until chance unexpectedly leaves Kehara on his doorstep and at his mercy.

Yet in a land where immanent spirits inhabit the earth, political disaster is not the greatest peril one can face. Now, as the year rushes toward the dangerous midwinter, Kehera and Innisth find themselves unwilling allies, and their joined strength is all that stands between the peoples of the Four Kingdoms and utter catastrophe.

## **Winter of Ice and Iron Details**

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## From Reader Review Winter of Ice and Iron for online ebook

### Aelvana says

When the Mad King invades, Kehera finds herself a pawn in a struggle between nations and their Immanent Powers. Innisth is a minor lord determined to keep his land under his control, and is searching for the best way to deflect his king's attention so he can be left to rule his lands as he sees fit. The two of them may be the only ones able to stop the world from plunging into chaos during the four days of winter when the Unfortunate Gods are strongest. . .

First, a content warning: although the acts happen offscreen, the book does contain numerous instances of rape (of both men and women), abuse, and Innisth has a homosexual relationship with one of his staff. If I had known this going in, I might have passed on the book, because I really don't like reading stories with rape or abuse, no matter how obliquely they're portrayed.

For me the magic system was the most interesting part of the book. Each country has become so largely because of the Immanent Powers that are tied to the land in that location. The strength of the Immanent determines if it's subordinated to some other or ruling others, which is how the four main countries formed. But it's not like the people know all that much about Immanent Powers and how they work---there's a very strong prohibition against experimenting with them thanks to one major and a couple of minor disasters spawned from bad things the Immanents did when humans got creative. And of course, as much as humans may want more power, if their Immanent decides to ascend to godhood, even the best of them cause disasters and leave the land empty for a time.

On the flip side, it is puzzling that the Powers have no concept of equivalent relationships. It's all about dominance and subordination.

The book did feel a bit long to me. There are a lot of longer descriptive passages, and I wasn't always a fan of when the story would cut away from the main two to show some of what the more minor characters were doing. It felt like it took a long time for Kehera and Innisth to meet. Once they do, Kehera--who was able to go along with the idea of being married off to a maniac on the slim chance she could be rescued, and to keep her country from being destroyed--balks at the idea of a similar sort of alliance with Innisth. Even though she agrees with all of his reasons.

It's not her protest I minded so much as what she did next. In a moment where she totally loses her head, she causes a disaster within Innisth's household. That was one of two moments I really didn't care for in the book. Innisth did need people to stand up to him and challenge him in a nice way (those not trying to take over his country), but that was a cruel--and more importantly, really stupid--way to do it. Now she's really angered the guy that needs to help save her country.

Another thing I really disliked was Innisth telling his new wife, right after they get married, that he has no intention of giving up his homosexual lover. This fits his character. What bothers me is that his wife is totally fine with the fact he's going to be sharing his attentions with someone else. She's started to care for him, and regardless of whether she agrees with his decision or not, I can't believe she wouldn't feel at least a little slighted or rejected or jealous that he's basically told her she won't be allowed his full loyalty.

And I didn't care for how the ending treated Innisth. Tirovay seems to be advocating for himself the exact thing he doesn't want Innisth to do, but it's okay because he's not Innisth.

Anyway, overall it was not a story I would read again. I rate this book Neutral.

See my reviews and more at <https://offtheshelfreviews.wordpress.com>...

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### **Melissa Hayden says**

Rachel takes characters and gracefully glides them into positions they are perfect for, but don't want or think they are right for. There are hard moments they live through that brings out their inner selves, and these are the people they truly are and where they should be.

\*\*\*\*FULL REVIEW TO FOLLOW\*\*\*\*

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### **Ron says**

“Now is the only time we will ever have.”

A better-than-average modern epic fantasy. Enough originality, despite its Medieval European cultural setting, to engage the discerning reader. Written as if for young adult readers, but some inappropriate subject matter.

“We cut our fingers to the bone/ On shards of passing years.”

Well-developed characters. The point-of-view characters had realistic internal dialogue. You cared about several of them. Good storytelling, though the plot--despite several parallel threads--was very linear. Few surprises, good or bad.

“A chance always comes if one holds to hope.”

The reader never doubts the various, increasing manifestations of evil will be thwarted. I didn't feel the menace which I kept being told about. Even the big climax doesn't generate much heat. I liked it, I just wish it was even better.

“Always be polite to your enemies. Courtesy leaves you with more options, and besides it disconcerts them.”

Nice cover art by Marc Simonetti.

“You are the foundation of all my hope, and the tomb of all my fear.”

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### **Katie Patchell says**

**Warning: Book contains numerous cases of abuse/rape of men and women.**

Ok, so I'm going to begin my review with a disclaimer. NOT a disclaimer to apologize for my opinion (because isn't diverse opinion-sharing the whole point of Goodreads??), but other than the above warning, a

disclaimer to explain my history as a Rachel Neumeier fan.  
And I've been that for a few years--a fan.

I average reading 400 books a year, have written to authors periodically by snail mail or email, and check blogs (once in a blue moon). When I discovered Neumeier's book, "City in the Lake," in the library a few years ago, I was spellbound...I loved the lyrical fantasy, with its intriguing characters, adventure, and depth. Lately I've been busy with a college degree/graduating/traveling/work, so checking author blogs and reading latest books hasn't been a priority.

### **Why am I telling you this?**

Because I'm such a fan of Neumeier's books/writing voice that despite all of this happening in my life, I check her blog every day, re-read her books at least once a year, and pre-order her books before they come out. This last one's a huge thing for me--Jonathan Stroud's the only other author I pre-order. I've been burned too many times before, plus--every book is different. It's hard to know what you personally will love until you've read it.

### **Disclaimer over--I'm a fan. You got that part. Moving on.**

I hated this book, and it's a really, really sad thing for me to say. But it's my review space and I'm going to be absolutely honest.

I've been waiting for this book for over a year--reading Neumeier's blog posts about it with anticipation, reading fan comments on title options....everything. The page flap sounded so interesting, and the cover? Wow. Gorgeous.

### **But a few chapters in I realized that the story had more regarding content than was stated. Much more.**

First of all--the smaller issues. One is something I've seen before in some of Neumeier's books, but wrote it off to being a personality similarity between all the dreamy, mage-like female characters. This is the lack of heroine/female agency, even when the heroine is billed as a "strong heroine." In "Black Dog" this happened, in "City in the Lake"--marginally--"Pure Magic"--especially--"House of Shadows"--a bit. It's fine when one female heroine is submissive to men or doesn't take charge of her life, but repeatedly? The reason I'm "airing this laundry" about the lack-of-agency problem for me in her other books is that it happened. So. SO. strongly in Winter of Ice and Iron. Kehara is introduced to readers in the book's flap/summary as a very strong, self-sufficient heroine intent on saving her kingdom.

### **GOOD! More power to you. Please, go save your kingdom like the woman we all inspire to be.**

But readers are first introduced to her doing embroidery while her father and brother are off fighting in a major battle. Okkkkk...I think even if you love embroidery (which I admittedly don't) you'd have to admit that if you're going to have just one female lead—and one marked as a strong, independent female lead—you shouldn't introduce her to readers doing something that was one of the only recourses to women during the decades (centuries) of gender repression.

Not ok.

But I gave this the benefit of the doubt. After all, in previous books, Neumeier has female leads love cooking as their only hobby/major skill (another gender stereotype), but I can look past that.

But what's even stranger is that during the course of the book, Kehara 1) Is not trained to understand high-level strategy, battle tactics, or political concerns (she's supposed to be the heir of a powerful kingdom, so this should've been taught), 2) Is repeatedly captured, and doesn't particularly try to escape ever, and 3) Marries a man who tortures, rapes, and kills men and women, and doesn't show a sufficient amount of righteous anger. And by "doesn't show a sufficient amount" I mean--neither of them.

**Added to this, Kehara is told by her new husband (and also her husband's male lover) that he will not ever give up his lover.**

**And she accepts this.**

*Pause right here--*This just makes me want to WEEP that people reading this may think this kind of relationship is ok. Value yourselves. You deserve loyalty in your dating relationship; you deserve loyalty with your spouse. Love triangles shouldn't happen--your partner should honor and respect you, and treat you as an independent, whole, dignified human being.

As much as I love this author's other works, no one can ever make me think this kind of behavior (the physical abuse constant in the book, explained next) or infidelity is OK, least of all romantic. This happened in "Black Dog" and "Pure Magic" (dominant males with submissive/inexperienced/accepting-of-roles females) and I accepted that. Barely. Because black dogs were a fascinating premise. **But enough.** I'm not accepting it in books anymore since it contradicts my values on gender equality, romance, and human dignity.

I'm going to ignore my personal reader issues with the length of the book (way too many things that needed explained that only muddled the world-building--gods and wall of storms and Immanents and Immanent connections and storm dragons and...), and skip to what I really, especially rated this book one-star for.

**This issue is: the combination of rape/other abuse with magic.** I mentioned this in the first line because this is something that only one person to date has shared on Goodreads at all (never mind the marketing campaign or major newspapers--they just say "gritty"), and really should be a warning if this is something that triggers people. Um, you know what? It should, damn it. It should trigger people.

This abuse is focused on mainly as men dominating through sex--and especially dominating, abusive sex--with other men. Although females are mentioned as being raped or worth "less than" throughout. I'm a female, and am very, very sad and angry when I read books glorifying women being abused in sexual relationships. And honestly, this happens a lot more in fiction than reading about men being sexually abused. So maybe the author was going for a different focus? But regardless of the gender, it's not new or fresh or interesting--*it's terrible.*

I'm not an idiot, and I know when something is being glorified in a book. A main key is the author/narrator's view or the "moral compass" character's POV. This subtly tells the reader what to think, or at least, what the moral guidelines are in the book's world. **Reading a totally normal conversation between the female fiancé of the main male lead and his male lover (who volunteered as a young man to escape an abusive, possibly sexual, job with an old man, and is slept with violently for seven years to appease the main male lead's brutal sexual tendencies) is strange and disturbing enough. But reading about the male lover being glad to be of service (and fighting jealousy) and the main heroine contentedly accepting advice that her marriage night will be memorable....**

No. Just...wrong. This is not acceptable, book world or real world.

In "Winter of Ice and Iron," not only are women raped, homosexual/bisexual relationships + rape in homosexual relationships are portrayed as the norm. I don't agree with these lifestyle choices, and I

especially don't want any person, character or not, whether male or female, young or old, friend or stranger, abused. And it's adding insult to injury to brush this horror off as normal and accepted, even in a book. **Just by what, the victim saying it's ok and the author saying who the hero is?** Is this supposed to put a positive spin on things? Or make "gritty" an edifying read?

I understand if the book's world has violence and sexuality...but it was focused on in almost every chapter. It was normalized. It was explained as being connected to magic, *so...oh well. Guess you just gotta do it to do your magic. Right?*

Really?

I mean, it'd be laughable in parts if it wasn't so terrible. I'd be reading a scene where Innisth is talking to someone and then just, feels the need to assert very physical dominance. So he reaches over and touches the stranger's neck and eyes him up. Cue sultry voice.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but who does this in an average political situation? How about when you're talking to a new ally? Or your new solidier in your guard? Or someone training you/the person you're trying to protect? **It got to the point where it was like:**

"Oh look, Innisth just became a new leader. I bet HE'S going to be a better ruler than his controlling fath--"  
*\*Innisth abruptly changes from talking about a new captain of the guard to asking for young men to fill the role of sex slave\**

"Oh, is Innisth talking to a stranger? Oh nice, he's getting so well-adjusted and friendl--" *\*Innisth can't handle being trained to fight with swords by a peer--must try to sexually dominate male\**

"Oh, ok--Innisth is telling his new wife's guard that he should've guarded her better. Ok, well, that's innocent enou--" *\*Innisth caresses guard's face and demands he agree to do anything he commands while gauging how attractive he is\**

"Fine--this is definitely a situation where Innisth can think with his head and/or be a decent human being. He's talking to his new potential ally in a very political, dire situation. He wouldn't--" *\*Innisth threatens/implies violently forcing the man into every--every--type of submission\**

And the worst part was that the "moment of change" in the novel--the one that turns the beast into the not-so-beast--was when Innisth promises not to torture and rape men and women anymore. *\*jaw drops\** This shouldn't be the end goal of character resolution!

Of course, sexual promiscuity and infidelity during the marriage with his personal male servant...is ok and healthy for everyone involved...? Apparently so.

### **And the reason for the glorification and constant focus on SEX and RAPE and TORTURE?**

*Magic.* This is not a solid, reasonable, interesting, or frankly, mature excuse to do any of these. I've read books where magic is tied with animal traits and human characteristics, and wasn't buying the whole "Innisth can rape men and women and think about sex and abuse and murder constantly because he's bound to a mountain/wolf Spirit." No. Just...no.

Last I checked, **mountains** aren't into abuse, and **wolves** are incredibly loyal, determined pack members who have strict rules of relationship conduct and again, loyalty to their mates and friends. One of the reasons they're my favorite animals, actually. What they're **not** is the Harlequin romance parallel for the buff,

dominant, controlling, steely-eyed "hero." This was angering, and also honestly--really, really disappointing. I love Neumeier's writing style, and I've seen her create and handle and master depth/character development like few others do. Knowing this made it disappointing for me to have little character depth for the "hero" (many air quotes here) other than the need to follow his violent, sexual spirit controlling him, and the strange development of Kehara (aka, sometimes stubborn, mainly passive). This is very much a Beauty and the Beast story on steroids.

**And let me note here (because this is an issue I feel strongly about):**

There's a difference between glorifying sexual slavery and abuse, and showing it as it is to promote social change and compassion for the abused. This book glorified it—I felt far more pity for every. Single. Man. And. Woman. forced into sexual slavery of some kind or level than I did for Innisth. He was definitely not a "poor scarred wolf-life hero..." as he was probably supposed to seem. Rather, I walked away from this book being angry that this kind of borderline "50 Shades" view of sex and romance is glorified, since there are many women, men, and children forced or coerced into submission through unhealthy relationships or human trafficking in our communities and around the world.

**Did I want to write this review?** No. Especially since I love some of Neumeier's previous works so much. And also? I know the book's been released recently, so this is the time for authors to read reviews. And I'm sorry for that. Not for my views in any way, shape, or form--but that I read this, and these were major problems/concerns.

So for me, I'll still re-read my old Rachel Neumeier favorites and keep following the author....but I definitely won't be buying another book by her without getting it first from the library. The flap was misleading, and the unsavory, offensive, degrading, very-focused-on abuse content overshadowed the standard fantasy, huge world-building premise that "Winter of Ice and Iron" was marketed to be.

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## **Allan says**

(Copying my Amazon review)

This book is going on my nomination list for the Hugo Awards for next year. The elevator pitch for this book would be Wuthering Heights meets Game of Thrones. Although the book's characters deal with some very serious topics, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, the book is fundamentally optimistic. So it's dark, but not "grim dark." Optimistic dark? Is that a thing? Also, it's relatively high fantasy - explicit magic and the strong presence of spirits.

The romance is complicated with strong-willed, but good-hearted, characters. Some of the most emotionally charged scenes happen when the protagonists are at odds because of their good will and good intentions, and it is often not at all clear what the "right" course of action is. The characters make the best calls they can, and sometimes that means sticking a knife in the other character's heart and twisting. One scene really stuck with me in this regard. One of the protagonists was raised by an abusive father, and there is an intense scene where he realizes he is doing something similar to his father despite his best intentions. His visceral reaction, accompanied by a whisper of "I am not my father", trying to convince himself as well as others, is heartbreaking.

The worldbuilding is fascinating. Neumeier reminds me a bit of Dave Duncan in this regard - always coming up with new cosmologies and carefully thinking through the implications for the story. I was impressed at how Neumeier managed to bring me up to speed on the basic cosmology in the first couple of chapters



simply by showing the characters living and breathing in the world. Sometimes authors with non-standard cosmologies resort to info-dumps to get that across, and it's nice to see "show, don't tell" done well.

Highly recommended.

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### **dathomira says**

very little happens in this book until like the last 150 pages (all the Big Events feel like they happen off screen) but i did love it because the strength of the book lies in its characters. i wish, honestly, that the whole book had been inniseth but i understand why not. anyway--i loved it, all 500+ pages of it and read it in a week which is a FEAT to be sure. i may now pick up the keeper of the mountain of memory.

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### **Joanne says**

Skimming through the the other reviews posted, you are either on team "I LOVE THIS BOOK", or team "I DID NOT LIKE IT". Me, I am with the first. This was such a refreshing change from the fantasy books I have read recently.

It was a bit difficult to catch on to the story . There was one reviewer who said "Neumier slowly builds her world without giving anything away..." and I think that is spot on.

If you are not a fan of high fantasy, this book is not for you.

There are only a few in this world who have a connection to the magic. That magic comes from the earth itself-you can master it, or it can master you. Letting the later happen can bring on events that may destroy everything.

The story revolves around Innisth tere' Maer Eanetai , who lives and rules the province of Ensete' and the Princess Kerha irine' Elin Raehema, the daughter and heir of the King of Harivir. Innisth carries the fierce power of Eaneten, while Kerha has mastered the gentler, but still powerful Raehemaieth. Was it the Fortunate Gods, or the Unfortunate Gods that brought these two together?

Whichever it was, the facts are clear: They must work together or all is lost.

I hated for this book to end. Research on Ms. Neumeier (who I have never read before) shows she had never done a series. I can always hope she makes an exception. There is so much more I want to know about this world. The other books on my night stand were quite neglected the last few weeks.

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### **Debbie Gascoyne says**

Rachel Neumeier has been writing the best "classic" "high" fantasy that I've read in recent years, and she doesn't disappoint with this novel, which is really, *really*, good. The GR blurb reads "in the spirit of

Jacqueline Carey," I imagine because one character has certain... um ... sexual proclivities that one might associate with Carey, but I think those expectations would disappoint real fans of Carey's and might put others off this book. Yes, there is a dark side to at least one character's sexuality, but that's not what this book is about. What it's about is a fascinating world that, to me, has echoes of Patricia McKillip's Riddle Master trilogy, with its land-rulers and land-heirs. But the lands here are personified, become spirits with needs and to some extent characters of their own, and those who rule over those lands are to some extent subject to those spirit-wills. But it's more complicated than that. It's fascinating, and involving, and all the characters are believable and the protagonists are admirable, and you care about the outcome, which is not predictable. This is so not your average "extruded fantasy product" quest narrative.

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## **Mitchell says**

I previously left a short summary of my experience with this book, but having given it some time to digest, I've decided to talk a bit more about my feelings for giving this such a low rating.

Now, I really like the, say, first 200 pages of this novel. Enough that for a long time I was certain I was going to give this 4 stars. Neumeier had set up a really interesting novel, with two interesting (and one very flawed) protagonists, with a pretty clear conflict. While the magic system of the Immanents was a little confusing at first, it seemed fairly clear once more time was spent defining it. I had criticisms, but generally was enjoying the novel, and it's for this first third that I've given the book 2 stars rather than just 1. However, by the time I was nearly done this (standalone) novel I couldn't ignore the fact that those criticisms hadn't gone anywhere, and many had gotten worse.

First off, let's talk about our two protagonists and how awful they are.

Now, full disclosure, I didn't finish this book entirely. I had maybe 80 pages left before I got fed up and skimmed the next 40 or so, and then I skipped to the end to see what happened. So many of the criticisms I level at these characters and their flaws might be changed by something that happens in the span of 40 pages, but it's nearly 600 pages so I don't think it's unfair to say that's not good enough.

Kehara Raehema is your typical Fantasy princess. She's learned in many homely arts (when we meet her, she's working on, if I'm recalling correctly, embroidery while the men are off fighting a battle) she is naturally an intelligent and clever wit, and has a calming presence about her, but can get feisty when she wants to. Oh, also she has the spirit of a nature god riding in her like the rest of her family, and one day she'll inherit complete control over that god's influence over her kingdom. You know, typical princess things. She's also incredibly loyal to her family, to the point where she's willing to give up her birthright, including previously mentioned nature god, to enter into an unfavourable political marriage with the enemy in the hopes that she'll put an end to war. Though this clashes a bit with how I'm going to criticize Kehara in a moment, I will say that I'm glad Neumeier was willing to pull the trigger on this--one of the only features that separates Kehara from other "princess protagonist" archetypes is that she doesn't try and fight this, she is totally willing to sacrifice, and it's very in keeping with her character.

That said, what the shit Kehara? She is entirely reactive, and passive. Numerous times throughout the novel she thinks to herself "I am no longer going to be a pawn in someone else's game" and I thought to myself "Finally, we're going to see that character arc swing!" but then she'd continue to be a pawn in someone else's game almost immediately. She's frustratingly useless.

It also annoys me, from both a feminist reading and a worldbuilding perspective, that Kehara's powers don't mix with the female roles in this novel. Kehara has access to an Immanent power. She's going to inherit a dominating control over that Power when she becomes Queen. She will be the ruler of her kingdom, expected to both lead her people and wield a greatly mysterious divine power. We meet and hear of a number of women who are in the same position. And yet all of these queens seem like they come out of a mundane medieval Earth. Like, countless times Kehara bemoans the fact she never learned anything about strategy, but why the fuck didn't she? SHE'S GOING TO BE QUEEN WIELDING A GOD ONE DAY. Why, in a world where women regularly wield this power and lead nations with it, are they stuck in gender roles more familiar to the real world? Considering how many times in this novel the day is saved by someone who wields an powerful Immanent rushing to the front of an attack, it stands to reason that she would be expected to go out on the battlefield herself, even if only to watch from afar. So why, when we first meet her, is she at needlework while her father and younger brother are like a kilometre away waging a battle? It feels like lazy worldbuilding.

We also have Innisth Eanete, the Wolf Duke. He also holds an Immanent power and it's much fiercer and more aggressive and violent than the one Kehara holds. This is, often, used to excuse how awful a person Innisth is. He seems like a really good, dark, brooding Mr. Darcy to Kehara's Elizabeth, but then you take a step back and you realize why you're praising him. Like, most of the people he rules over like him because he's a step-up from his father who ruled before him, and from the cruel dukes and such that command the neighbouring lands. But while "he resisted sexually assaulting this rape survivor" may seem like a gold star to the people living in his house, it's not good enough for me to root for him. Regular people don't sexually assault each other, and being able to blame an invisible force of nature for those urges just seems too easy.

And hoo boy is there a lot of sexual assault in this novel. All of it, so far as I can recall, was off page, but a number of characters--male and female--are explicitly taken advantage of by men in power (Two characters who are assaulted by the same men eventually begin a sexual relationship of their own, and while it's explained away as bonding in the face of shared trauma, it strikes me as highly unrealistic that either of these survivors would be ready for that). While Innisth never stoops to penetrating anyone against their will (unless those 40 pages I didn't read are a real doozy of an ending) that doesn't mean what he does isn't an assault. He still uses his power and sexuality to make men and women do as he says, or to make them uncomfortable for his own amusement, or to threaten them. He certainly lays his hands on people, and comes pretty damned close to forcing himself on them. But I guess it's supposed to be okay because his Immanent makes him want it?

Now, don't get me wrong, I could respect Neumeier for trying to write a greatly flawed character, especially one who tries to recognize the error of their ways and tries to redeem themselves. But this never feels like the path Innisth sets out on. Again, maybe in the last 40 pages he starts to come around, but for 500 pages he's treated like this noble brooding hero. Kehara's role in the novel once the two are united is for her to be this calming force to his heat, and at one point she is explicitly told by a different character not to be angry with Innisth because it will hurt his feelings. Again, this is a man who sexually assaults people, tortures and murders others, but she sees his inner beauty so he's just misunderstood. A character that is deeply flawed and interesting for the first third or so eventually proves to be one note, and irredeemable.

Now for more minor complaints.

You've probably noticed, if only by looking at the plot blurb, that the names are something fierce. I can respect if Neumeier was going for a specific naming convention, but it was just too much to keep track of. The names put up a barrier between me and the characters and made it difficult to connect with most of them. I can't pronounce Innisth's name, and I only realized while writing this review that I've been reading

Kehara's name as Kehera. The Immanents themselves have long names, short names, their names tie in to the last names, and are used for location names, making it even harder to keep track of what is what. Then there's just such a cumbersome cast of characters, some of whom get very similar names, that it all just becomes a big mess.

The Magic is also confusing and poorly defined, and seems to just have powers for the sake of powers. It seems to establish pretty early and effectively that a king/queen's connection to the land gives them influence over that land, and that connection varies with their power. Sure. But then Innisth is able to psychically communicate with wolves? And the people that die in his land come back as wolves? And also he can divert avalanches, an ability that never gets applied to warfare? It's poorly defined, and often felt like it was made up on the spot to solve problems or create complications.

There's also a lot of exposition. A lot. Many chapters, especially at the beginning, open with big infodumps to define the world and take forever to actually get to a scene, making the opening rather plodding. Considering this is a standalone novel, a lot of that information feels unnecessary. Much of it also only becomes relevant towards the end of the book, with some of it never seeming to come into play at all. This book could have been shorter. Much shorter.

Finally, the cover. It's a really nice cover. It's stark and evocative, and gets across, I think, the tone of the novel quite well. But Saga Press chose to make the cover shiny, which diminishes that artwork somewhat. It was a silly choice on their part. I'm not knocking points for it, I was just disappointed when I first saw the physical book and realized the cover wasn't as nice as the screen version. Also there's a mountain painted on the back cover that catches the painted light in such a way that I always think I've creased the back cover, and I get this brief panic (again, not Neumeier's fault, and I'm not taking away from the book itself, just a funny minor annoyance).

There were redeeming qualities about this book, but I think it desperately needed an edit, and a few more beta readers maybe saying "Hey, this guy is a huge creep and your female lead is a stereotype" before the book was actually ready.

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## **alexa says**

ahh, i haven't read a book like this in so long.

*winter of ice and iron* is exactly the kind of book, and the kind of fantasy, that i adore. slow, quiet, character-driven, and political. it won't be for everyone, just for those reasons. but it was written perfectly, exactly, for me.

the worldbuilding is fantastic: full, intriguing, and completely different. as is the plot, and the writing, wow, it was extremely elegant and gorgeous. i want to write like neumeier. but where this book shines is its characters. innisth and kehera. god, i love them. these characters are deeply and richly realized, with all their virtues, hopes, pains, desires, and faults. the last of which innisth, especially, has in abundance - but he learns.

(view spoiler)

there is a lot of struggle in this book: to be good, to be strong, to be independent, to be kind, to be in control,

to be willing to sacrifice, to be brave, to be vulnerable. there is a lot of backstory (both personal and historical) that we don't discover in full detail; a lot of work toward happiness and prosperity that happens in the future, about which we don't get to read.

which leads me to my last point. while standalones are increasingly rare in fantasy and i'm so glad to have found one, i wish *winter of ice and iron* wasn't. i long for more of these characters and their world. i'm going to be thinking about this one, and rereading it, for a while.

(i just wish there was a guide to pronunciation, because oh man, i had to teach myself these names and i have no idea if i pronounced them right at all.)

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### **Chas Hunt says**

I read this book in two days. The world building is excellent and the characters were complex and had unique voices. The only thing that fell flat for me was the romantic subplot. There was just a lot of tension building up to it and the result was a little anti-climatic. Having said that, I couldn't put the book down and there was a lot to love about it.

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### **idiolects says**

this is def one star higher than it deserves (the female lead is SO lazily underwritten + what r these names) but god, so few books hit the specific lush-fantasy-romance sweet spot so squarely, and that's p much all i ever want to read

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### **Kell Andrews says**

Dark, complex, engrossing

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### **USOM says**

Take your time with this book. If you do, you will fall in love with the intricate plot and characters. My first desire was to rush it, to try to read as much as you can. But you need the time to savor the events and names (there are intricate names and many have varying names, but just give it time). The book is worth the time if you love fantasy - especially Jacqueline Carey. I am amazed by the detailed plot and this was my most recent read that gave me the epic fantasy vibes in terms of world building, expansive world, and politics.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review from the publisher.  
full review: <https://utopia-state-of-mind.com/revi...>

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## **Charlotte says**

A book to get lost in. Over 500 pages of magical worldbuilding and mermorable characters.

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