



Silent Hall

N.S. Dolkart

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A coward's son, a merchant's daughter, a young prince, a wild girl, and a half-dragon all find themselves refugees from their island home. When a plague destroys their home, they try to forge their own future. Along with a sinister wizard, they awaken a dragon and defy the gods.

After their homeland is struck with a deadly plague, five refugees cross the continent searching for answers. Instead they find Psander, a wizard whose fortress is invisible to the gods, and who is willing to sacrifice anything - and anyone - to keep the knowledge of the wizards safe. With Psander as their patron, the refugees cross the mountains, brave the territory of their sworn enemies, confront a hostile ocean and even traverse the world of the fairies in search of magic powerful enough to save themselves - and Psander's library - from the wrath of the gods. All they need to do is to rescue an imprisoned dragon and unleash a primordial monster upon the world. How hard could it be?

Story Locale: Fantasy island of Tarphe and the nearby continent

Series Overview: Five refugees find their own way, running afoul of some gods, becoming chosen of others, and tangling with wizards, dragons, and other strange powers.

Silent Hall Details

Date : Published June 7th 2016 by Angry Robot

ISBN : 9780857665676

Author : N.S. Dolkart

Format : Mass Market Paperback 522 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Adventure

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From Reader Review Silent Hall for online ebook

Wart Hill says

NOPE

NOPE NOPE NOPE

N.N. Light says

Well done fantasy adventure! I really enjoyed it.

Zippergirl says

Silent Hall starts well and ends well. The plague on the island was great--strange and surprising. Bandu and Criton develop into intriguing characters. And who doesn't love a dragon?

"It seems to me we're wandering aimlessly," Narky remarks, "until we find something better to do."

That's the crux of the problem right there. There are two quests which bring the characters (and reader) right back to Silent Hall, for no compelling reason. A hundred or more pages might be trimmed here to good effect and move the story forward, not backwards. Twice.

Too many gods in the pantheon. "There were so many Gods to keep track of that Tav wondered how people kept them straight." Ditto. Atun and Atel, Mayar and Magor, and Eramia and Elkinar, et cetera. The names are just too similar and their attributes seem to overlap.

Love Bandu. Love Criton. Both well-developed, and could have carried the story alone.

Phaedra spews exposition. Hunter is your typical strong, silent type. Are all high-born people so dull?

Narky complains, but I liked his tendency to speak the unvarnished truth. Maybe Narky could develop a sense of humor. There is a serious need for comic relief in the book.

Two of the best (creature) characters make only a brief appearance. Four-foot and Salemis, we hardly knew ye. I hope the author isn't saving them for the next book in the series. They are needed here.

The potentially rich mythology of tree fortresses, the gateways, and the fairies seemed stripped to the barest minimum. I hope the author isn't saving that for the next book in the series. It belongs in this one, also.

And the menstruation and virgin discussions? Um, no.

Daniel Casey says

In January, Silent Hall made Fantasy Faction's list of 'Most Anticipated Fantasy Novels of 2016,' which was how I discovered it. I'm not quite comfortable calling it "young adult crossover" because doing so shaves off audience for this debut. Dolkart has written an epic fantasy adventure of the swords and sorcery type that although it follows a group of young adults or new adults, if you will, is a story for everyone. It is a tale of adventure, discovery, and hard decision making. When asked to describe the novel, Dolkart suggested "Malevolent gods. Refugees from a cursed island. Giant freaking ants."

Read full review: <https://misanthropester.com/2016/08/0...>

Bob Milne says

This was an interesting book, with some really outstanding aspects to it, but even more roadblocks to a good, solid read. I nearly gave up on it twice, but persevered to the end, although I will freely admit to skimming some chapters.

The good? I liked the concept, and I liked the characters. I was intrigued enough by the latter to want to know more, to read past those roadblocks, and entertained enough by the latter to trust in them (Narky and Bandu especially), even if I was questioning their journey.

The bad? The world building was muddled, with far too ambitious of a mythology for a single book. I read a lot of epic fantasy, and I like my stories to be well-detailed, but this was too much. Also, the plotting of the book leaves a lot to be desired. It never really felt like the storyline was moving forward, or approaching any sort of climax.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Disclaimer: I received a complimentary ARC of this title from the publisher in exchange for review consideration. This does not in any way affect the honesty or sincerity of my review.

Elaine Aldred says

Five teenagers leave their island for very different reasons. Soon after, they discover that the world they left behind has disappeared forever, because everyone they knew has died from a mysterious plague. The wanderers manage to find sanctuary in the wizard Psander's fortress, but is not long before their patron sets them off to complete tasks that will change them all, more than they could have ever imagined.

This is a very special debut novel because the quality of writing takes this tale way beyond a simple fantasy adventure. The style of writing is interesting because the story is told from the perspective of all of the five

main protagonists, and therefore makes for some interesting perceptions of the world of Silent Hall and the people in it. This type of narrative also has the feel of a narration by someone sitting with you as you both huddle by a roaring fire. This creates the type of distance between you, as the reader, and the characters in a way that gives you the space to get a grandstand view of all their enthralling adventures, while feeling as if you're in the thick of the action.

The interactions of the teenagers are wonderfully subtle as they come together in individual conversations to share confidences with each other, or as a group to take part in decision-making which affects the future of all of them.

The five characters each have different qualities. The extent of these is gradually revealed and forms part of the rich texture of the story, rather than dominating it. Each of them has strengths, but also weaknesses which shift and change as the story moves on, and they are able to see their way through by working as a tight knit group.

As teenagers, they have the same kind of issues that developing adults must face, and yet must deal with crises that would test even the most experienced hero. But they begin to build the type of strong bonding that is usually only found in a family, which is essentially what they become.

It is not only the quality of the writing that makes this novel exceptional. Silent Hall is a book which fits comfortably into the adult fantasy genre, but will also appeal as powerfully to a young adult market.

This is a book which rewards with good old fashioned story telling that relates an epic story on a very intimate scale.

Silent Hall was courtesy of Angry Robot via NetGalley

If you want to know more about the writing of this book, then there is an interview on my blog Strange Alliances <https://strangealliances.wordpress.co...>

Nathan Aronheim says

I had the opportunity to get my hands on an early draft of this book, and it's glorious.

The characters are as real and differentiated as they come. Like teenagers generally, they have gaps in their knowledge which lead to some hilarious moments, and their interactions have real depth. The setting is a fantasyland, but with plenty of individual quirks that set it apart, like vengeful, petty Gods in the classic Greek tradition. The ending is epic and just right, if you know what I mean. Appropriate in all the ways you'd want from a fantasy novel.

The author knows exactly how to subvert tropes like the kindly bearded wizard mentor, but also how to play them straight effectively.

Like all the best fantasy, it has analogies for contemporary issues. The characters, like us, have to confront these issues on a personal basis, and can't magically solve them for the whole world any more than we can.

Can't wait for a sequel!

Bradley Jerzy says

For the longest time I've been searching for a fantasy novel that captivates me. Anthony Ryan's Debut trilogy

did just that, ever since however, as been a slew of books I've picked up, and never finished.

I found this at my bookstore, picked it up, and put it down. Quite a few times actually. My hesitation with books lately has really spoiled the magic of reading for me - I eventually picked it up, bought it, and read it all quite quickly.

I devoured it.

This book to me wasn't so much about the story (though that is a huge point to why it captivated me) but about the characters. Five very different, loveable, troubled teens who felt so real to life that I found myself caring for them, rooting for them, and cursing myself that I have to wait for book 2.

All I can truly say is, thank you for finally giving me a novel I can read from beginning to end. Something that truly gripped me and will find itself a much welcome place on my bookshelf.

Kitvaria Sarene says

This book is a mixed batch. It had some really amazing parts, but it also had quite some things that annoyed me.

I'll start with the bad part - to me it felt like there wasn't any real plot. The characters wander around, get some rather random feeling quests now and then, and wander around some more. It all lacks a sense of direction or meaning. Some of the decisions about where to go just didn't make any sense to me. The characters were really, really tropey. I did still like them, and I found them interesting, but they were: The warrior who isn't too bright, the intelligent girl who reads a lot, the coward who would rather run away, a girl who grew up alone in the forest since she was about 6 and therefore isn't too good at communicating, and a half breed, who doesn't really know who he is, looking for more of his kind. I would have really liked them a bit less stereotypical, even though I kinda liked them. They could be more diverse and a bit more depth would help.

There's a romance in this that just didn't work too well for me. Two of the characters get together, and though the girl is told that one doesn't have sex before marriage, and one shouldn't run around naked in front of others, still they all simply pretend they don't notice if the two go away to have sex. Or as the wild girl calls it "mate". I could have done with less mating, without the described birth and the relationship problems between the two, which are at least rather realistic.

This book just has too much. It has gods - and plenty of them. It has fae, and wizards. God magic and Fae magic. And wizards do learn to use a mix of both of them. It has a war, and a curse, and sacrifices and different religions and priests, and living fortresses and god knows what else. And while I love a deep and rich world to explore - this did feel like a disordered mess instead. It just did too much instead of fewer things, but those well. The worldbuilding didn't suck me right in, but rather flowed by me on both sides.

The prose was ok, but felt rough in some parts. Definitely not especially good or fluent, but not so bad it would distract from the story.

The good things - I really liked the perspective of a character growing up in the wilderness. Even if at some points it got too repetitive. The other characters were interesting enough to let me care about what happens to them.

The curse at the start of the book was really well done! I just hoped a relevant plot would have sprung from it.

All in all it was one of those books that fall under the category "I don't regret the time and money spend on it, but I also wouldn't miss it if I had read something else instead"

Talya says

Wow. So good. You won't be able to put it down.

This book is incredible in its character creation. Everyone will have their favorites (mine is Narky) but each one is created so realistically and thoroughly that you will hate and love each one of them in certain points. Dolkart builds off traditional fantasy tropes (like questing) and characters to make them into real characters. The uppity princess, the brawny hero, the outcasts.

Characters - SOME SPOILERS BELOW - DON'T READ ON IF YOU DON'T WANT TO READ SPOILERS

Phaedra: twist on the classic "uppity princess." Think Cimorene from Patricia C. Reade or Ella from Ella Enchanted. Phaedra is the upper class girl who is smart and wants a broader life - but yet, realistically, she is unable to throw off all aspects of her former life - particularly her world view. This is so much more realistic than simply disregarding everything about that life. What I loved most about Dolkart's characterization of her is that he made me hate her in places and uppity princesses are usually my favorite. Initially she is the leader of the group, but as they learn to work together, she can't seem to let go of this role even as she is no longer needed in it. Really realistic.

Criton: twist on the "outcast because of magic" - Criton is really similar to many characters in books who are outcasts for possessing certain types of magic. However, unlike them, he realistically bears these scars.

Criton is a bad person trying to be a good person. (Love the careful prodding to the reader to think about this as Bandu's back and forth about him being "good" or "wicked"). He is pretty deeply messed up and as a result doesn't always do the right thing - not as in "leave my friends in danger" as in "physically harm them myself." Criton is my least favorite character for this reason, but also one of the best written. I definitely know a few Critons in my life.

Bandu: twist on the outcast of society. Think Daine from Tamora Pierce. But Bandu has much more depth. Dolkart uses Bandu's unfamiliarity to explore and critique some very obvious social norms. Unlike some other reviewers, I found Bandu and Phaedra's discussion of virginity to be beautifully written (especially given Bandu's lack of command of English), enlightening, feminist and realistic. (Think Broadway's Spring Awakening)

Hunter: twist on classic brawny hero - many fantasy books now make fun of this trope by making these characters dumb comic relief, but Hunter realizes this issue with his character and really tries to be something different than what he's trained as. One of my favorite characters by the end and I usually despise the brawny hero.

Narky: where to begin? Narky is almost totally original. Social outcast, but otherwise - completely free-speaking, not always morally right, character. So good.

Steve Caldwell says

You know that little voice in the back of your head when you start a highly touted debut novel, "can this live up to the hype"? Well, in the case of N.S. Dolkart's *Silent Hall*, the answer is an enthusiastic yes! This is an original fantasy, with elements of coming of age, epic fantasy quest, and social commentary. It turns funny, action packed, tragic and thought provoking, it is a character driven story that has you rooting for the main characters, warts and all.

The five main characters are Hunter, a noble's brave, selfless son trained as a warrior; Phaedra, a rich merchant's daughter who lives for books; Bandu, a wild girl with fairie magic that was raised by a wolf; Criton, a Dragon Touched (some draconic features, such as scales, magic and fire breathing, as well as basic shape shifting) and Narky, a coward's son who is running from his past.

After barely escaping from their homeland as the inhabitants were cursed to death by an angry god, the five travelers find themselves on the mainland, shunned for being from a cursed island and for their dark skin. Determining they can't afford to stay in the port city they landed in, they head inland, determined to find a place in the world. In a small village they come to, they discover the village is about to be raided by "freedom fighters", and the party hears of a local wizard from the villagers. Determining the village can't afford to be robbed yet again, they convince them all to come with them to the wizard's castle for shelter. The castle is Silent Hall, and is home to Psander, who appears to be an old man. Bandu and Criton see through the Glamour, though, and realize Psander is a middle aged woman, hiding under an illusion. Silent Hall was constructed to hide Psander from the eye of the gods, who years earlier had roused their followers to destroy the wizards. Psander interviews each of the party, and she agrees to help them attain their goals, in exchange for performing services for her. These tasks include helping the "freedom fighters" help slay a Sacred boar and bring the skin back, as well as bring back some magical mineral and mushrooms from an old dragon's lair. On these quests, they meet suspicious villagers, travel to exotic locales, and are almost killed by an invading army. The story takes months to progress, but the author isn't one of those writers that fills pages with fluff. If a journey is uneventful, he just says, a month later, they arrived at their destination. He is very focused. The party decides to go start searching for some of their own goals, but they decide to keep together to do it. This has mixed results, as they are captured by elves, and not the Tolkien kind, more like the Brothers Grimm, the children are so tasty, kind. They escape in an action packed sequence, rescuing a bunch of kids as well. As they are returning the kids to their families, the fanatical High Priest of the City of Ardis, goes on the warpath, and crosses paths with them. Since he slew all of Criton's kind, he sees it as his mission to kill him and his companions too. The party determines they need to find and bring back the dragons if they can, and with some clues left by a goddess, they manage to cross the veil and find one. They figure out that to free him they need something from the elves home, and some help from the gods. They find out the last thing they need is the tears from someone cursed, which basically means the king of their homeland, left alive all alone on the island with the dead. This means a trip home for them. After a nerve racking trip, they discover the King and convince him to come with them, with the wrath of the vengeful god nipping their heels. When they return to Silent Hall, it is surrounded by two armies, and they have to make their way in to save the day. What follows is a mix of magic and steel, single combat and the return of dragons to the world. The story leaves off there, with the party having won the day, but a long fight for justice ahead of them.

The thing I really enjoyed most about this story was how character driven it was. Yes, the book has magic and battles, but the author really chose to focus on the characters, their differing personalities and the way they interact together and grow as individual characters. He doesn't get heavily into explaining every facet and detail of the magic, giving a quick view as they are used, and leaving lots of room for future growth. I think my favorite character was Narky. His character arc is probably the biggest, because he keeps trying to

fight his true nature, and only at the end is he able to reconcile that he will never be selfless like Hunter, magical like Criton, educated and cultured like Phaedra, or fearless like Bandu. He can just be Narky, the guy who will help his friends, but is willing to do the job dirty, as long as it gets done, as well as the guy who will scream "run away" when there's danger as well.

As far as who will enjoy this book, I believe any fan of epic fantasy, or anyone who just like a well written, focused character driven story, will enjoy this book. If your big into Anthony Ryan's Blood Song series, Michael Sullivan's Ryiria series, Tim Marquitz's Blood War series, or Jeff Salyard's Bloodsunder's Arc series, then this book should be a must read for you.

Phoebe Prince says

Silent Hall by NS Dolkart

Silent Hall is about five island teens that are the only survivors of a particularly gruesome curse that causes everyone else on the island to die on land. We're introduced to each character quickly and in successive chapters. There's Narky, who murders a 'love rival' in the first chapter. That's how you start a book!

I'm going to talk a lot about the characters because they're what made me love this story. And the best part about Silent Hall? It never slows down when introducing characters. We meet the other four main characters--Pheadra, Hunter, Bandu, and Criton--in the next several chapters. It becomes apparent something bad is going to happen, and all of the islanders except the five teens are dead by like chapter seven. This story really waste time and keeps the plot moving. There's enough in this book for an entire trilogy's worth of action, but it doesn't feel rushed.

The entire Five Man Band--my favorite trope--is done exceedingly well here. The leader is, oddly enough, Narky, the murderer. The lancer is definitely Bandu, the feral child. Criton is the smart guy, Hunter is the big guy, and Phaedra is the chick. I loved Bandu and Hunter, and Bandu is a *motherly* version of the lancer, which is a fun twist on that character archetype. Hunter is surprisingly reserved and sensitive for the big guy, and I connected with both of these characters. As the smart guy, Criton drives a lot of the plot because it's heavily based in questing for new mythology. Out of all of the characters, Pheadra is the least developed. I feel her arc never came to completion (sequel?). I can't get out of talking about characters without mentioning Psander, the wizard who owns Silent Hall. Psander never came into focus as a character for me, and she mostly serves as a plot device. The main five are strong enough that it doesn't matter that much.

The plot moves fast, and you're constantly deciphering the new mythology that comes along. The mythology focuses on the gods and the barriers between the worlds. I was as frustrated as the characters were not to learn more or know more. The obscurification felt almost too purposeful in some parts of the story, and some explanation on how magic works was sorely needed. The most exciting part of the novel focuses around the elves, who are not the friendly, fairy creatures of folklore. They're strong warriors and gather their powers from an evil tree. We do find out--fairly quickly, too--how the elves powers work and why they work. I think that made that part of the story more concrete and helped propel the action.

The weakest part of Silent Hall is how Psander and her missions feel underdeveloped. They're basically fetch quests, and while the five characters have emotional reasons for wanting them to happen, it's never explained why Psander's magic works. This does hurt part of the ending of the book.

Notes:

I couldn't stop thinking of 'narking' every time I read Narky. I have no idea if this was intentional on the author's part.

The romance plots surprised me. They felt realistic, if not fully developed, and I felt 'sequel' in those unresolved stories.

I read a lot of fantasy series where people natter about religion this summer. Can't say I particularly enjoyed that aspect of this book.

Rating: 5 stars. This book wasn't fun, but it was action packed, and I liked all of the characters.

Vippi says

~ARC Kindly provided by Netgalley and Angry Robots in exchange for my honest review~

DNF at 51%

Silent Hall follows the adventures of five teenagers – Hunter, Narky, Bandu, Criton, and Phaedra – who find themselves together in the same boat (both figuratively and literally) ending up as the only survivors of the mysterious curse sent by the gods on their homeland. This is just the trigger event that will lead them to face a series of adventures and even to challenge the gods themselves.

I really, really wanted to like this book... The premise was really interesting and the first chapters seemed to start off on the right foot...

But then, sadly, it was all downhill from here.

That's the problem of this book in a nutshell:

"It seems to me we're wandering aimlessly," Narky remarks, "until we find something better to do."

Even though good, old Tolkien reminds us that *not all those who wander are lost*, in this case I really **felt lost in all that wandering aimlessly**.

The plot fluctuated between dragging in some parts and being too rushed in others. The world-building lacked details and the complex mythology - maybe a bit too ambitious for a single book - never felt smoothly embedded inside the whole story. The characters are interesting (especially Bandu and Criton), but I struggled to connect because they **lack depth** and their emotions, motivations and reactions felt superficial.

All in all, **this book had some potential but apparently that was not enough to hold my attention or make me care for the story and its characters.**

Koeur says

<https://koeur.wordpress.com/2016/05/0...>

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Genre: Fantasy

Rating: 4.8/5

Publishers Description: Five refugees from a plague-stricken island cross the continent searching for answers. Instead they find Psander, a wizard whose fortress is invisible to the gods, and who is willing to sacrifice anything – and anyone – to keep the knowledge of the wizards safe.

Review: Wow, this was crazy good especially when you consider that this is the authors first novel.

The world building is spectacular and the movement spans different territories while entertaining specific quests along the way. The character development is really well done. Each character has named chapters that give their unique perspective on the traveling entourage and their own internalizations. Add in some wizards, Elfs, a dragon and a few angry Gods and the recipe for great entertainment is complete. I sure hope I get to read more about Narky, Criton, Bandu, Phaedra and Hunter. **GET THIS!**

O Suzannah says

I don't usually read books written by men, but this book far exceeded my expectations. I loved the female character who was abandoned as a child and raised in nature. Her ability to sense the messages of the natural world and interpret them -- and her difficulty in communicating this to others was very well done (and resonant for me). I liked the remake of Biblical allusions like Noah and the flood/ark and the nomadic wanderings of this little remnant of a group that has been destroyed. The romance between the two characters who were raised outside of society was interesting and well attuned to the overall atmosphere. The prose is well-written and the plot has plenty of page-turning adventures.

I recommend it for a highly entertaining summer read.
