



## The Wolf in the Attic

*Paul Kearney*

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*1920s Oxford: home to C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien... and Anna Francis, a young Greek refugee looking to escape the grim reality of her new life. The night they cross paths, none suspect the fantastic world at work around them.*

Anna Francis lives in a tall old house with her father and her doll Penelope. She is a refugee, a piece of flotsam washed up in England by the tides of the Great War and the chaos that trailed in its wake. Once upon a time, she had a mother and a brother, and they all lived together in the most beautiful city in the world, by the shores of Homer's wine-dark sea.

But that is all gone now, and only to her doll does she ever speak of it, because her father cannot bear to hear. She sits in the shadows of the tall house and watches the rain on the windows, creating worlds for herself to fill out the loneliness. The house becomes her own little kingdom, an island full of dreams and half-forgotten memories. And then one winter day, she finds an interloper in the topmost, dustiest attic of the house. A boy named Luca with yellow eyes, who is as alone in the world as she is.

That day, she'll lose everything in her life, and find the only real friend she may ever know.

## The Wolf in the Attic Details

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Author : Paul Kearney

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## From Reader Review The Wolf in the Attic for online ebook

### Nigel says

Yep - not what I was expecting and it certainly worked well for me. 4.5/5 probably. Review nearer publication

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### Zippergirl says

Lazy like the River Thames at its source, Anna's story trickles out; swirling in eddies and rushing and riffling when the rains start falling.

The Wolf in the Attic by Paul Kearney has as much or more mythical flavor as supernatural elements. A brave young girl becomes a woman while on the run in the rain under a full midwinter moon. Everything and everyone she's ever known are gone in an instant. Under threat of the workhouse in this olde Oxford, it's a choice between grabbing her doll Pia and a bedroll, or "the men in the black hats and suits [who] frighten [her] more than the wolf in the attic."

Readers who read will delight in the few sly inside jokes, as when Anna meets an Oxford man, and in conversation mentions "tree language, all deep and slow." Now where have we heard that before? When she leaves urban Oxford behind her companions become decidedly more unearthly, and old. Really old.

Highly recommended read if you've enjoyed Robert Holdstock, Guy Gavriel Kay or Charles De Lint. Standalone, but there is hope for a sequel.

I received this book from netgalley and the publishers in return for a review.

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### Book Haunt says

It's 1929 and eleven year old Anna Francis lives with her father, George in a damp, lonely old house in Oxford, England. Life hasn't been great for them since they fled Greece. Her mother and brother were both killed at the hands of the Turks who destroyed their city. Her father is no longer the pleasant man who educated her in the Greek myths and read to her when she was small. He's wasted away their money and spends his time drinking and holding meetings with other expatriates. Anna's life is very lonely and sad. Her doll Pie is all she has to talk to.

While Anna's father is holding his meetings, Anna sneaks out of the house for adventures in the city and wood near her house. Anna's adventures are just beginning. First she witnesses a murder and the murderer sees her, but lets her go. Anna has some very nice run-ins with two not-yet-famous men, Jack Lewis (C.S. Lewis) and Ronald Tollers (J.R.R. Tolkien). She even gives Tolkien some ideas about what a tree might say and what it might sound like. Fans of Tolkien will get a little chuckle!

One day, Anna decides to make the attic of the old home her special place. Once she starts spending time there, she comes across young Luca hiding out in the attic. Luca comes from a family of gypsies and getting

to know him will change Anna's life forever.

The writer uses a lovely descriptive atmosphere here which fits with the dreamlike sequences that unfold. Anna was a very sympathetic character and I felt so sad for her. At about the halfway point, the book changed to something very different. It took a startling turn that caught me off guard and I wasn't quite sure where it was going from there. It was a bit like reading two short stories. *The Wolf in the Attic* is book of many delights. It draws heavily from numerous areas such as Greek mythology, English folklore, paganism, and other theological themes. It's a good read for those of you who love fairy tales.

*I want to thank the publisher (Rebellion Publishing) for providing me with the ARC through Netgalley for an honest review.*

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### **Carolyn says**

Eleven year old Anna Francis and her father are Greek refugees living in Oxford in the 1920s after being forced out of Smyrna by the Turks and rescued by a British ship. Anna's mother taken by the Turks and her big brother Nikos, a soldier may be dead. Anna is home schooled and keeps away from the local children who taunt her for her olive skins and dark features. With her father distracted organising a Greek refugee committee and away in London a lot, Anna spends a lot of time on her own exploring the attic of her house and roaming the streets and countryside. She meets interesting people including a chance meeting with the young C.S. Lewis and J.R.Tolkien with whom she has a conversation about trees that can talk. However, when she comes across some gypsies camping in the woods, her life changes in unexpected ways that will have profound effects on her future.

This is a beautifully written book and Anna is a wonderful narrator, still childlike but thoughtful and insightful. The story has fable like qualities like a tale from a gothic fairy tale, particularly after Anna meets up with Luca, the wild gypsy boy with the yellow eyes. The ending of the book suggests there will be a sequel to look forward to.

*With thanks to Netgalley and the publisher Rebellion for a digital copy of the book to read and review.*

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### **Asghar Abbas says**

Dead trees all around and everywhere, all of us everyone deadened inside, where everything in sight is the color of a dying leaf. We are all dying, never to be in a song again. So what song can we really follow all the home. This haze, all the hues are golden here. This warm lull, a wet breath, before the winter's song is quite heady. Thick dryness in the brisk air, heavy and breathless, but not in distress, not yet anyway.

It is finally that time of the year again. So of course, the moon is urging us to harvest something other than a smile, more than a smile even. So much more than Her Smile. But the real question is, can half a moon still find us on that road?

Here's the thing, it is still the moon that reminds me of all that I am. All that I still am. I am the music without the song. I am without a Song. I am in a song without one. I am the brightness in the color that's not vermillion.

And here I am standing by the road next to the fields fresh fallow and inviting. Look to your right, stalks of rye undulating so prettily. Turn Left, you really should and stay on the left, you find fields of barley rippling in the night air. And in the middle of all this is your favorite girl, naked and swaying, reciting John Banville in her native tongue, her accent quite pleasing and fae. But that recital is neither an incantation nor an intonation. It's just her, a consciousness preceding matter.

From glossy to dull, all the leaves, this forested floor puts you in the picture of fall. What a pretty picture this makes up. Puts you in a mood. This road, which the woodland creatures are so wary of, makes you appreciative of Fall. It really does.

For Fall of mankind, that is. Fall of men is something I am all for, you know. Oh, you do know. Good. I got no dragons. But shall we begin?

It has already begun.

If there is a book that's made for fall, it's the *Wolf in the Attic*. I mean, come on. Just Look. At her. No, look at the title too. How can you read this and not be a goner? Look at the cover, now saying it in Homer Simpson's voice, look at it. Peel the onions and sure, peel back everything, skin on skin to get inside. Aperitivo. Yum.

Look at this book, but not at Tony Stark, or at that new suit. And yes, you got me, Ro. I got this because of the book we both love. I really wanted, no needed this to be 2016's *Tell the Wolves I am Home*. Even though there is an actual wolf in this one.

So I read the book, waiting to love it. For the book to impact me, but something went wrong. Sure, the wolf turned and the moon helped a little bit. But it wasn't the bloodletting I was hoping it would be. I wasn't sated like I once was one hot April in 2015. It wasn't the fate I had sealed.

For one thing, it took forever to get the real story going, even longer for the wolf to actually get to the attic. More than half of it had gone by before the wolf deigned to show up. Had he stayed there in the attic, it would have been a great book. I wish he had. But the book went in completely different direction. Not to where the witches were waiting for us under the burnt umbrage of the stripped trees.

See, I was expecting it to be one thing, it became entirely something else. Hints of continuing this story is a little disturbing. It wasn't what I was expecting it to be, certainly not what I had made sacrifices in the standing stones for.

Make no mistake, this was a story of an immigrant unsung by the civil twilight. It is tragic because this had started off so well. Well, well enough. But by the end of it, I quit trying to figure out what it was trying to be. It had become a mishmash of half-baked ideas that couldn't be cooked no matter what, barely edible. And then the jumbled ideas that started to rot, something was already rotten, so beware.

Then why the high ratings?

Well, you asked the question in French. You are the answer in no known language.

The Wolf in the Attic is incredibly well written.

But there is no story there. You gotta have a story, even if she is not in it.

Then there was the very unnecessary, casual appearance of Tolkien that didn't service the plot in any way, didn't serve the story at all, had no purpose other than gimmickry.

So, of course, we had the mandatory mention of Lord of the Rings. With Tolkien there, it was only a matter of time. Sure enough, our heroine was walking with him and she basically impelled the idea of the talking trees. What were they called again? Gnats? Last I saw of those trees, they were looking for women for themselves. Lady trees, that is.

CS Lewis was there too. His cameo was actually pretty interesting. But poor sweet summer child. In the book, he was actually thinking critically. Freely. It's rather sad in his later life he found the o in the organized religion. That he would later go on to accept Aslan as his personal lord and savior, is just a sad end. Consider the collective harm that has been done, maybe it is time to outgrow, grow up, outgrow them all. If you think about it, remove indoctrination and confirmation basis, and what is left, what are you left with?

The natural quotient of all goodness in the world is faith. That's well and good. I mean it, it's the best. But better not wave it around, better not quench your thirst. One pill won't make you big, one pill won't make you small. They are both the same, rabbit-hole all too familiar. Both pills lead you down to the same warren.

Bottom line, at the bottom of it all. You can pick any. You may believe in the spaghetti space monster or clthulhu, just keep your limitedness away from my literature. You can make your characters delusional, that's what is allowed in the marriage that's fiction. The ultimate concession of creation, of creating, of the creator. That's your prerogative. But don't push your tunnel vision that's your point of view down the throat of others.

Last thing, less of make belief and more of fantasy. Even if it is the fantasy making us believe. In something. We must let go of the fanatical and hold on quite dearly to the fantastical.

Finally, the cult of kindness needs to be a little more tolerant. People. Intolerant goodness of people needs to be a little more vague and flexible. So much so. Until. We are all relaxing, all of us, in the sands, on the shores of tomorrow, for our own much earned and equally deserved littoral retreats.

I'll meet everyone there, see you.

Write better fiction, sure. But. Just, be better.

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### **Chocolategoddess says**

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in return for an honest review.

I'm unable to decide if this book was bad, or just not my kind of thing.

Kearney can use words. He has many beautiful turns of phrase and creates original imagery.

Kearney has read, and included a great deal of mythology in this book, from Ancient Greek, to Druidic religions, to werewolves, and even the lives of two famous writers.

Neither of these are bad things, and yet at the end of this book I was left with the feeling that it was nothing more than a vehicle for both of them.

This book is flabby with beautiful words. The main character, Anna, experiences everything in detail. Intense, lavish detail. So much detail that reading it was quite a challenge because it took so long for anything to actually happen through all the crisp air and mysterious landscapes. Anna also mulls over her situation in just as much detail. I found her focus believable as a child with little else going on in her life, but it was boring. The same story could have been told just as well, better even, with a quarter of the words. Maybe then it wouldn't have taken me two months to slog through it.

The mythology was gathered from many corners of the world. Unfortunately I don't care. There was just so much crammed into this book, and jammed down my throat, over and over, or else glossed over. Anna hails from Greece and her father teaches her about the old stories. I used to be pretty into Greek mythology as a kid, and Anna is not as into it as me, despite treating it like some deeply personal connection to her past. Kearney mentions a handful of stories, several times, and never really goes beyond mentioning the same names. It felt lazy.

The rest of the mythology was not lazy, but it was confusing. Anna crosses two other groups of people, the Romani, and the Roadmen, who both have strong, competing mythologies. The only one we really get to hear in any detail is the Romani's, which as far as I'm aware, bears no resemblance to any traveller's actual mythology, because it inexplicably links the werewolf myth with them, via Ancient Egypt and "the East". Honestly it sounded kind of like a mash up of whatever Kearney fancied putting in there: anything to make these people mysterious. This seems pretty disrespectful.

I don't usually mind mash-up mythology in my fantasy stories, but this book was heavily rooted in reality. So rooted that it's actually our world, because J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis inexplicably appear in this book. There is actually no reason for them to be here, other than to say they're here. It's one of the reasons I picked the book up--I was thinking this would be an interesting tale picking up on events and themes from the great writers' works and weaving them together with a new story. It didn't. Kearney just inserts the two into the book, pretty much as "random encounters" that have no real effect on the story.

This brings me to the plot. The first half of the novel is largely a lengthy setup for what goes on in the second half. Not in a cool way where little hints are left behind and then you get halfway through and suddenly it all makes sense. It's in the way where I shouldn't have to read half the book for the inciting event! I'm sure Kearney thinks the inciting event is much earlier than halfway through, but it isn't.

Spoilers for the first half of the book here: Anna wanders about a bit, watches a boy murder a man, gets chased by the murderer, is let go by the murderer, and then wanders around a lot more, bumping into the writers, and giving us little hints that all is not well in Anna's little world. That's the entirety of the first half of the book (no wonder it took me six weeks to plough through it!) before something actually happens which kicks Anna into action. So much pointless wandering and hinting, over and over ... I don't care. Stop jamming bread and dripping down my throat, I understood that they were poor without you telling me three times! I really did!

Running into the second part of the book, the reading became easier, but more frustrating because the mythology opened up and I had so many questions. Unfortunately it never gets straightened out. Instead of developing a rich world of complex interaction between the fantastical elements, we get ... the same things jammed into us that were jammed in the first half of the book. It was frankly exhausting and I picked up the pace just to be done with the book. If I wasn't reading it for NetGalley, I wouldn't have finished it.

So far we have a story that's wordy, determined to show us just how much mythology the author knows, with a highly-repetitive plot. Now we move into more spoilery territory ... if you don't want to know who turns out to be the bad guys in this, read no more!

The bad guys turn out to be the dark, foreign, Romani people. I mean, really. Seriously? Who are the shining good guys? The incredibly white and stalwart English folk. This happens in the last few pages. It isn't set up previously, beyond the author being vague about everything important, it just straight-up turns into racism. Did. Not. Appreciate. Particularly with the massive amount of media hatred and prejudice towards travelling people, I think this is a pretty terrible thing to put in. Can't we just get over the "other" being the bad guy? Please?

Aside from the terrible pacing, the story was average. Girl meets boy, boy murders man, girl doesn't really seem to care all that much because it's a BOY zomg. It was pretty dull.

There's a whole section where girl suddenly gets her first period where I kind of ... got irritated. Kearney's a man. He doesn't get what it's like to suddenly have blood pouring out of your vagina. He has Anna treat it kind of like a wound, instead of freaking out, despite the fact she's never even heard of a period. She literally shoves a sock in her pants and whines about her stomach hurting. I don't think there was really a need for it to be included. I'm pretty sure he thinks there was a need, but I can think of multiple other ways he could have done it, just off the top of my head so ... there wasn't a need. Please don't write about periods unless you actually have a clue or it's vitally important. And please don't give us the YOU'RE A WOMAN NOW speech twice. Just no.

The setting was largely Oxford. I've spent some time in Oxford because I'm fortunate enough to have a friend who lives there. I've walked past The Eagle and Child (I will have lunch there one day, I'm determined). Oxford is one of the most magical places I've been. It's soaked in history, and the architecture is hundreds and hundreds of years old. I'm sure it's changed since the 20s, but it hasn't changed that much. There is a reason Tolkien and Lewis created such incredible stories, there is a reason Oxford is used by filmmakers to illustrate magical stories. Oxford gets into your brain and fills it up with inspiration. Somehow Kearney manages to reduce that magic to naming the roads Anna walks down. It takes very little to have me nostalgic for Oxford, yet Kearney still didn't manage it.

I can at least say that I didn't hate Anna. I didn't like her voice, but she's a plucky kid who controls her own destiny and doesn't do stupid things without a good reason. Ultimately she's mysteriously saved by a magical white dude but in that situation there wasn't a whole lot she could've done herself, so I'll allow a pass on this one. But still, I'm sighing.

Overall, I didn't like the book. If you like vague world building, random cameos of famous people, and elaborate words, then this book may be for you. For me, I'm going to find a book with beautiful writing and a strong plot, or a fantasy so rich with world building I can practically taste it.

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### **Althea Ann says**

Anna is a heart-rendingly lonely little girl. A Greek refugee in 1920's Oxford, her memories of a warm and sunny, loving home seem almost like fantasies of a lost paradise. Now, everything is cold and grey. Her father has retreated into desperate, fervid political meetings with other Greek expats - and the bottle.

Removed from public school because of bullying, Anna has just her tutor, and the doll whose friendship she knows is purely imaginary. Free to wander the streets (and the woods) unsupervised, Anna stumbles across a terrifying scene of violence - and encounters a family of strange and rustic travellers. These seeming Gypsies attract her with the foreign-ness they share with her (one young man in particular holds a dangerous attraction), but their culture may be older - and odder - than she could guess. Has Anna met her salvation - or her doom?

This novel is the first I've read from Kearney, and it will not be the last. This is so, so good. The language is just beautiful, and I fell in love with Anna's character: her precocious love of mythology, her imagination, her independence, and her dreams. Her situation is so well fleshed out that it could easily have stood on its own as a novel that was just a character study about the refugee experience. At first, I thought it might be simply a mainstream historical novel, as I embarked upon reading this while knowing little about the book, and nothing about the author. However, then Kearney weaves in his supernatural element, and it is just superb. (view spoiler)

The one thing I do have to say, is that a blurb I saw makes much of CS Lewis and Tolkien appearing in this book. Well, they do, but I wouldn't have noticed if I hadn't read the blurb, and I doubt many other readers would have either. While I recognize the author's wish to give a nod to those greats who inspired some of the themes and setting of this story, I didn't feel that their appearance was necessary, especially because the way they're presented, you expect them to play some intrinsic part in the tale - and they don't.

Regardless - 5 stars for this one.

Many thanks to Solaris and NetGalley for the opportunity to read. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

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### **Nikki says**

Received to review via Netgalley

The Wolf in the Attic is a bit of an odd one. I have quite a few reservations about it: firstly, I'm not sure about the narrative voice. It took ages for me to pin down how old Anna was supposed to be, based on the words and phrases she used, and the general tone. I know she's actually a refugee whose first language was Greek, but instead she comes across as slangy (saying things like "what rot!"). I also wasn't sure about the inclusion of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis — it's a cute cameo in one way, but it also gives one of Tolkien's original ideas to a fictional character, and the inclusion of the two shook my suspension of disbelief. Especially when Kearney manipulated real events to fit his story better, re: the date of C.S. Lewis' conversion to Christianity. They really aren't necessary to the plot at all, and not really to the themes.

More worryingly, though, I didn't really buy in to the relationship between Anna and Luca. That is, there's nothing wrong with it as a concept, but in execution I didn't see why they were drawn together. It just needed a little more flesh on the bones, and it probably would have worked.

I'm also not 100% sure about the stuff about the Romani people. I know that the skinchangers/witches say that they're not Romani, but have dealings with them, but it's a slim difference and at other times the book doesn't seem to make a distinction. The stuff about King Arthur and the Roadmen felt a little confused, and I thought it needed a little more explanation — just a little. I'm not sure I agree with another reviewer who felt

it came across as racist, because Luca is a good person and there are definite shades of grey, but it is a bit borderline in some ways.

Nonetheless, it's an interesting read, and Kearney's style is certainly readable. The book is a little slow-paced, but that's fine for me; it actually feels a little odd how quickly the second half is covered, given there's a lot more going on. I enjoyed the process of reading the book; it's just thinking about it too much that seems to spoil things.

Originally posted here.

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### **Kaitlyn Red Wing says**

I HATE giving one star reviews but this book was cutting it close. I didn't solely because I couldn't finish the book so who knows, maybe it got better. (I doubt it)

First, the writing was excruciating, Kearney obviously knows how to word beautiful sentences, however, so much of the book seemed pointless - run on sentences about the same thing over and over again. I get it, this girl is poor and she's Greek but she's not supposed to act like it or tell anyone. Also, spoiler here, Anna watches a boy murder a man and then when she runs into him again and he takes her home she doesn't act like someone who just witnessed him murder a man because guess what, he's a BOY.

I'm a HUGE fan of mythology, especially greek, but I found the mythology in here thrown in at the most random times and lazily explained. The same stories are used over and over again and don't go into much detail.

I honestly don't even want to talk anymore about this book because I had such high hopes for it and I'm left extremely unsatisfied.

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### **Virginia says**

While I found aspects of this story entertaining and engaging I had a number of issues with the book as well.

First the things that I liked: I enjoyed the story telling itself, and I enjoyed the setting. I found myself vividly immersed in Anna's surroundings. I also enjoyed her interactions with the other characters she met. The dialogue was generally well written and engaging with only one or two exceptions (which I'll get to in the negatives). I like that Anna is bold, adventurous and stubborn, but realistically has no idea what she's doing. I think she's a well rounded character in many ways, though I found her frustrating at times, but I find most children her age frustrating so I thought that rang true. ;-)

Now the things that bothered me. Unfortunately, this section will seem longer because I'm nitpicking and explaining my reason for disliking certain things. That does not mean I found the book to be more contain more negatives than positives, if that were true I would be giving it two stars or fewer. That said...

I found the way the theme of religion, and particularly christianity, was addressed to be repetitive and unoriginal, and I it irked me that it was there at all because it wasn't developed in a way that seemed to overly relevant to the rest of the plot. It seems like there might be some more coherent explanation in the offing (I can only assume this is the first book in a series as it is otherwise woefully lacking in plot completion) but there was insufficient relevance to this first book to make me feel like references to angels

and devils vying for Anna's loyalty were really relevant, when we were already looking at a world filled with interesting magic.

Similarly, the presence of CS Lewis and JRR Tolkein as characters is interesting and entertaining at first, but then becomes wholly irrelevant by the end of the book. Again, I'm assuming that they will become relevant in subsequent books, but the overall cohesion of the first book on its own is severely lacking. These two characters serve no purpose but to make cameos as far as the plot of the first book is concerned.

The following section addresses some issues I had with the book but contains major spoilers so reader beware:

(view spoiler)

One last thing that I like, but that contains a major spoiler: (view spoiler)

In conclusion, I enjoyed the story enough that I will seek out the sequel, but I was disappointed in how dependent this book seems to be on having the next book come out in order to resemble a whole story. We have been given just a taste. I'm all for epic series, but I prefer that they break in places that give some semblance of closure before moving on. I hope that the next book, even if it is only the second of many, will provide more sustenance for the plot.

\*I received an advanced reader copy of this book via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review\*

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### **Leah Bayer says**

Going by the description, this doesn't really sound like something I would be drawn to. Historical fiction about a refugee girl from Greece in 1920's Oxford, meh. But that cover, man, it got me. Also the name--I am an absolute sucker for animals in book titles. In fact, I read two Wolf books back-to-back!

I'm so glad that the hype made me pick this one up, because it is absolutely magical. It reminded me strongly of *Among Others*--not really in plot, but definitely in mood. Anna, our main character, is a little girl who just wants to escape into stories and fantasy but lives in a depressingly realistic world. Her mother died before she came over to Oxford, and her father has changed drastically since the tragedy. He's quite cruel to her at times, so Anna is wrestling with these conflicting ideas of her past (happy family, community, culture) and present (sad family, poverty, being an outsider). It's pretty heartbreakingly

But of course that's not the main lure here. Anna's life takes a fantastical turn while in Oxford. There are incidental meetings with C.S. Lewis and Tolkien, which of course add to the sense of the magical, but this is a straight-up fantasy book. I'm not going to discuss any of the actual fantasy elements because they kick in at about 50% and I don't want to spoil this for anyone, but they're absolutely wonderful. Unexpected but familiar feeling, this has that "The Magicians" vibe of "what would life be like if there really was magic?"

It's not all sunshine and butterflies--it's dark woods and terror. There are both folklore and mythology elements here, along with tropes taken from traditional high fantasy, but they're spun in a unique and clever way that feels familiar without being trite or boring.

I can see this appealing to a huge variety of people. Those who love historical fiction, high fantasy, fairy tale inspired works, magical realism, tragic turn-of-the-century tales... it's got a little something for everyone.

[arc provided by netgalley in exchange for an honest review]

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### **Jeremy Jackson says**

A Greek refugee flees with her father to Oxford in the 1920's, where she first meets two budding authors of the magical, and then magic itself.

The prose alone garners five stars from me; this is a beautifully written work. The story is just as good-historical fiction, incidentally fantasy, a touch of fable and a touch of faerie.

The characters of Lewis and Tolkien were respectfully crafted, and felt authentic. All told, *Wolf in the Attic* felt like an homage to the best stories that came out of that fantastical, scholarly friendship. I feel as though Jack and Tollers would both have enjoyed it immensely.

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### **Holly says**

I am Anna Francis, wanderer, adventuress, and I feel that the snowy dark is smiling on me because it knows the love I have for it. I am a creature now of shadows and the dusk.

First of all, this book was definitely not what I expected. Although it was categorised as Science-Fiction and Fantasy, the description gave nothing away so I didn't really know what I was getting into.

Kearney definitely knows how to write. The strong, emotive language carried the book and threw me right into the wonders of 1920s Oxford. I could list a multitude of quotes to show how well Kearney writes, but you really need to read the book to get immersed into the language and the feel of the novel.

The rich language intertwines the story of a refugee girl with myth and legend. Anna, though merely 12, becomes the hero of her own story, and the adventure she goes on is carefully balanced between realism and the mythical. You never quite forget she's 12, but you're also invited to suspend your disbelief. Thrust into the 'Old World', the English countryside turns into the playground of legends.

Despite a relatively slow start, with a total unawareness of where the story was going, the novel builds into a mix of wonder and reality. With sneaky cameos of Tolkien and C.S Lewis, and the strong link to English history, you're always slightly tethered to the real world, where Anna is merely a refugee from Greece.

Anna is a wonderful character, and as the story develops you can't help but be sucked into the mythology and

the wonders of such an adventure. I'll definitely be looking into Kearney's other works.

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### **Dearbhla says**

I'd heard of Paul Kearney before, but I'd never read him. And seeing as he is Irish I figured I really should give him a try so when I saw this in the library I picked it up. And I really loved it. It's a small story, in a way, the story of one girl making her way in a strange land. A refugee who doesn't really remember the home she has left. A girl who has lost so much and has no idea where she is going. And then she meets Queenie and Luca and maybe she has found a future?

It is a wonderful blend of historical fiction with myth and fantasy. But if you have read the blurb and think this is a book all about C.S. Lewis and Tolkien, then think again. Yes they make an appearance, but they are cameo roles not starring ones, so in a way I think they shouldn't have been mentioned at all. They add colour and atmosphere, and add to the whole world. Oxford at the end of the 1920s.

There's a lot to love in this book. The writing is so immersive. It's a joy to read. The first half is all Anna, only gradually does the supernatural intrude onto her life. You may even start to wonder when the story is going to really get started. I loved the slow build though. It feels like a fairytale before the fairy godmother shows up, all the hard work and none of the magic.

The second half is much more mythic in its supernatural aspects. Witches and Horned Gods! awesome.

The ending is a somewhat open, so maybe there is a possibility of a sequel. I'd be happy if this was a standalone, or if there was a followup. I'll certainly be on the lookout for more books by Kearney in the future.

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### **Donna says**

This book was an uneasy blend of historical fiction and fantasy, two very different genres I had been hoping would integrate seamlessly like in other books of its kind I've read. But the two genres didn't blend much at all in this book since the first half was mostly historical fiction and the second half was mostly fantasy based on Old World mythology and folklore of a kind which wasn't my thing. The writing was beautiful, though, with much loving attention given to details in that setting, but less so when it came to developing the characters with the exception of the main one, Anna Francis.

Anna is eleven and lives with her father in Oxford in the late 1920's. They are Greek immigrants who barely escaped with their lives several years earlier when the city of Smyrna where they had lived was captured by the Turkish forces, not everyone in their family as lucky as they were to have survived the war. They came over to England on a British allied boat and set about adapting to a new way of life, each in their own way, while struggling to not forget their heritage and the ones left behind.

*Memories are important, like the bones of the mind. We build ourselves upon them, flesh and blood moulded around the pictures of what is past.*

But things go terribly wrong as Anna is bullied for being different, epitaphs and stones thrown at her by the neighboring schoolchildren. Her father heads meetings for other Greeks who are desperate to find a way to return home and reclaim their life and what property was once theirs. Devoting himself to this cause, he neglects Anna who is taught privately at home and develops her own private world when the outer one she lives in seems too cruel and uninviting except for the land itself and two kind men she meets on one of her many nightly wanderings. But these wanderings have her crossing paths with something her wildest imaginings could never have come up with. She is equally terrified and fascinated with what she sees until something horrible happens that tips the scales to the side of terrified.

*I know these streets as well as my own hands, but everything seems different tonight, as though Oxford is a woman who has just unveiled herself, and the face revealed is not who I thought it was.*

I found the first half of this book to be interesting and full of depth as Anna, living an isolated life, enriches it with the stories she's read and by certain people she meets. She is a sympathetic character who is smart and determined to fit in even as she's treated as an outcast by many. Then the second half of the book came along and lost all depth while veering into half-explained fantasy elements that became even more muddled by the end which left many questions unanswered concerning several characters. And unfortunately, some of those characters who didn't have formal educations were written in a way that had them sounding like hillbillies instead of people whose ancestors immigrated from Egypt. This dialect completely threw me out of the fantasy world and the English countryside the author crafted. Instead, I longed for the beauty and depth of the first half of the book and in the blossoming relationship Anna had with one guest star of a sorts--CS Lewis. The author of this book has said in an interview that he'd like to write a sequel and expand on this relationship. The question is, do I want to risk reading another book if I can enjoy only half of it should history repeat itself in the sequel?

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