



Touch

Michelle Sagara

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Nathan died the summer before his final year in high school. But he wakes in his room—or in the shrine of his room his mother's made—confused, cold, and unable to interact with anyone or anything he sees. The only clear memory he has is a dream of a shining city and its glorious queen, but the dream fades, until he once again meets his girlfriend Emma by the side of his own grave.

Nathan wants life. He wants Emma. But, even if Emma can deliver what he desires, the cost may be too high to pay...

Touch Details

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Colleen says

Wow. Sagara doesn't shy from the hard subjects, and this book is full of them. The theme of this story (not the plot) is "what makes a human a monster/evil, and who gets to define that?" From the first book, we readers learned that assassins travel the world trying to kill budding necromancers before they come into power because of the assumption that they will be evil. Emma, our heroine, is a budding necromancer who refuses to command or control the dead. In the opening of this second book, Emma is dealing with all kinds of pressures, like talking with her dead dad over homework and navigating high school. Added to that, her friend Allison is dealing with her own lack of talents in just about everything but school and being a good friend. Stir in a guy who has lived with resentment most of his life for never having anyone love him. Add normal things, like parents, and less-normal things like dead people arguing with live people.

This is the second book, and gets rather assumptive of backstory here. Most of Emma's necromantic powers are already established for the reader. Emma can see/talk to the dead, and she can make them visible/audible to others if she touches them. She can use her physical hands in metaphysical ways. But she continues to refuse to use or abuse anyone around her to strengthen herself or exercise power for personal gain.

Emma's powers of friendship are quite strong, mostly because of loyalty and acceptance of people as they are rather than as she wishes them to be. That requirement of understanding is the foundation of her friendships with everyone from Michael (high functioning autistic) to Allison (plain bookish introvert) to Amy (queen bee and social force of nature). Emma, Eric, Chase, and a host of other characters move through the story. The alliances and understandings among the group are fluid, and come under storytelling pressure both from Emma's decisions and from those of her friends. All of the various relationships are in play in this series, and are highlighted even more as this second book breaks into separate points of view, rather than focusing exclusively on Emma.

Spoilers ahead

The point of view that is most perilous is that of Nathan, Emma's months-gone dead boyfriend. The book starts out in present tense from his point of view inside the car accident that kills him. In an edifice of storytelling that I find difficult to enjoy, Nathan's POV in the story is told in present tense, contrasted by the mostly past-tense rest of the story. (Either Sagara does not have quite a firm enough grasp of grammar, or I of her idiom, to make those tense transitions well.)

The other strongly presented point of view besides Emma's is that of Allison, loyal friend and girl of no particular powers or talents. She's smart, she understands Emma and Michael, and she can communicate when no one else wants to do so. She also has weaknesses of pride - for example, she hates to fight in front of anyone because she knows it makes her face red and blotchy - and strengths of character that make her decisions completely believable.

For most of the story, Allison's arguments centered around her loyalty to Emma, and focused on the character most trying to pull them apart: Eric. But there was some budding resentment, too, as Nathan reappeared in the story and therefore in Emma's life. Allison and Nathan got along well enough, but Allison was not used to being ignored by Emma in favor of an invisible friend.

painful spoilers ahead

[illegible]

In the previous book, Emma and her friends went off into danger to save a ghost-toddler from a long-burned-out housefire that he was permanently reliving. In this book, Emma talked a crying ghost boy out of a ravine by promising to take him home. This ghost was both autistic and confused about why he died. He did what his mother told him to do - wait in the cold in the ravine until she came to get him.

Yes. What you think.

This was a painfully real part of the book. As I said, the theme of this book is "what makes a person a monster" and here was a huge psychological confrontation for me, as a reader, to step into a book and face a reality of life: mothers abandon their children to die.

Sagara, and therefore Emma, pushed the plot and that question through some very painful contemplations and confrontations to a point beyond judgment of another person. This was where the strength of Emma's character was proven to be so solid, and not maleable for the sake of plot continuation. Emma was willing to step beyond her mental judgments of people to see the actors in this tragedy as they were, not as she wanted to believe. And while the resolution was ok-enough for the moment, Sagara did not waive any epiphany wands over any characters' heads to change who and what they were for the sake of readers' solid sleep later.

I picked this book up because the first one was really quite good. I recommend it with caution to people who would like to continue along in the story.

Kris says

I liked the first book a lot better. There was just something about this one that seemed slow and disjointed. I had a lot of trouble reading it. I'll definitely still get the next book because I want to know what happens but depending on how it goes I might not be able to finish it...

Maggie says

Loved Allison and Chase!

I found Mark's family very odd. They were my least favorite from the book.

Hoping Eric and Emma end up together!

Ferdy says

Spoilers

Hated this. The plot was all over the place, I didn't know what was going on most of the time — it was a rather confusing read.

-I was annoyed that there was no quick recap of the first book, all that was needed were a few sentences here and there especially since it'd been over a year since the release of *Silence*.

-What's what: Emma found out she was a Necromancer of some sort, her dull dead boyfriend turned up and Emma whined, then evil necromancers turned up and acted evil. The other necromancers attacked Emma and her friends, apparently some Queen of the Dead person sent them to retrieve Emma for who knows what reason. Emma found some random unrelated ghost boy and tried to help him go home, everyone acted preachy. The necromancers attacked her friends again, Emma felt guilty and then they all decided they should run away together. The end.

-I loathed Emma's character, her personality grated on me so much. She was such an insufferable cow, she was a hypocrite, she was judgmental, she always thought she was right, everything was about her and her pathetic feelings. I'm guessing I was meant to feel sorry for her because her boyfriend died four months earlier. I didn't. Her grief was dull to read about and she behaved as if she was the only to have ever suffered loss.

Losing a high school boyfriend is no doubt sad but it's hardly the worse grief in the world. Her mum lost her husband, who was also the father of her child, the man she built a home and family with, and the love of her life... But Emma had the audacity to think that her mum's pain wasn't as bad as hers. WTF?! Losing a husband and being a single mum is far worse than losing a high school boyfriend. The two don't even compare. But dumb Emma thought her dead dad wasn't as important to her mum as her dead boyfriend was to her. Just because her mum wasn't crying day in and day out eight years after his death didn't mean she stopped caring about him or that he didn't mean as much to her.

Did Emma not realise that people grieve in different ways? Not everyone publicly mourns and not everyone mourns forever. Did she not think that her mum might grieve privately or that it was too hard for her to talk about his death or that she coped by getting on with her life?

How could the thick cow believe losing a high school boyfriend was just as difficult as losing a husband?

Not only did her mum lose her husband but also the father of her child, and her partner in life, and the person she built tons of memories with. Whereas Emma's boyfriend was someone she hung out with at school and went on occasional dates with — he wasn't her family, they didn't share their lives together, they didn't have kids, and there weren't even together that long. Her mum's loss was so much more worse than Emma's. How

could Emma not see that?

Also, Emma's juvenile attitude towards her mum was disgusting. She was such a brat, she should have been happy that her mum had found happiness with someone else after eight years, but the selfish cow wanted her to be alone and miserable for the rest of her life.

She was a silly, judgemental, self-involved douche who thought she had a monopoly on pain and grief.

-Most of the other characters irritated on me as well. Amy was annoying, Eric had little personality, Nathan was dull, and Michael was boring. Chase was the worst, he hated Emma and demanded Allison stop being friends with her even though he'd only known both a couple of weeks. Who the hell meets someone and then shortly after demands they should give up their best friend? He had no right to expect Allison to give up Emma for him just because it made him feel better. He barely knew her yet he thought he had a say in her life. Allison had been best friends with Emma for years, she wanted to help with all her necromancer problems even if it meant risking her life, it was her decision to stick by her friend, it had nothing to do with Chase.

-The necromancers and the general world building was rubbish. Where did the necromancers come from? What was their end goal? How did the hunters come about? How could Eric see the dead if he wasn't a necromancer? Why didn't anyone ask him? How did the Queen of the Dead and Eric know each other? What was the Queen of the Dead's agenda? Why was she the way she was? What was with the lamp, the door/light, and the old lady?

-The plot was all quite disjointed, there was no clear storyline. It didn't help that the POV's randomly changed and that it wasn't always clear who the POV character was... Every character sounded the same.

-There was so much inner monologuing and pointless preaching and philosophising going on. It made for awful reading.

-The sentences were poorly constructed, the dialogue/monologue rarely flowed well.

All in all, a rubbish book with a nonsensical plot, flat characters, and poor writing.

Diane says

I could have sworn I posted my reactions to this back when I read it from the library, but apparently not. Oh, well, a few quick long-after comments, then....

2.5 Goodreads stars: not as good as the first. The plot got bogged down with repetitive introspection, and I'm getting a little impatient with the juvenile lead's continuing belief that the death of a high school boyfriend is practically the end of [her] world. Still, it's not poorly written, and I do plan to read the third (which was *finally* released).

Caitlin says

A touch too angsty in places, but plenty of action in others, and the Queen of the Dead is an impressive antagonist. The characters, once past the angst, and pretty interesting too, varied and realistic for teenagers.

I'm curious as to what happens next, but not enough to rush out for the next book.

Jen (That's What I'm Talking About) says

Rating: D+

Originally posted at That's What I'm Talking About

Review copy provided by Edelweiss

Touch opens with a short prelude from the POV of Nathan, the deceased boyfriend of protagonist Emma who was not present in the first title, Silence. Nathan chronicles his thoughts and existence from the moment of his car crash to "present day," roughly three or four months after his accident. We discover that he was given an order by the Queen of the Dead to go home and watch his family and friends. The book then begins its story shortly after the conclusion of the first title. Emma's friends are trying to adjust to a routine after learning about her ability to see ghosts and the existence of Necromancers, humans like Emma who have the ability gain powers from using ghosts' energy. Necromancers work for the Queen of the Dead, who wants to kill off Emma's friends and family.

Although I don't normal read and enjoy YA literature, I was completely enamored with Silence, the first book in Ms. Sagara's Queen of the Dead series. The story was engrossing and characters strong, keeping me glued to the pages, despite some confusion while reading the book. Unfortunately, the second story, Touch, did not hold my attention like the first book did. The small issues I had when reading Silence only grew and became problematic the second time around. The plot is slow moving and seemingly without a clear direction at times. There is entirely way too much introspection by these characters, and at times I just wanted to skip over the repetitive analysis of true friendship, love and death.

Overall, Touch focuses on the emotional development of each character rather than be driven by the plot and action. If that is your cup of tea, you may enjoy the book. However, I wanted a cleaner/clearer storyline that moved from point A to point B. There are side stories which are critical for the further development of the characters, but did nothing for the overall plot of the book.

Unfortunately, each of the characters fell flat for me. The strength I found in each before, seems to have fizzled under the weight of insecurity. Too often characters are harshly judging themselves or uncertain what course of action would be best. The only character who seemed to have her act together is Amy, the Cordelia-like (Buffy) friend of the gang who takes charge, even over the knowledgeable elders. And don't get me started on the parents who didn't seem to care that their kids are leaving at all hours of the night and won't share where they are going. These kids must live in a world where parents are gullible, and I found it annoying. I like that the author tried to include the parents, but I felt it was an inadequate effort.

I appreciate that the book does not shy away from some thoughtful and meaningful issues and ideas, the primary being what it means to be a true friend. It also touches on the subjects of moving on and forgiveness. On the surface, I like the topics and how they are handled. However, after a while, the discussion carried on too long and the story became lost in introspection and repetition. For example, I appreciate the theme of friendship and what defines a true friend, but I was bogged down by the constant reminders that Emma and Ally are best friends no matter the dangers. They continually have to justify it to the Necromancer Hunters, Chase and Eric, and it got old.

Once again the author makes the reader work to comprehend the fundamentals of her world. While I

appreciate not being spoon fed every detail, it made for confusion, and after two books, I would have like a little more concrete idea of what is happening, rather than having to infer every detail. I'm still not entirely clear on who the Queen of the Dead is and why she wants Emma so badly, which bothers me. There were times that I re-read a section more than once, yet still felt like I was missing something and didn't fully comprehend the significance of what was said or happened.

While there are some exciting and tense moments, unfortunately they were too few and far between. One of the side stories involved a deceased child who was lost and wanted to go home. There is such great potential for action in the story line; however, it ended with a rather long commentary on forgiveness. In addition, at one point during the deadly climatic confrontation, two separate characters took a rather lengthy time to evaluate his/her life and place in the world that I felt they certainly should have been killed off during that time!

I had high expectations for Touch after reading the first title in Ms. Sagara's Queen of the Dead series. Unfortunately, I was disappointed in the title. It has some good qualities, and the very ending was excellent and holds great potential for the next book. However, the good was overrun by too much introspection and discussion of heavy topics. While I appreciate the discussions, they all became repetitive and some were ill-timed, which detracted from the book and plot. If you enjoy a book driven by character development, you may enjoy Touch much more than I.

Anna Wick says

It gets deep and philosophical

Clearly to flush out the world and prepare us for the and by reading the trilogy last book. I'm enjoying it

Mei says

Not as enjoyable as the first book, I found the pacing dragged a bit in this one and there seemed to be a bit more existential philosophising which I find a little tiresome, but that's just me.

Alyssa says

Review posted on The Eater of Books! blog

Touch by Michelle Sagara
Book Two of the Queen of the Dead series
Publisher: DAW Hardcover
Publication Date: January 7, 2014
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Source: eARC from Edelweiss

Summary (from Goodreads):

Nathan died the summer before his final year in high school. But he wakes in his room—or in the shrine of his room his mother's made—confused, cold, and unable to interact with anyone or anything he sees. The only clear memory he has is a dream of a shining city and its glorious queen, but the dream fades, until he once again meets his girlfriend Emma by the side of his own grave.

Nathan wants life. He wants Emma. But, even if Emma can deliver what he desires, the cost may be too high to pay...

What I Liked:

I'm really trying to think of redeeming qualities of this book, I really am. But I seriously don't know what stood out, that I can remember, that I really liked. Honestly, I can't even summarize this book properly - I have no idea what was going on.

What I Did Not Like:

One: Sagara did not do a really good job of refreshing readers with events that happened in book one. You know when you first start reading a sequel, and the author slips in a really abridged recap of the first book in the beginning of the sequel? For people who are really familiar with book one, it might be annoying, but for people who don't really remember book one, it's extremely helpful. Also, the author will mention events that occurred in book one periodically throughout the sequel, and remind readers of who certain characters are.

I'm going to be honest with you: I didn't remember most of book one. I didn't even remember who Nathan was - without reading the summary of this book. I remembered Emma, Eric, and a fire. That's it. And what did not help was that Sagara didn't summarize what happened in book one for us (in the beginning of book, as most authors subtly do), and she didn't really hint at what happened throughout the book.

I usually remember books really well - even if I didn't absolutely love them. But let's be honest: I hadn't read book one (Silence) in over a year, and while I LOVED that book, I didn't re-read it like, ten times, or anything. I borrowed it from the library, read it, and returned it. That was in June 2012. So... I didn't really remember much. Just that I LOVED book one.

Two: this book is boring. Like, I legitimately had to stop around 30% of the book, and take a twenty-minute power nap. I am not joking. I could not keep my eyes open while reading the ENTIRE BOOK. That is a problem. And no, I was not reading it at early hours of the morning. I DID get a good night's sleep for the previous days. This book was just THAT BORING.

Three: the plot made very little sense to me. Or rather, there really wasn't a plot? Events seemed scattered and unrelated. Beware the Necromancers, wonder about Nathan's appearance, help a dead boy, beware the Queen... that almost sounds straightforward. But the plot is anything but that. It's so disjointed and all over the place - I couldn't figure out where the author was going with anything.

Four: this book is in third person, but it's in third person limited, with multiple points of view. That is SO ANNOYING, in this book. I could never tell where the switches were exactly, so I would get annoyed when I realized that I was reading the events in someone else's view. I mean, it's all third person, but Nathan, Allison, Chase, and Emma think very differently. And the switches were very random. They weren't clearly marked by a symbol, or a large space, or anything. I suppose this might be fixed in the printed copies of this book, but it was so irritating to deal with, while reading.

Five: ALL of the characters, with the exception of Eric (and maybe Michael), are kind of sickeningly stupid. I remember really liking Emma, in book one. In this book, I really don't like her. She's sort of dense, or maybe just naive, or brainless, or something. I didn't like Allison either, because she decided that she needed to be in EVERYTHING, right in the middle. I didn't like Chase, because he seems too angry all the time. Chill, bro. I didn't like Amy, because I feel like she was forced upon readers, and the author tried too hard to make her a dynamic and spunky character. Just... no.

Six: the romance is so weird. One couple sort of deserves each other. But Emma and her dead boyfriend. Weird. Like, leave the dead alone. If they're supposed to be dead, let it be. Move on. This is when I dislike romance in books - when the romance suddenly make ALL the difference in the plot. Like, Emma's feelings for Nathan is what drives this book, and the next book. No. Bad. Bad, meaning, not something that I like.

Seven: the ending was CONFUSING. I mean, the entire book was confusing, and very boring, but the ending in particular was confusing. I honestly have no idea what happened, and I just spent the last three hours reading the book. The ending was kind of like a slap in the face, because the entire book is sort of la dee dah, until the climax, and that's where the author decides to throw all of the action into one scene. But I'm confused. I don't understand why, all of a sudden, everyone realizes that there is danger. Like, it's hard to explain, but basically, WHAT? Break it down, please.

Overall, I couldn't figure out what was going on, and I didn't like the characters, and this book was not for me. Cue the disappointment, because I was really excited to read this book. I gave the first book FIVE stars last year! How often does that happen?! Ugh. This was a not-so-great sequel.

Would I Recommend It:

No, not really. It's unfortunate, because I was looking forward to reading this book (and potentially enjoying it). I hate it when sequels disappoint me! Honestly, if you liked the first book, it's worth a shot. But if you have not read the first book, then don't bother with either book. It's not worth it (in my opinion).

Rating:

1 stars. I'm super disappointed with this book, and this series, for that matter. I doubt I'll be reading subsequent novels in this series. That's too bad!

Sabrina says

I'm all for friendship, but the whole, lying to my family and putting them in danger because BFF!!!! Squeeeeee!!!! Well, that just pissed me off, and there is a strange maternal crit thread in the undead space going on that is just bizarre and was very similar to the last book.

Anna Wick says

middle book is like middle child, always a bit insecure what it needs to be

? BookAddict ✍️ La Crimson Femme says

This is a must read. The danger heats up in the second installment in the Queen of the Dead series. Nathan returns at the behest of the Queen of the Dead. His reunion with Emma is bittersweet. Emma is still in the dark about her powers and what her purpose is as a necromancer. Ms. Sagara pushes up the violence with threats against Emma's friends and their family. This story is dark. It isn't a fluffy teenage drama. Instead, it is more similar to Joss Whedon's season seven of Buffy, when Buffy's last glimmer of cheerleading spark is completely snuffed out.

What I really love about this story is how Ms. Sagara designs each character. Her characters are complex and well created. They all have their specific hot buttons and motivations. The way Emma's friends relate to her is a powerful demonstration of loyalty, courage and a bit of foolishness. Amy and Allison won't leave Emma, even if it means they could possibly be killed. While Chase and Ernest tries to convince Allison to abandon Emma and stay safe, Eric tries to keep Emma from getting killed. Amusingly enough, Michael is the only sane one.

What moves me about this book, is Emma's idealist sense of justice. She is outraged by Mark's situation. Mark is a child ghost who is trying to figure out what happened to him. He needs closure. Emma is angry and already creates a story in her head about why Mark is dead and she's judged and cast the evil villain. This is a very realistic portrayal of a sheltered child, especially with Emma's strong convictions of right and wrong. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. I'm not saying that adults are jaded with flawed moral compass. What Ms. Sagara does, is show how there are shades of grey. The lines blur because each situation requires an analysis of many variables. It's not cut and dry. This is a learning experience for Emma and she grows from it. She's no longer the self-righteous child screaming "unfair"! She's now a more subdued young adult learning that real life contains hard choices and there is no such thing as "fair". There are several teaching moments here. It all comes down to core concept - choice. Each character must make a choice and accept the consequences of their choices. This speaks to me.

While this kind of lesson is critically missing in most young adult books (and adult ones), it does make the story pace a bit slow. It's also so subtle that I believe many readers will miss or ignore it. This would be a mistake because I believe this is a key element to determine what kind of necromancer she turns out to be. These are tests to see if she will show compassion and see ghosts as more than a power source. Ms. Sagara mentions this point a few times which means it will come into play in further installments. No one ever said Ms. Sagara was fast. She's frustratingly elaborate at times and takes a long time to build her foundation. It is a very solid foundation. This fantasy is highly recommended to readers who enjoy a story about loyalty, courage, idealism and struggles with moral dilemmas.

**provided by Edelweiss*

Kt says

Review originally posted on my blog: A Book Obsession..

I'm not sure what happened, but this series has completely derailed for me. I remember being completely engrossed in the first book. Sure, I was a bit frustrated with the slow pace of the world building, but the

premise was great, and the characters were even better. However, this time around in TOUCH, it was incredibly hard to keep reading. It just lost that spark that drew me in the first time around. In fact, I would only get about 5-10% or so of the book read before literally falling asleep. It just couldn't keep my attention, and I only made it through 50% total over two weeks. This is very rare for me as a book typically takes me about 2-3 hours to devour. I really hate to give up considering how much I enjoyed the first book, and want to see what happens next, but I just can't seem to get any further. Everything just seemed disjointed from the characters to the multiple plot threads that didn't really jive together. Maybe I just wasn't in the right head-space for this book, but I just had to set it aside. I'll more than likely pick it back up sometime and at least skim to the end, as maybe things will turn around, but for now it just didn't work for me.

Aliette says

Continues the Queen of the Dead saga, deepening the world and throwing a few curveballs in the way. Amy is just flat out awesome, but as usual it's Emma and her compassion that are the centre of the book.
