



# Close Kin

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## Close Kin Clare B. Dunkle

For years, Emily has been living happily in the underground goblin kingdom. Now she is old enough to marry, but when her childhood friend, Seylin, proposes, she doesn't take him seriously.

Devastated, Seylin leaves the kingdom, intent on finding his own people: the elves. Too late, Emily realizes what Seylin means to her and sets out in search of him. But as Emily and Seylin come closer to their goals, they bring two worlds onto a collision course, awakening hatred and prejudices that have slumbered for years.

## Close Kin Details

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## From Reader Review Close Kin for online ebook

### Kirsten says

This sequel to *The Hollow Kingdom* was entertaining enough, but I found it overall to be rather disappointing. There were definite high points: the fleshing out of the history of the conflict between the elves and the goblins was welcome, and Dunkle's depiction of the dying elf culture was excellent, if harsh.

There were quite a few problems with the book, though. For one, the pacing and plotting was very odd; I felt that Dunkle introduced a lot of plot elements and then didn't give them their due, and the story seemed to move in fits and starts.

I also, quite frankly, had problems with Dunkle's handling of the characters in this one, particularly the women. Kate was so fantastic in the first book, and Sable, a young elf woman, had great potential to be just as interesting. Dunkle never really lets that potential play out, however, and after a daring act at the beginning of the novel, Sable fades into little more than a passive pawn. Dunkle's characterization of Irina, the other elf maiden, was downright forehead-slappingly offensive; the character is completely, unbelievably vapid. There's an attempt toward the end to make her more than a pretty cardboard cutout, but by then the damage is already done.

Finally, it bothers me that the author has created a sympathetic culture (the goblins) who rely on wife-stealing to further their race, and has really just completely failed to truly explore the ramifications of this. There are attempts to do so, but for all of the main characters it pretty much boils down to a kind of Stockholm Syndrome, where the stolen wives decide that they are better off where they are now. I might even be ok with this if it was more blatantly acknowledged, but instead it feels like Dunkle is glossing over something uncomfortable that she herself has created.

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### Linda says

I was disappointed with this sequel to THE HOLLOW KINGDOM. Read Kirsten's review from August, 2008: I couldn't have said it any better.

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### Miriam says

This series' continuing emphasis on forcing teenage girls to get married really turns me off. It bothered me in the first book (especially the ease with which the author glossed to "but she loved him") but I was willing to accept it as a traditional trope. There was no need to use the marriage theme again here.

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### Clare Cannon says

A wise and entertaining sequel to the Hollow Kingdom. The focus shifts to new main characters, Kate's sister Emily and her best friend Seylin. The variety and realism of characters is Dunkle's special talent, both

the good and the bad learn and respond to circumstances, growing better or worse for their own free choices. Emily's initial resistance and later recognition of the need to gain maturity is expertly portrayed, realising that winning others over to her own ends is not as helpful as learning from what others might be trying to instruct her.

Dunkle continues the theme of goodness being more attractive than external beauty, and once again manages to win her readers' affection for even the most unusual characters. A rewarding read for teens.

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### **Kathleen says**

3.5 stars, mainly because I loved seeing so much of Kate and Marak from book one, The Hollow Kingdom. What I loved about book 1 was the singleminded focus on only two main characters, Marak and Kate. Their developing relationship was given the attention it needed, and I enjoyed watching the beautiful Kate bond with her ugly goblin beast, even in the midst of fear, loss, and danger.

However, in this book (Close Kin) we see three relationships develop. Three!!! Seylen and Emily, Tinsel and Sable, Thaydar and Irina (spelling?). And this book gets grim and really dark in places.

Emily's romance was supposedly the focus, but I found myself more interested in Sable's story. I wanted to know more about Sable and Tinsel ( a nice pairing). However, I felt cheated. Not one of the relationships got the attention it needed -- and I needed -- so I left this book feeling a little miffed.

But the good news is that we see plenty of Kate and Marak from book 1, along with their adorable son Catspaw. (Loved the scene with weary Old Agatha and the little rascal.) I liked how Kate and Sable became friends. I also liked how Irina showed her trump card -- the single magical gift she had that no one else could top. That sequence was sweet.

At the end, we see little Catspaw, the prince, and young Matilda (Til) grow into an adolescent. I liked how Dunkle portrays Catspaw, but she used the proverbial sledgehammer when working with Til's character. Why? Maybe she's prepping us for book 3, In the Coils of the Snake (yes, that's right).

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### **Bella Smart says**

It was good, but not quite as good as the first.

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### **H says**

Wow. Just wow! I love this series; it is really amazing! The way Clare Dunkle made a world where societies of elves, dwarves, and goblins can live in secret without any humans knowing is spectacular! I would definately read this series again and again!

The characters have depth and the conflicts are so cool and believable! I definately recommend this to anyone who loves fantasy!!

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## AziaMinor says

God I could read these books over and over again they are that good. The magic, goblins, elves, even stupid humans all make it worthwhile ?

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## Willow says

I've really enjoyed Clare Dunkle's *The Hollow Kingdom*.

Dunkle has an unpretentious way of writing. Her characters are humorous, direct, and to the point. Her stories are fast-paced and fun. And the best part is there's no purpley prose cluttering up the sentences or overlong, blown-up descriptions. Yet the world building is still imaginative, different and succinct. I like the characters and I like how Dunkle never strays from her original source which is obviously old-fashioned fairytales.

Dunkle's world has a harshness that doesn't sugarcoat the ugly and cruel aspects of both goblins and the elves. Nobody is perfect here. Goblins are pretty good natured, but they have dangerous, badass tempers. Elves are beautifully magical, but they can be pretty ruthless. As always, Dunkle has a strong theme running through her books about how beauty is misleading. Goblins might be grotesque, but they are grievously misjudged. And elves might not be as beautiful as they look.

I must admit though, I didn't enjoy *Close Kin* as much as *The Hollow Kingdom*. In the first book, the give and take between Kate and Marak was great because they ended up being each other's equal, even with all the annoying goblin laws. But this book is less focused. There are more characters and it's heavier handed. Don't get me wrong, Emily is a hoot, but this book seems to have an underlining message that says all women will only find happiness if they get married and have children (or adopt like Ruby did.) And that message drives me bonkers!

Here I had thought Marak had changed from the first book (because of Kate) but he hasn't changed at all. He still has the same nauseating agenda that says women are a means to an end; their main purpose being to pump out a bunch of goblin babies. Yes, I realize Marak is just trying to save the goblins from extinction, and the goblins are a lot nicer than the elves (Dunkle even tried to add that the women go on to have exciting careers as well as a fruitful family). But I don't buy it. I seriously wanted to punch Marak in his overbearing, goblin nose.

Of course this doesn't stop me from wanting to read book 3. These books are entertaining, unpredictable and fun. I don't need to agree with every theme from every book I read.

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## Laura Navello says

[ 2 more brides! And they even start to fall for their husbands-to-be in the few days that took the travelling from their camp to the goblin kingdom. I know they were mistreated and abused in their camp, but it seem

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## **Lyssa says**

Although this book was no way near as good as The Hollow Kingdom, I still greatly enjoyed it. The characters are so much fun!!! This tale centers around two people from the first book, but it also introduces intriguing new people. Emily and Seylin must undertake quests in order to grow up and figure out which direction their lives will take. The story takes on a definite dark side when Seylin encounters the ragged elf band. I highly recommend to all my peeps and I am most definitely reading book three.

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## **Katie says**

[I really appreciated that Irina wasn't just depicted as "dumb." She had talents, too. (hide spoiler)]

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## **To Catch A Falling Star says**

I liked The Hollow Kingdom better; that ending was extremely unsettling. Let's see how Til is redeemed in the next book.

It was rather slow toward the beginning.

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## **Maud says**

This book was such a disappointment, it lacked all the charm and excitement of book 1!

The one thing that I liked about this book (and is the reason that I gave it two stars) was the whole elf culture and the way that it was dying out. It was interesting to see and it felt realistic.

Sadly, that is the one and only thing that I liked about this book. There are far more things that I disliked which sucks even more because the first book was great.

My first problem was the pacing. It was off, it was so incredibly off! Sometimes we would follow characters for a day or two and nothing interesting happens and then suddenly a month or so has passed and still nothing interesting is happening!!!

This whole book is all about finding brides. Nothing else! There is no excitement, there is nothing thrilling, there is nothing interesting at all about finding some bloody brides!

And when they finally do find some brides, they are boring. Irina is a ditzy stupid girl and she remains this throughout the whole story. Sable showed promise during the first chapter but in the end she stayed this shallow weak girl. Neither of them ever become interesting even though they had potential.

And talking about the brides, the author seems to simply refuse to explore the fact that these women have been stolen by the goblins to take as their brides! She doesn't explore the consequences of this at all.

Whenever she makes an attempt it turns into some kind of Stockholm Syndrome; the wives listen to their goblin-husbands-to-be and come to the conclusion that life with them is probably better than before. They do not love them, they do not like them but you know what it's better than being a free elf apparently... The

author simply glosses over this uncomfortable thing she has created and I wonder why because it could have made the story so much interesting! Maybe she doesn't want to portray the goblins badly? I don't know... Finally the ending. It was too perfect, it was too sweet and the final chapter was unnecessary for the story. It doesn't follow any of the main characters and seems like a set up for the next book.

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## **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

If you like fantasies that don't pull their punches, this is a good one and it's well-written, but I have some difficulties with recommending *Close Kin* unless you truly loved the first book, *The Hollow Kingdom*, and don't have a strong aversion to reading about some really unpleasant events. This sequel is tied very closely to events in *The Hollow Kingdom*, so you definitely need to have read the first book before this one.

About 6 or 8 years after the end of *Kingdom*, we meet up again with Seylin, a unusual goblin who looks just like an elf. He can shapeshift into a very large cat, which he does all the time because, how embarrassing to be a really hot-looking guy when you live with freaky-looking goblins? Anyway, Seylin has fallen in love with Emily, the younger sister of Kate, the main character in the first book. Emily thoughtlessly blows him off while they're talking one day, not even realizing that he's trying to propose to her. Seylin, in a funk, gets permission from the goblin king to go on an extended journey to seek out any elves that may remain.

After he's gone, Emily suddenly pulls her head out of wherever it's been and decides to go find Seylin and tell him *She Has Feelings Too*. This book is about each of their travels and what has become of the elves that (in the first book) everyone in Goblinland was convinced had died out. *Close Kin* discloses what happened with the elves, and seriously, it's brutal, nearly as bad as dying out, but in the end there's a ray of hope.

If you get through this book, you should read the third one, *In the Coils of the Snake*, to get some closure and peace of mind. :)

Content advisory (these things are more or less disclosed near the beginning of the book, so, not really spoilers except for the one I've marked): Self-mutilation and utter subjection of elvish women. Also, a major plot point is that elvish women ALWAYS die in childbirth unless (view spoiler) -- this understandably creates some major problems for the few remaining elves.

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