



The Thirteenth Tower

Sara C. Snider

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In adversity lies strength beyond imagining.

Abandoned as a baby, young Emelyn's life as a housemaid in the quiet village of Fallow is unremarkable—and empty. That is, until a host of magical creatures arrives and inflicts terrible misdeeds on the townsfolk. Inexplicably immune to their enchantments, Emelyn joins a pair of Magi intent on stopping the cause of the trouble—and who claim to know of her parents, promising Emelyn answers to a lifetime of questions.

But the answers Emelyn seeks prove to be more elusive than she hoped, and the world outside Fallow more perilous than she imagined. Magical creatures roam the land over, attacking yet another town before coming after Emelyn. The key to her survival—and finding her family—lies deep within her, if only she can conquer her doubts and believe she is more powerful than she ever dreamed.

In a journey that explores facing one's fears amidst the uncertainties of an unknown world, *The Thirteenth Tower* is a magical tale of discovery, growth, and of love's enduring strength.

The Thirteenth Tower Details

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From Reader Review The Thirteenth Tower for online ebook

Maxine says

Emelyn, abandoned at birth, is a housemaid in a quiet village. She dreams of a different life but mostly she dreams of finding her parents. On the day of a festival in her village, the townsfolk are placed under a particularly nasty spell by a group of magical creatures. Somehow, Emelyn isn't affected but, when a creature tries to take her by force, she is rescued by a young man, Corran. When a group of Magi appear to help them, Corran is wary but when the Magi tell Emelyn they know about her parents and that they can train her in magic, she follows them.

Soon they are embarked on a perilous journey through a landscape full of magical and dangerous creatures. Emelyn's magic seems limited to motivating a stubborn donkey; the lessons from the Magi only seem to give her a splitting headache; and Corran disappears. When one of the strange folk they encounter along the way warns her against the Magi, she decides she must seek her own fate.

The Thirteenth Tower by author Sara C. Snider reads more like a fairy tale than a modern fantasy. Even the language is evocative of one. In many ways, the story seems to harken back to those older tales about abandoned orphans and innocents, Pied Pipers, mischievous imps, dark forests full of hidden dangers and magics, and mysterious towers containing beautiful maidens. That is not to say that the story and its magical creatures are neither interesting nor unique. In fact, they are very much so. But for those like myself who grew up with fairy tales and loved them, The Thirteenth Tower is a wonderful reminder of a more innocent time when dangers lurked in the dark providing wonderful chills down the spine but safe in the knowledge that fairy tales always (well, almost always) end well.

Jen says

was waffling between a 3 or a 4 star book. I went with 3.5, rounded down to 3, as I didn't think it warranted a round up.

This wasn't a bad book by any stretch of the imagination. It kept me entertained and was interesting, but not until about 60% into the book.

The characters were not really fleshed out much and the plot seemed to be rather slow going. It took me a while to get into the book. Also, there was one scene that made this book more than a middle grade read. Magical creatures were dancing around, the male creatures were humanoid, with jackets and ties on, but nothing on from the waist down, with their male appendage in an upward position. It was very sudden and shocking and makes this entire book better geared toward the YA audience. It's a shame that one scene was in there, because it was an otherwise rather calm book.

I did enjoy the plot once it got started and the mystery was one that the reader and MC pieced together at roughly the same time. The MC was rather dense, but I think that comes from being an uneducated maid, though she did pride herself on being able to read, we never saw her implement that skill in the book.

The bad guys kind of surprised me and I enjoyed that twist. Though I have to say, I was all but 2% done with the book when it was time to go to bed and I put it down and went to sleep, without once wanting to know RIGHT NOW what happened next. That right there is what made this a 3 and not a 4 star book for me. If a reader can put a book down for something as trivial as sleep (sleep IS trivial when a good book is in your hot little hands) when there is only 2% left to the book, then the book didn't do it's job of hooking the reader.

Again, I received enjoyment from the book, but I don't have any overwhelming urge to read the next one in the series. I wouldn't say no to it if it crossed my path, but I'm not going to go out of my way for it.

A good fantasy book, but not for the immature reader due to that one scene in the beginning.

My thanks to NetGalley and Double Beast Publishing for an eARC copy of the book to read and review.

Nick says

3 SHINY STARS!

As a fantasy fan, this was a good novel. It took me 2 and a half days to finish this. The world that the author has created is awesome and the characters really fit with the background. Also the creatures in this book are not exactly the creatures I'm familiar with.

The plot was well build. But I do have a problem with the story. It was kind of slow at some parts and not very interesting. I would rewrite almost half the book and make it more exciting. That means that I was bored, but in the other hand there were moments I was really thrilled and did not expect to happen at all.

I liked the beginning and the way that story goes. I loved the idea with festival and the way how things turned out. The ending also had a unexpected twist. The middle of the book was the part I did not like a lot but it was good. It could have been better.

The Story

So this book is about an orphan called Emelyn who has a lot of unanswered questions about her early life. One day she tries to get ready to attend the Harvest Festival. But what happens there is what changes her life and now she is headed to risks and unexpected truths.

The Characters

I liked the characters but I think the author could have done a better job with describing them. There were a lot of great characters but I couldn't connect with them properly. Also the main character Emelyn doesn't have great qualities like she is not very smart and she doesn't come up like the main characters do. Also the other characters are like emotionless and I did not like that.

I recommend this book to fantasy lovers. It's a fun read.

Anna N.~Take A Shot In The Face Of Fear! says

Rating: 5

I won a copy of this book for an honest review. This will never effect how I like or rate a book.

There's no denying that I am a fan of fantasy and this was some great fantasy. The only thing I can even think to say bad about it right now was the few typos I spotted but there were only maybe two that I did spot and they certainly didn't take away from what I was reading.

This was something new and extraordinary and the story lent to the feel of that. It felt very original. The writing was beautiful, it really did well in placing you in this new world. Though it helped that the world building itself was very well done. A fantasy needs a believable world and this has that.

It was also quite easy to enjoy all the characters, even the despicable ones. I especially enjoyed Cobbe. The main character while not the most heroic had a strength all her own and she was someone I could easily root for. Her journey was long but at the same time not long enough. There's just so much more story to be told here. This book ended in a great way. It left me satisfied while at the same time longing for more. Wanting a sequel to see just what would happen next.

I could continue to gush about this book all day but it's obvious to say I'd definitely recommend it. Certainly for those that love fantasy but also for those that just enjoy a well told story. This book is now a favorite of mine and I look forward to reading it again in the future.

On a last note it feels good to finally give a book I won a well deserved five stars. Makes me hopeful and again proves to me that there's a reason I judge books as hard as I do. This book proves that new and fun

stories can be told, characters can feel alive and interesting, and lastly that romance doesn't have to be part of a story especially when that story is already told with so much love and care.

pdarnold says

I received this eBook via Netgalley for my review.

To start, this book is an odd mix of fantasy. A fun read if a teeny bit predictable, for me anyway. But I nearly gave up on this book in the second chapter. Why, why, why add the erotic symbolism when it is the only incident and gives no form or other meaning and seems really out of place other than to bring shock factor? Truthfully, everything around this single sentence had enough weirdness going on it was unnecessary to add the erotic description of the male dancers. Had the book continued with this genre... OK, an adult fantasy. But 98% of this story reads as if inclined for a more youthful audience. This would be a fun, delightful, eery read for 13 - 15 year old youth and up if not for the one single sentence.

There is definitely adventure, magic and mages, folk earth magic, orphaned or abandoned child, festival, kindness of strangers, very eery weird creatures and some sweet quirky loveable or at least likeable creatures too, travel by foot - mule - and a pig, a journey, apparitions, learning new skills, learning to live outside ones comfort zone, cruelty, vengeance and repentance, searching for the hearts desire, fearing ones own abilities, overcoming fear. There is a lot going on here and I would have loved to buy this for my niece, she would have lost herself in this tale. But sadly, I cannot because of a single sentence.

Jennifer says

Fans of classic fairy tales, and I mean dark tales, Brothers Grimm, will enjoy this well written hero's journey. The storytelling is solid, the settings lush and immersive. Each chapter ends leaving you wondering if you have enough time for just one more, you've got to know what happened! I hope there's a sequel...

Jess says

This is a generous three stars. I considered just giving it two, because to me it was just ok. But the book finished really strong, and I feel like if the writer can continue with the momentum she ended this book with, it might really be a special series. However it was not enough to make up for the first 3/4ths of the book, so three stars it is.

Likes: The ideas in this book were interesting to me. But I just itched to scratch the whole first 3/4ths out and re-write it with some depth to it. Especially Percival, I'm so disappointed in him, he could have been really interesting. And Corran. And maybe some of the characters alluded to in the first part of the book that we never actually meet but are just told about. Or the ones we did meet and supposedly care about that are never mentioned in the resolution. And, um, Emelyn too. Dang it.

The strength in this book was in the last few chapters (although not the very last chapter), during the climatic

scene. It truly fired up my imagination, the imagery and ideas were different and interesting. I loved the idea of the forest people, and the hobbit like things, and the idea of a woman having power that isn't accessed the same way as the men, and exploring that. I hope it IS explored in the next books instead of just one of the many things alluded to that are never resolved.

Didn't work for me: The characters were sadly underdeveloped. Emelyn was NOT smart. "'That's...nice, Cobbe,' Emelyn said, still not quite understanding the significance of finding roots." Ok, Cobbe just spent a page and a half explaining to you how important it was to know how to find the roots in the winter time so you don't STARVE TO DEATH. I don't understand what's hard to understand about this concept. It's one of many times I thought that Emelyn was being deliberately dense. The other characters seemed lifeless. There were a few times that I thought Aldren showed some life, vaguely thinking he would do things differently if he weren't bound to his master, but it never amounted to anything, until it practically time for the group to part ways. I felt like every time a character was going to have a serious conversation or address a major plot point, it was just put off (e.g., Emelyn wanting to know about her parents but not asking). It seemed like page after page was simply Emelyn asking herself questions that she couldn't answer, or that were really dumb questions. 'I wonder why that happened?? Oh well, we'll never know.' When Aldren told her she had some signs of having the Art, she asks herself... 'Why did he say that?' My brain just broke. Emelyn. It's because of all the freaky stuff you've been doing without meaning to for the past twenty pages. And I have bone to pick with Corran and Emelyn seeing obviously magical creatures and then saying things like, 'Well, it looks and acts exactly like creatures of legend, but those are obviously a myth, so I'm mystified about what those things were. Huh. It's a mystery all right. Something weird is DEFINITELY going on here.' This while traveling with two magicians. FACE. PALM. So much of what happened is not explained at all. The Magisters kind of start to explain about accessing the Art through runes and concentrating and rigorous study, but Emelyn just, um, kind of wishes hard? And touches the earth? This is interesting, why isn't it explored more???

Anyway, go ahead and give it a read some rainy day, it's got potential.

Gina (My Precious Blog) says

Emelyn is an orphan who knows nothing about her family. Abandoned at the doorstep of a wealthy family and taken in as a house servant, she's always been extra curious about her roots. Secretly, she dreams of much more for herself than a life of servitude. When a festival comes to her small hometown of Fallow, the town falls under a malicious spell. Everyone in the town seems to be adversely affected, except Emelyn. When a group of magisters (red robes) come to her aid, they promise to tell her about her parents if she follows them back to their tower. Emelyn is very skeptical and doubts their intentions are altruistic, especially since a young man, Corren, who also wants to help her is adamant they are evil. What follows is a quest for not only to a destination, but also for answers to all of Emelyn's burning questions about her family and her manifesting powers.

The Thirteenth Tower is set in a magical world in a town called Fallow to begin with, then moves to other cities and towns as the quest ensues. Pacing is quite slow. Its quick out of the gate, but slows down significantly as the story progresses. Then, towards the end it picks up again. This one is told in a third person narrative, primarily from Emelyn's viewpoint, but at times it does switch to the perspective of other prominent characters.

Emelyn, the main character in this story was quite naive, I can't blame her since she'd lead a very sheltered

life working as a servant. This character trait lead her many times into making poor decisions. I did appreciate that she cared about others and especially that she had a soft spot for animals. I know this girl held compassion, if she didn't I don't think the story would have concluded as it did.

Corren, Emelyn's friend, was a shallow character, difficult to really get to know. He didn't make a lot of sense and at times seemed reserved and very strange. In the end, when all is revealed his character makes plenty more sense. As the story unfolds, he comes off as pretty weird. I'm glad he's rectified in the end.

Cobbe, the wildkin, was probably my favorite character. I enjoyed her because she spoke her mind. She was very strong willed and confident. I liked how she backed up whatever she boasted about. When she put her mind to something she wouldn't let anything get in her way of achieving her goal. She was one heck of a great cook and kept a watchful eye out for Emelyn, even though she really didn't want to.

Aldren, one of the lower class magistors was the only guy in the "red robes" group I liked. He was dealing with some pretty bad baggage. I liked how he yearned to do things differently this time around. It was important to me that he cared about Emelyn. None of the other magistors did. He seemed to take the time to get to know her, this is especially evident when he tried to teach her the ways of the Art. I didn't like how he had to keep so closed lipped on certain subjects.

Even though this was a slow moving book, it wasn't dull or boring. The main problem, it lacked action. I'd give it high marks for creativity and craftiness, with an abundance of unique creatures I'd never read about before. My favorite creatures were the Wildkins, who sort of reminded me of hobbits in a strange sort of way. Mainly because they were short in stature. The forest creatures were elusive and were creatures I'd like to learn more about in subsequent installments of the series. Magic, in this book is referred to as "The Art". Different cultures wield it in their own ways. The plot was fairly complex, this was more of a plot driven book than a character driven one. Even though most of the unexpected twists were somewhat predictable to me, I wasn't able to guess them all. The way the title was integrated into the plot fit nicely and was very powerful. I believe this book could be read as a stand alone novel, but I have a feeling this one is going to be part of a bigger series. The author ended the story in a good place. I just felt she left it open for more story to tell about what Evelyn will chose to do next.

I would recommend this book to patient fantasy lovers, those who don't mind a slow moving, but interesting story. It reads like a fairytale. The language is also formal and sort of dated or maybe could be considered mature. The conversations were definitely very formal, too. I would say young people who get easily bothered by blood should not read this one as some of the scenes are fairly violent.

Kathy Davie says

I suspect this is the first in a new fantasy series for middle grade readers, and it revolves around Emelyn.

This ARC was provided by NetGalley and Double Beast Publishing in exchange for an honest review.

My Take

Snider manages quite a lot of information in a short time as she introduces us to Emelyn's world. One in which she indulges in all the usual daydreams of an orphan, hoping to one day find her family and learn that they hadn't meant to leave her so long. Snider certainly kept me wondering for the longest time about Corran and the barefooted girl, and when the truth emerges, you just want to weep.

She's included a unique twist on what I consider the fae in the form of the forest people and a horrible twist on the Magi to whom all must be reduced to rote formula. It's actually a very good example of *show*, as Snider's Magi ignore or lie about what they don't want to discuss, and Snider uses the fear Emelyn feels about them and Corran's suspicions to build in the tension.

Only we don't know any of this for sure. We suspect, we wonder. We hope. Meanwhile, the Magisters know how to entice Emelyn to accompany them on their journey. It's the core of the conflict in this story, and Snider is not shy about adding more and more of it. Teases from Snider, baiting from the Magisters, and the taunting appearances of Iyen. The Magisters' conversations, Corran's comments all serve to keep you glued to *The Thirteenth Tower*.

When they abandon Corran, I don't get the logic that they'll encounter him later on their journey. Okay, never mind. It's like much in *The Thirteenth Tower* with the Magisters. They give out as little as possible. I fear them, that they look to trap their prey. It's that vignette at the Thirteenth Tower that finally proves their arrogance, their stupidity. Jeez, I can't believe how blind, ignorant, and one-sided Percival is. There should be a balance between learning and discovery — it feels like a metaphor for man and his science, and these Magisters make me think of those Nazi doctors willing to do anything to their captives for the answer to any of their perverse questions.

Oh, I did love Iyen's revenge, their own shades offering up the same words of "comfort".

It's a journey that will open the world to Emelyn.

The Story

It could have been worse, and it could have been better. At least Emelyn has a place to sleep and food to eat. For today, she's looking forward to getting her chores done so she may attend the Harvest Festival.

It's an unexpected parade of all sorts that pulls her out of the Mansell yard, for it's the neighbors, the Mansells, their neighbor Mrs. Bower, the servants all skipping and gadding along following a fiddler playing a twisted branch.

It's the information Emelyn has sought her entire life that decides her to follow the Magi, and it will be a road of unexpected adventures and even more unexpected truths.

The Characters

Emelyn is an orphan left on the doorstep of the Mansell residence in Fallow. Later, Cobbe will call her **Silver-eyes** and Corran she will name **Hollow-man**.

Corran is a protective young man who appears out of nowhere and rescues Emelyn. He used to apprentice with **Mr. Wainwright** some years ago, although he came from Tirenfor where the Magi did not exist and his people celebrated the old ways. **Iyen** is the wife the Magisters took from him as he fled with their daughter, **Siyan**.

Magisters and Towers

Magi/Magisters are magic users. Cocky, "science"-oriented, singleminded men who came from the south. They pushed ever northward building their Towers. "Civilizing" the barbarians and bringing enlightenment. The Magisters of the past were **Hauer** and **Jennison**.

Grand Magister Percival Lacreld is from the Twelfth Tower. **Aldren Keller** is High Magister of the

Twelfth Tower with a passion for flora and fauna.

Roelith is a bustling mini metropolis up in the north.

Cobbe is a **Wylkin** and was in the city trapping falcons for dinners. They are renowned as fantastic cooks, but are rarely seen as they seldom leave their forest homes. Amongst the Wylkin, a **Den Mother** is their leader, drawn from the **Wildings**, the female Wylkin who leave their villages to travel and explore. **Bog** is the second Wylkin Emelyn meets.

Beryl Royen is the kindly innkeeper with her husband and son. **Ferrin** is the name Emelyn gives the donkey they buy. **Werren Worsby** is a trader they encounter.

Fallow, the village

Derron is a boy Emelyn is sweet on. **Mr. Hibberly** runs the general store; his wife, **Mrs. Hibberly**, is quite critical. **Mr. Cowan** sells meat pies and ale. **Mr. Gatwick** is the dairyman whose wife will be selling butter, cream, and cheeses at the festival. **Mrs. Troller** sells her apples and preserves. **Mr. Torvel** is the alchemist, and **Mrs. Gristman** would never agree to what they were doing to her. **Patrice** is a servant girl from a neighboring household.

Mansell

Torrence Mansell is the master. **Miss Merridan Cook** is the household cook; the housekeeper is the one who took Emelyn in and raised until she was ten when she was put to work. **Tilly** is her dearest and only friend and another housemaid. **Mr. Witherby** is the gardener?

Lamphyr are a sea-folk superstition of men without eyes holding lanterns. The **Art** is the magic and using of it whether through the **Natural** or **Constructed** runes. **Threshing** is a test all potential Magi undergo and it exacts a heavy price. The **forest-kin** have great power but wield it in everyday tasks. The **And'estar** are their wise ones.

The Cover

The cover is beautiful with its tall pines dusted in snow as the rescued falcon flies overhead.

The title is the key to their secrets, *The Thirteenth Tower*. It holds the truth about their dirty deeds.

Jen says

The Thirteenth Tower by Sara C. Snider

Book Description: Abandoned as a baby, young Emelyn's life as a housemaid in the quiet village of Fallow is unremarkable—and empty. That is, until a host of magical creatures arrives and inflicts terrible misdeeds on the townsfolk. Inexplicably immune to their enchantments, Emelyn joins a pair of Magi intent on stopping the cause of the trouble—and who claim to know of her parents, promising Emelyn answers to a lifetime of questions.

This is a fantasy novel that was OK; there were parts that were interesting and parts that were slow. For the most part, none of the characters captured any deep interest.

In a way, I guess it is something like a traditional fairy tale in which the characters have little depth or personality. Emelyn tried to come off the page, but even she could not maintain a strong presence. It isn't listed as YA, but should be. Some YA books, the very best of them, appeal to all ages, but this one didn't truly satisfy me. Not bad, but not completely engaging.

As usual, please note that my reviews are not literary criticism, but merely my opinion of a book. I notice at Goodreads, several people gave it 5 stars.

NetGalley/Double Beast Publishing

Fantasy/YA. 2014. Print length: 251 pages.

Silvia says

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I received a review copy from Netgalley, in exchange for a honest opinion.

When the village of Fallow is attacked by a host of creatures that should only exist in myths, the unlikely team that sets out to stop the problem is made up of two Magisters, an orphaned servant girl, and a guy whose back story doesn't really add up.

As they travel North to find the root of all mayhem, Emelyn will have to face many disquieting questions. Are the Magisters to be trusted, or is everything people say about the Order more than rumors? Could she be able to wield the Art? And most importantly, is she really just a orphaned housemaid?

It's so difficult to review books that didn't elicit any strong reaction in me.

Up until the ending, which in my opinion was really weak, I didn't have any big issues with this novel.

Trouble is, I didn't have any particular praise for it either.

It was nice, in the sense I didn't actually want to drop it, but nothing more.

I think the setting had the greatest potential out of all the elements in this novel. It wasn't extraordinarily original or well-built, but it worked and had some intriguing ideas. I'm still left feeling as if it could have been explored more, which is appalling considering the plot is a quest in the wild. I think there are sequels planned though, and most of the stuff I'm curious about should be explored further there.

On the other hand, the weakest link were probably the characters. Characterization was pretty much non-existent for any of them, although it was most noticeable in the protagonist. One thing I couldn't help notice was the absolute absence of distinctive speech patterns in the main group: the servant girl and carpenter spoke exactly like the two old scholars.

I think the antagonist is the one whose lack of character I was most disappointed in. They were the usual bad fantasy villains with no purpose other than destruction, no plans or cunning, only scary because they're powerful. Now, I like these evil cardboard cut-outs made only to loom over the plot. But they need to be so almighty and pervasively evil, not a chapter passes by in which we're allowed to forget they are there, at the end of our plot, especially as we near the ending. If your villain lacks personality, they should at least have presence. This was not the case in *The thirteenth tower*, in fact the only terrifying manifestations of their power are in the beginning and in the final confrontation. And even if they had been a well-written villain of this kind, why reduce them to that, when they have such clear ties to the main cast? It really ruined the

ending for me (beside managing to guess it from halfway in, but I'd put that down to this being a middle grade novel. And me being more familiar than it's recommended with fantasy tropes).

I feel the novel suffered badly from the poor characterization and a meandering style that needed some serious editing. The plot itself was pretty solid, although predictable, with some slight twists to the standard quest plot and no major plot-holes.

Pamela says

Oooh, fantasy! I say that a lot. It's abso-tively posi-lutley one of my favorite genres to booktalk as a teen librarian. I'm willing to try lots of different types of fantasy, as well (high, urban, dystopian, whatever), so I put in a request for an ARC of *The Thirteenth Tower* by Sara Snyder on Netgalley.

Much as I said in my review of *The Murder Complex*, some books need to marinate. I now feel as though I need to revise my rating of TMC, because while that one may have just needed some tweaking, *The Thirteenth Tower* needed a good three day brining, much like a Thanksgiving turkey.

It's not an *awful* book. It just needs more editing, more development, and more detail. In short, just plain more.

Snyder's fantasy world is interesting in that the magical aspect (referred to as the Art) is more of a scientific practice than anything arcane. This treatment of something that is usually esoteric reminded me of the magic using geometry and mathematics in Brandon Sanderson's *The Rithmatist*. The magisters (magic users) have towers all over the land where they do their studies and, presumably, also kill puppies and such. They're regarded with deep suspicion by the inhabitants of this country because the magisters came from the south, bringing their beliefs with them and imposing them on the populace. This is a great jumping-off point for a discussion of imperialism or religious conversion or what have you, but it's not fully explored. Let's get to the story, shall we?

Emelyn is a drudge in the Mansell household. Abandoned as a child, she's considered a pariah by most people, since in Fallow, to be abandoned means that you cannot be loved. "Love could never be anything more than an unattainable idea, a fanciful feeling of which the likes of her would never know." (more on this later, promise) The dictatorial Miss Cook raised Emelyn, and the young lady longs for a family to say they love her. But she's a realist, too--so every morning, she gets up, stirs the fire, and squares her shoulders for another day of hard work. Only, this day is different. It's the Harvest Festival, and if she gets all the chores done in time, she might slip off to attend the dancing, music, and feasting. But things go very wrong, very quickly.

In a nice bit of **foreshadowing** (as you can tell, it's *heavy foreshadowing*), Emelyn meets a strange girl while running a household errand. "The girl had long, dark hair and wore a dress of rough leather with colorful little beads that clicked when she moved ... Her eyes were grey like the clouds overhead, much like Emelyn's own. They looked striking against her dun-colored skin. Emelyn had thought her own skin dark, but now felt fair by comparison." I am a bit confused by the use of the word "dun" to describe the girl. It's a word generally used as coloring for horses (I was a MAJOR horse fanatic as a kid, and dun was not my favorite coloring. I preferred chestnut. Anyway.) and not for people. Merriam-Webster defines dun as a color as "a nearly neutral slightly brownish dark grey." That is the most equivocal "definition" I may have ever

encountered, but no matter. I do not think that people, in general, have dark grey skin. They may have cool-toned skin, but not grey. Hmm.

Moving on, Emelyn returns to the house and does her chores, and as Harvest Festival approaches, fears she won't be able to go. But suddenly everyone in the village begins acting very, very strangely. Citizens who are normally taciturn or even downright grumpy are laughing and dancing at the festival. A Pied-Piper-esque figure lures the townspeople into revelries. At the town square, "The men were clad in well-tailored black waistcoats, the silvery chains of pocket watches glinting in the firelight. Below the waist the men were unclothed, their erect [note: it is extremely hard for me to type this without cringing] penises protruding from thatches of thick, dark hair." I suppose this whole revelry scene reflects debauchery even in the clothing of the fae participants (I'm assuming the men and women described in this scene are fae), but whoa. That came out of left field. In fact, I think that little paragraph is an escapee from a 50 Shades wannabe a few books over.

Normally, descriptions of nudity feel most natural for me in, say, a police thriller, where detectives are looking at bodies and so forth. My particular issue with this strange description is that it doesn't fit with the tone of the rest of the story. No one even kisses any one else in this story--that's how unromantic it is. So it's not like *The Thirteenth Tower* is a fantasy brimming with sexytimes. No. Plus, the reaction of Emelyn, the main character, isn't believable. She gasps and runs away, but promptly forgets about it. When the magisters she ends up traveling with assure her that her friends will be okay, she believes them completely. Lady: You just saw people driven out of their minds and committing acts with strange people who eschew pants! You need to be more concerned about this! I need to shake you!

Actually, Emelyn's entire course of action can be summed up as complete passivity. As she runs through the woods and is attacked by small, lecherous men, she's saved by a complete stranger. What does she do? Trust him! Argh! Anyway, his name is Callum, and as they run, they encounter two other strangers who are none other than the highly jerkstastic Grand Magister Percival and his slightly less jerkstastic apprentice Aldren. They tell Emelyn to come with them because they know her parents. What do you think she does? If you answered, "Run the other way screaming," you would have been sane, but wrong. She goes with them, even though Callum warns her that magisters are dangerous and full of schemes. But he comes along too.

The rest of the story is a series of scenes where they traverse the landscape, a revelation is made, Emelyn totally doesn't get it, and they keep going. We have a classic example of the Chosen One syndrome here, complete with the character's disbelief in her abilities. But it's more than that. There is a scene where the younger magister has a very long conversation with her about how she has natural abilities in the Art (think untrained Jedi, okay?) and explains that she must train. Instead of considering this utter reversal in her fortunes, "Emelyn did her best to keep busy, mostly tending to Ferrin in the stables. She tried not to think too much on what Aldren had said about the Art ... It was all too much to take in at once." Gah! After speaking with Percival about her abilities, Emelyn pitches a fit and is practically comatose for days because ... learning that she can do cool things is somehow traumatizing. She just wants to go back to being a plain ol' drudge!

Anyway, the whole point of this journey is that the magisters must confront someone warped by the Art in the far north. They get there eventually, and there is a battle, in which Stuff Happens, and after which Emelyn decides to be her own person, although who knows what that really means, with her track record?

All of the in-between stuff is either Major Foreshadowing or strange filler, like the insertion of a magical cook-dwarf named Cobbe and the woeful tale of Callum's family.

I also noticed a lot of strange word usage and just plain odd conversations. For example, when Callum and

Emelyn are running away from some bad guys, Callum tells Emelyn, "We've been heading south, though. You can tell by the trees. The moss tends to grow thickest on the northern side." This only applies if they are in the northern hemisphere of whatever planet they're on. If it's the southern hemisphere, moss grows more thickly on the south part of the tree. There's a hilarious scene in an old Scooby-Doo episode with The Creeper, where Scooby and the Gang are lost in the woods, and to confuse them, the Creeper reaches over to the moss on the tree, rips it off, and sticks it back on another side. That's instantly what I thought of during this scene.

The prose alternates between pretty normal and Trying Too Hard, although there are some good creepy bits when Emelyn encounters some dangerous creatures on the road.

Overall, I wasn't impressed with the story as it now stands. Given a few more go-rounds of editing and fine-tuning, this could be amusing.

I received an ARC of this from NetGalley.

Lindsey says

(I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.)

The Thirteenth Tower is about Emelyn, an orphan who works as a servant in a small village. A festival is starting the day the story begins, and Emelyn is looking forward to finishing her chores so she can attend. While she's working, she hears music nearby and goes to investigate. What she finds leads her on a long journey to discover herself and her past.

It doesn't take long for the plot to move forward, and I was instantly drawn into the story. It got a bit slow in the middle, as Emelyn and her companions were mostly just walking through the woods, occasionally running into something strange or dangerous. It picked up again near the end, and the final confrontation was well-written and more exciting than the previous few chapters.

Thought I had an inkling of how things would ultimately turn out, I was still interested to find out exactly what would happen. I felt a few things could have been fleshed out a little more, but hopefully this is going to be a series, so maybe those small things will be explored a little more in future books.

There also wasn't much character development, which is a shame. Emelyn, especially, had so much room to grow on the journey, and it was only at the very end that she showed any change at all.

The Thirteenth Tower is a fairly clean (only one very small scene at the beginning), middle-grade fantasy, with creative world building and an interesting plot.

Megan says

[Disclaimer: I received a free copy of the e-book edition from NetGalley.]

The Thirteenth Tower was actually a pleasant surprise. I've read some really awful books that I got from

NetGalley lately, and was expecting more of the same, which is probably why I ended up enjoying it as much as I did. Emelyn starts out as a servant girl, but ends up as so much more.

There is a lot good about this book. I mostly enjoyed the writing style, found it easy to read, and the dialogue wasn't as strained as I expected. There were moments where I found it wandering off into flowery territory, but for the most part it was appropriate and well-done. Emelyn isn't the greatest heroine, she's not someone I could see myself being friends with, but she isn't insufferable and her story ends up being quite thought-out.

The concept itself was interesting, and I appreciated the execution of the twists and turns of story. One thing I didn't like: it was absolutely completely predictable. It really was obvious what was going to happen; I think I figured it out about halfway through. And while that's a pretty nice chunk of book in which I was in the dark, it still leaves half the book for me to go "OK, when is [this] going to happen?" or "When is she going to figure out she's [that]?"

I didn't like the ending, there was too much going on in the final major scene and yet not enough. I felt like I was trudging through mud while reading the "battle" scene, and I still can't figure out exactly what happened. Also, I don't see anywhere on GR that this is a planned series, so the strange and abrupt ending has left me a bit confused. And while I appreciate Cobbe as a character, I still can't quite figure out her purpose aside from keeping them fed, and providing a little comic relief.

The one thing that has bothered me throughout the entire book is one of the opening scenes: when Emelyn gets swept away to the festival and finds instead the strange creatures, we see the following:
(view spoiler)

This is the **only** such passage in the entire book. Throughout the rest of it there isn't even the barest mention of sex, the closest thing to describing a body part being Emelyn's attempts to figure out whether the small-folk are men or women. It stuck out in a bad way, because otherwise this book was pretty exclusively PG. I'm not saying it was inappropriate, but it didn't fit at all with the rest of the book or with the narrative style. I would consider removing it in future editions, only because I felt it interrupted the story for no reason whatsoever, distracting me from what was going on.

So there's room for improvement, and if it IS going to be a series that explains the ending. It's not fantastic high fantasy, but it was a pretty good read and I rather enjoyed it.

ETA 10/29/14 - I've been skimming other reviews just to see what others have said about this book. A lot of people have mentioned the lack of character development. Upon further reflection, I think I was a bit too generous in mentioning I felt that Emelyn was well-developed. Presented with passages and examples of her stupidity, I realize I had been thinking this all along. I think what changed my mind was at the end when she decides to embrace her powers and stop being so stupid. Maybe that blinded me to her faults (and there were many). It's probably why I said I didn't really care for her as a person, or wouldn't be friends with her. Anyway, I agree with other reviewers that most of the characters could have been more well-developed, with their motives a bit more clear, or noted at all.

Katie Cross says

This cover, and then the first chapter, is what first sold me on this book.

What Snider really had going for her with this book was creativity and creatures. The adventure-style kind of plot, which I'm not always a fan of, was very enhanced by all the new encounters. Most of the creatures are new, at least, in my experience. As a reader, I really enjoyed going along for the ride. Cobbe was, hands down, my favorite person in this book! Her and her pig were an absolute delight, and a little gollum-esque, without the creep factor.

Another thing going for Snider was the world she created, and the way she used and categorized magic. It was a magical system that was new to me, and that kind of originality in fantasy is always refreshing to come across. I liked that the magic took physical concentration and mental strength from the wizards.

One of the main points of the plot was pretty apparent to me at the beginning (no spoilers here, don't worry) but then, when it came about at the end, still had a significant twist. So while I saw it coming, I also didn't see it coming, which almost acted as a double surprise. My suspicion is that Snider planned it that way all along, and probably knew that it would be obvious, so kind of leads the reader along an assumed path and surprises them with another one.

What I struggled with in this book is in regards to the Magi (or the wizards). It was about 50% of the way through the book before I really figured out the difference between the two of them. They both came off somewhat flat and bland, except Aldren, who eventually had some kind of personality, but it took awhile. They both came off as background features. As a result, I feel it slowed the plot somewhat, as I found myself wondering towards the end . . . 'ok, so when are they going to be important already?'

The only other issue I had with the book was the occasional passivity of the main character. I found myself spurring her on to greater action or motivation several times in the book. She didn't need to be an overwhelming presence, and there were times that she showed strength, but overall I wanted a bit more spunk from her. Regardless of this, Snider still made me sympathetic to her from the beginning, and I still rooted for her, and was curious to see what became of her.

I read this book in two days, looked forward to reading it, and plan to buy the next installment. Snider, as a writer, has strength in her words and positive world building skills.
