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(Cover art by Clyde Caldwell)

Pool of Radiance Details

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Brian says

This was the very first novel I'd ever read. I fondly remember my father buying books at the bookstore every weekend, and one day I asked if he would buy one for me. "Yeah, bud, pick one out," he said, and I went straight to the fantasy section looking for a book with a dragon on the cover, because to a 10 year old dragons are awesome. This is the book I ultimately took home with me.

It's been many years since that day, and I would venture to say if I read it now it would not be half as magical as it was to me then, but it will always be the book that made me love reading.

Jakk Makk says

[The love triangle is weak. The body image stuff is mildly unsettling, though I'm not sure why. (hide spoiler)]

Duane says

I played this as a game on the commodore 64 way back in the 80s and I read the book when I first saw it way back when...I came across it all these years later and decided to reread this series. Well I can see the difference 20+ years has on my perspective that's for sure. I got very nostalgic and wished to play the game again. I will say that this is an easy read without too much mystery or deep thought provoking ideas but for the value of childhood memories it was priceless.

Conor says

I was going to give this two stars since it's essentially D&D fan fiction with romance elements thrown in for teenagers, but the writing is smooth and it's thoroughly unpretentious in it's aims, so.

Peter Greenwell says

Comes across as the novelised version of a D&D play session. The writing is easy on the eye, and it flows smoothly, but it's as profound as a puddle of water. Play the SSI Gold Box game based on this novel (or it is the other way around?) as it's good fun for an old DOS game.

David Sarkies says

A book based on a computer game

22 May 2012

Like seriously, what the ...! Pools of Radiance was a computer game and they wrote a book about it. In fact it wasn't even all that original because it pretty much followed the plot of the game. Come on, can't these writers do any better than write a book based so closely on a computer game that only those who simply can't get enough of the game will pick it up and read it. Okay, granted, I did, but back in those days I was basically reading anything with the Dungeons and Dragons logo on it. This is not the first time they did this either (as we shall discover shortly), but at least Curse of the Azure Bonds actually had a decent story, and the game was based on the book rather than the other way around.

The story is set in the Forgotten Realms in the city of Phlan (which was created specifically for the computer game). For some reason (I can't remember) the city had been destroyed, however some colonists have arrived to attempt to rebuild the city. Mind you, the ruined city is not uninhabited, it had been taken over by tribes of humanoids who are led by some dragon that has been possessed by an evil spirit. On top of this there are corrupt councillors who are attempting to trap the heroes and prevent them from digging too far into the mystery. However, the catch is that every time they are sent on a quest, they complete it and move one step forward to defeating the bad guy.

I might mention a bit about the game now. Pools of Radiance was pretty much the first official Dungeons and Dragons game ever released. There were some experiments beforehand, but nothing actually released by TSR. This was the first and it was also very primitive. As they began to release more games the style became better and the development of the next always seemed to move forward from the original. Like the book, the players explore the ruins of an old city with the intention of clearing it out so that colonists may move in and retake the city.

It is an interesting concept, though in the past when cities were destroyed, they were either built over, or completely raised to the ground. However, in most cases there is usually a very good reason why a city would have been built where it was, and despite an enemy's attempts to destroy a city, some how it would always come back. There are some exceptions though, such as Ninevah and Mycene, but if you travel around Europe you will discover that in many cases the modern city is either near, or on top of, the ancient city. Take Napoli for example, there is pretty much nothing left of the Ancient Greek (or even Roman) city, however take a wander around the old city and you may encounter some holes where you can see the old city. Further, there is a basilica in the old city where, if you go down into the cellars, you will come out in the ancient market place (though it is completely underground). Here is an incident of the newer city being built on top of the old.

The other issue with this book is its neo-colonial attitude. It was written in the 80s and in a way I thought we had moved on from colonialism (we actually haven't). Despite the fact that the city is ruined, it is still inhabited. The players are told that the inhabitants are bad and must be cleared out. However, who actually says that they are bad? The alignment system that Dungeons and Dragons uses? Probably. Also, why is it they are always bad? Is it because they kill humans. Well, guess what, humans kill goblins, but humans aren't bad. Elves kill orcs, but elves aren't bad. Why is it that orcs and goblins are bad? The only reason I can understand is because they are ugly. Personally, that is pretty low and pathetic in my opinion. Also, who gives the humans the right to kick the orcs, goblins, and other races out of the city? Seriously, let us move on from this narrow minded, racist roleplaying game and actually make something that is worthy of our enlightened society (hold it, that's right, we aren't enlightened).

Karmakosmik says

Questo libro è praticamente una partita di D&D fatta da un gruppo di adolescenti alle prime armi con i giochi di ruolo. Infatti, il modo con cui il terzetto base (Shal, Tarl e Ren) porta a termine le proprie missioni è alquanto ridicolo, ma tuttosommato il libro scorre abbastanza piacevolmente e l'ambientazione stessa è anche piuttosto interessante. Se cercate del fantasy serio lasciate perdere, ma se vi volete rilassare un po' con un "videolibro" o "librogame" può anche passare.

Stefan says

Paper-thin characters. Zero character development. Every fantasy stereotype is used.. Simplistic, completely implausible plot. Zero story twists. No insight into any character's persona. Plenty of deus ex machina situations. Dialogue so contrived and inane it makes my toes curl. This might be a good book for kids, but it certainly doesn't make for interesting reading for anyone over the age of twelve.

I finished this only because of dogged perseverance born from a desire to read most or all D&D novels.

Ida says

Four stars not because it's such a great book, but because it was a good classic fantasy adventure book. In other words it was fun and met the Expectations pretty well.

Chris Salzman says

I'd been saving this for a rainy day when I couldn't handle anything more than a big dumb book and that day finally hit a few weeks ago. I'd been reading a lot of non-fiction about typography and programming--two topics I dearly love--and it just got to be too much.

Have almost nothing to say about this book other than I'm glad I read it and glad I'm done with it. It's a collection of "cool" scenarios that would be (and probably are!) way more fun to play than read about. It's like hearing about someone else's D&D campaign without any of the metagame.

Robert says

Fun read while playing D&D adventurers league.

Dubravko says

So far the worst Forgotten Realms book I've read. After Salvatore or Greenwood, this reads like a fan-fic of somebody's Dungeons and Dragons session or two. I'm honestly surprised this even got published under the Forgotten Realms banner...

Sean Gibson says

Stellar writing or crafty plotting? Not particularly. But, this was my post-Tolkien teenage fantasy gateway drug that paved the way for the discovery of

Brooks/Salvatore/Eddings/Feist/Rawn/Martin/Abercrombie/Rothfuss/Sanderson/Weis and Hickman/et al, and for that reason alone, it's a seminal classic in my heart.

Also, Ren is a badass and made me want to be a forest ranger. I somehow ended up in legal marketing instead, but that's just because I wanted to pursue something that would keep me on the constant edge of danger.

Lucy says

Much like Terry Brooks's Shannara series, these books, as crappy as they are, were formative fantasy books for me. My cousin gave them to me to read when I was nine, and I thought they were AMAZING.

Completely don't hold up on a reread at all, so I choose to enjoy the memory instead. And they did push me forward on the path of being a fantasy addict.

Edward says

This was my first D&D novel, and I still have vivid memories of several of the scenes. I remember the young mage first starting out, and accidentally using several of her wish spells on innocuous wishes. I remember her going to a partially ruined city, and monsters lived in the ruined sections. I remember how, at the end, when all seemed lost, and the dragon was about to kill her, the mage remembered she had one wish left. For twelve year old me, it was pretty great stuff.
