



Radiant

Karina Sumner-Smith

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Xhea has no magic. Born without the power that everyone else takes for granted, Xhea is an outcast—no way to earn a living, buy food, or change the life that fate has dealt her. Yet she has a unique talent: the ability to see ghosts and the tethers that bind them to the living world, which she uses to scratch out a bare existence in the ruins beneath the City's floating Towers.

When a rich City man comes to her with a young woman's ghost tethered to his chest, Xhea has no idea that this ghost will change everything. The ghost, Shai, is a Radiant, a rare person who generates so much power that the Towers use it to fuel their magic, heedless of the pain such use causes. Shai's home Tower is desperate to get the ghost back and force her into a body—any body—so that it can regain its position, while the Tower's rivals seek the ghost to use her magic for their own ends. Caught between a multitude of enemies and desperate to save Shai, Xhea thinks herself powerless—until a strange magic wakes within her. Magic dark and slow, like rising smoke, like seeping oil. A magic whose very touch brings death.

With two extremely strong female protagonists, *Radiant* is a story of fighting for what you believe in and finding strength that you never thought you had.

Radiant Details

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Author : Karina Sumner-Smith

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From Reader Review Radiant for online ebook

Quartzen says

Intense and affecting. This is a story about social obligations and the lines between responsibility and exploitation, told from the perspective of a magicless outsider who can see ghosts who unexpectedly finds herself tethered to the ghost of someone from very deep inside the society of magic-powered floating cities that hover over the postapocalyptic landscape. I'll be thinking about this one for a while, but I think I need to let it rest a bit before I continue on with the series.

Bradley says

I was recommended this one a while back and I feel slightly sheepish that I'm only just now getting to it.

I wanted something close to Jemison's Fifth Season and I can see a few similarities, but other than the eventual near-end blow-out that takes on some huge-magic ramifications, it's really its own beast.

Skyscrapers of magic. This part is rather cool. Kinda modern but after some huge collapse, the technology is now almost entirely based on magic. I'm reminded of Max Gladstone and dystopian urban fantasy mixed heavily with ghost talking. Sound cool? It is.

It takes a while to get into the magic system, otherwise focusing mainly on relationship building, a friendship between an abused ghost and the mc girl who, rather than disposing the half-alive mostly-ghost for the complicated job that it is, develops a strong friendship, instead.

Later on, however, is where I think this novel shines, when the world building blooms and the magics develop and then, all of a sudden, everything goes to hell.

It is technically a YA fantasy, but it is easily strong enough as a regular modern fantasy. I'm definitely continuing this.

Sarah says

For anyone who has been longing for a book in which the central relationship around which the story revolves is a really amazing friendship rather than a romance/love triangle (because let's face it, you can only listen to the Wicked soundtrack so many times, and romance is all well and good but one can't live off a diet of romance alone), this is the book you have been waiting for.

RADIANT is a book full of wonderful things, and there is so much about it that I love. I love the detail that the author has built into the world that has grown out of the remains of a ruined city. The tiny elements of world-building that lurk in crannies and around corners like the mysterious creatures heard shuffling around the streets at night. I love how the author explores ideas of morality, the contrasting worlds of light and dark, as the shining towers of the City above contrast with the ruined skyscrapers and caved-in subway tunnels of the Lower City. The Lower City lives and breathes -- its sights, smells, textures, and tastes present both in vibrant colour and in the shades of grey seen through the eyes of our protagonist.

But more than anything, I love the friendship between Xhea and Shai that forms the heart of the book. Two wildly different young women from two entirely different worlds, who would never have been friends in life, connected after Shai's death by a bond that surpasses the boundaries of the job for which they were originally brought together and becomes something wonderful and new. These are beautifully realized characters with hopes, dreams, faults, and flaws, and watching their friendship as it blossomed organically between them was my favourite part of a story full of wonder, mystery, fear, intrigue, and adventure.

With an ending that resolves just enough to be satisfying in a way that makes you sigh as you close the book, while simultaneously whetting your appetite for the next book and the answers to questions that still remain, RADIANT has earned itself a spot on my favourites shelf for a long time to come.

Online Eccentric Librarian says

More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>

Radiant tops my list of best books of 2014; neither the cover nor the blurb accurately foretold just how good a story was contained within. Very intricate and unique world building combined with highly nuanced characters to create a story full of pathos. I couldn't put it down once I had started reading.

Story: Xhea lives on the ground in a post apocalyptic Canadian City with magic-powered floating cities. Humans have found magic and it fundamentally changed the world, creating inequalities based upon the strength of a person's innate magic. It is currency and coin, and the heart of Xhea's poverty. For she doesn't have magic, only a very rare ability to see/hear ghosts. On the ground are the poor and in the outskirts, the Walkers - zombie like humans who are a horror of their own. When Xhea is paid to temporarily separate a ghost from a man, she will become unwittingly embroiled in world politics. For the ghost, Shai, is special. And the two girls will need each of their unique skills if they are to survive what is about to come.

Both main characters, Xhea and Shai, are very fully formed. Each is strong in a unique way that will both help and hinder their journey together. But it is their interactions and halting friendship that give this story heart. Rather than being enemies or screeching females, each recognizes the gravitas of their situation and make use of their talents. For once, we have characters who understand just how perilous their lives have become and act accordingly.

The side characters are just as human (or inhuman, as in the case of the ghosts). There are no mustache twirling villains or too-good-to-be-true friends who will end up as tombstones. Rather, loner Xhea has those she can sort of depend upon but whom will end up disappointing when she runs into trouble with the Towers.

The human aspect of the story is very well complemented by a fascinating and intricately conceived world. From the politics of the elite in the Towers to the scrabble on the ground - it all makes sense and it is all incredibly unique. A post apocalypse world with magic running throughout - powering elevators or cars and defining the worth of people. It's a capitalist society run on magic rather than gold or currency.

There's a lot to like here. Those who are looking to avoid yet another sloppily written, illogical YA dystopian with copious amounts of meaningless action culminating in a soppy insta-luv romance will find a lot to love with Radiant. It's the antidote to the rash of very poorly written books springing up since Divergent and Hunger Games became popular.

I eagerly look forward to the next book in the series and I give my highest recommendations for Radiant.

Reviewed from an ARC.

J.M. Frey says

(Full disclosure: I received an ARC from the author.)

RADIANT is a tense, wonder-and-horror-packed, political thriller at whose heart is cradled the glowing importance of the bonds of friendship; the desperation of loneliness; the pain of magic; the impertinence of power; and the misery of a child's abandonment, misunderstanding and desperate desire for a place to rest, to be safe, for a home in a world where such a thing never comes without a price.

RADIANT follows Xhea, a Lower City dweller in a broken, filthy cyberpunk future where the rich are only rich by virtue of having been born with magic. Xhea, so devoid of magic that it has even stripped her of her ability to see in colour, scratches and scrabbles out a living in the literal underbelly of the world. To make ends meet, Xhea pawns the treasures of the time Before that she scavenges, and for a price, will take on the burdens ghosts so that those to whom they're tethered can take respite from their haunting for a few days.

Into Xhea's bleak and gray world comes Shai, the ghost of a girl who once lived and died in the great, powerful, and magically charged Towers that float above the Lower City. A melancholy, forgetful ghost whose harried and erratic father wants free of her, Shai glows with a magic so bright that Xhea has never seen its like before.

And, if the guards of the Tower that Shai's father escaped from has anything to do with it, never will again. Now Xhea is on the run from Tower officials, forced to hide Shai and her powerful, terrifyingly bright magic, just save her own skin. But there are other players on the board who want to control Shai's hoard of magic, people who know Xhea's horrifically scarred and traumatic past, people who have debts or grudges against Xhea to either reel in or repay.

Oh, and there are the zombies too, who tear apart anyone stupid enough to be outside after dark, and who seem genuinely drawn to Shai's bright power... and the strange, dark magic that Xhea is starting to discover within herself, something that makes the very magic that makes up the wealth of this world a poison to Xhea.

What first began as a financial transaction grows into a strong and vital friendship between Xhea and Shai. In this age of Gossip Girls and Pretty Little Liars, a book which not only features but celebrates a genuine, strong friendship between girls built on mutual trust and respect is vital for young readers of all genders.

Sparse, spare, and at the same time a rich tapestry of worldbuilding and the soft misery of her blighted main character Xhea, Karina Sumner-Smith's smashing debut is a page-turner of the highest pedigree. Sumner-Smith's excellent, subtle, wringing worldbuilding abilities is supported by her clean, clear, precise wordcrafting. RADIANT is a book that is both a joy and a pleasure to read, with a breathtaking climax that rivals the greatest scenery pieces of the blockbuster films, and an ending that is both satisfying and intriguing, which promises a greater world filled with bigger and brighter mysteries for Xhea, Shai, and all those who dwell in the Lower City, a place – now that Xhea and Shai are in it - is no longer without hope.

Emma says

Original mash up : fantasy, post-apocalypse, dystopia, magic, ghosts,zombies...and it works!

I love the fact that we don't have all the answers about this world. It is quite inspiring as our main character overcomes the odds. She is quite a tragic character but they say you cannot feel sorry for someone who doesn't feel sorry for themselves, and it is certainly true here.

Her relationship to ghosts reminds me slightly of *The Girl with Ghost Eyes*, but the book has a flavour all of its own.

Very intrigued to see what the sequel offers. Want something a bit different fantasy and sci Fi lovers? This is it! Enjoy..

Lindsay says

An amazing story of two young women, one alive and dark, the other dead and bright, as they find each other and take on the world.

The world is a dark one of magic and conflict which seems built on the ashes of our world. Xhea seems to possess no magic at all, or at least not the bright magic that everyone else seems to hold, and partly because of this she lives her life in the Lower City. Above the Lower City hover the Towers, places of luxury and magic which predate on each other and jockey for position. Life in the Towers is pretty wonderful, with technology fueled by magic, but it's bought for a terrible price paid by a very few.

Xhea does have some abilities though, one of which is that she can see and hear ghosts. Which is how she encounters Shai, one of the Radiants that the Towers depend on both in life and in death for their endless font of magic. But it's readily apparent that the existence of a Radiant is absolutely torturous and Xhea resolves to help Shai as much as she can.

This book is written around the friendship between these strong and independent young women as they struggle for the basics of life: the right to exist without being exploited because of what they are. Their fight against the injustice of what other people have planned for them is a righteous one and drags the reader along with them.

Nicki says

In the crumbling ruins of a destroyed or decayed high-tech city, plagued after dusk by the once-human night walkers, Xhea lives among the dregs of society in the Lower City, the dwelling of those without enough magic in their bones to claim a place among the prosperous floating Towers above. But even here, she is the lowest of the low, for Xhea seems to be a singular anomaly in that she has no magic at all. She sees the world in shades of grey, and without a magical signature of her own everything from locks to lifts fail to operate for her, unrecognising of her humanity, for bright magic is life. Fortunately, her strange lack does seem to have left her with one gift, the careful employment of which lets her scrounge out a living, and sometimes even a taste of that elusive magic which restores the colour to her vision: She can see and talk to ghosts.

When Xhea strikes a bargain with a client to take the ghost of his daughter from him for a two-day reprieve, transplanting the ghost's tether from him to herself, she brings an unexpected new friend into her life. Shai, the ghost, is Xhea's opposite in almost every way, sprung from a wealthy life amidst the Towers, overflowing with bright magic -- which is a problem, as ghosts, like Xhea, have no magic. Xhea has seen such a thing only once before, under horrific circumstances. Are the people of the Towers trying to bring back the dead? Or are they trying to do something even worse with these bright ghosts?

I signed up for a buddy read of **Radiant** months ago, and by the time I got to it, I'd pretty much forgotten what it was meant to be about. I didn't even reread the blurb before starting, so I went in blind. Given I was a total blank slate, the setting cohered for me so fast, especially given the factors (magical floating towers) that *sound* like they should be hokey, but in practice really aren't. Sumner-Smith quickly impresses with her ability to build the world in rich strokes without the crutch of heavy exposition. This feels very different from your average post-apocalyptic YA, not only in being more of a fantasy blend but in, surprisingly given those magical elements, feeling more real. I can believe in this place as a *society* more readily than many of the dystopias that stick to hard sci-fi.

I'm honestly surprised how this trilogy seems to have flown under the radar when so many readers are looking for YA books that are less focused on love triangles and more on friendship and family, because the female friendship here is the biggest thing to celebrate about **Radiant**. Xhea and Shai are such fabulous characters. They're completely different from each other, yet they're great expressions of two different ways in which to be brave. Xhea has a big, justifiable abandonment complex, and the walls she's put up around herself have probably been a factor in what's kept her alive so long in such desperate circumstances, but Shai's influence shows her that some people are worth hurting for. Shai has been indoctrinated to live a life of agonising self-sacrifice that even death can't free her from, and Xhea's refusal to lie down and take it on both their behalves might be just what she needs to learn that it isn't cowardly to refuse to be others' tool any longer.

The story is divided into three parts that hold together excellently, never dropping the pace. I'm genuinely surprised to find that Sumner-Smith is a debut novelist whose focus until now has been short stories, because pacing is often one of my complaints when short story writers transition to novel-length fiction, but beginning, middle, and end are woven together perfectly, neither getting short shrift nor overstaying their welcome. I also find it immensely refreshing to read a story of this type in which no one acts stupid for the sake of the plot. Xhea and Shai are put into genuinely hard-pressed situations and they make sensible decisions, the decisions that I'd like to believe I'd make in such a situation rather than ones that leave me all-too-frequently yelling 'But why wouldn't you just try *this*?' at the page. I also went to some lengths in my buddy read to praise the fact that the author went to some pains to really think through what the physical effects of the things she was putting Xhea through would be, and not to pull punches or resolve them with a convenient *deus ex machina*, whether it's the fact that someone who isn't eating properly does not have an endless supply of energy or the fact that a severe knee injury cannot be powered through with adrenaline and pluck, it needs an actual brace or it's simply going to collapse. Having suffered a similar knee injury in the not-too-distant past, this level of realism made me almost irrationally happy. (I expect this is the feeling my horse-owning friends get when authors treat horses like actual animals and not slow, stubborn cars.)

And not a drop of romance in sight, much less a love triangle. This is just so solid all-around that I'm genuinely surprised it's not a Hunger Games-level phenomenon, although I suppose quality has never been the determining point for those. I think this will also have a lot of crossover appeal to readers who don't typically enjoy YA, because aside from a brief mention of her past which makes her current age explicit, I could've easily believed that Xhea was in her twenties.

My first five-star of the year. I can't wait to see where the Towers trilogy goes next.

Review from Bookette.net

Susana says

Release Date: October, 7th

Arc provided by Talos Press through Edelweiss

Radiant ups the game in the dystopian and post-apocalyptic story telling, joining the top authors with the most imaginative and well written stories on the subject.

Fans of Susan Ee's "Penryn and the End of Days" series will probably love this!

Radiant is such an amazing and complex story that I am afraid I won't be able to do it justice with my poor and basic review. In fact I'm fighting the urge to only say something as inane as: **Wow...and wow...and go read it...and can I say wow again?**

With traces of dystopia, sci-fi, post-apocalyptic (and I don't even know how to categorize the living, sentient A.I(?) parts), horror (get ready for some zombie like creatures...) this is basically a story about survival and friendship. Of holding on to something, **to someone** who is finally there for you, and who won't leave you no matter what.

Not even dead.

With a background of abandonment and neglect, fifteen year old Xhea lives as best as she can on **Lower City**.

In a world in which magic is the most powerful bargain in the world, Xhea barely scraps a life for herself, not having any magic of her own.

The Lower City part of her world, is where people with little magic _or as in her case, no magic at all_ survive amongst rubble and decay.

By contrast, in the sky, in the **City**, there are the Towers, floating islands of wealth and privilege, in which people with the greatest magical abilities live.

These towers are fuelled by their inhabitants' magic... and especially by some very important people called Radiants.

Radiants are like magic generators. They have so much magic inside them that it can literally kill them.

Now, magic in Xhea's world is as natural as breathing:

Magic gives you the magical signature you need in order to live a normal life. It allows you to buy everything you need by magically engraving coins with the value of their worth.

For Xhea, not having it, means accepting payments of small value that only children can use, or having to be as dependent on someone's good will to imbue her coins with someone else's magical signature...

Like I said, this is a complex world, and it takes a little while to get used to it. Maybe because it is so different of what we're used to! (at least in my case!) And that's a good thing!

This story is so different, so amazingly outstanding, and so prone to make our small grey cells work, that after awhile I'm telling you: You'll be like a fish on a hook. A very shining and appetizing hook!

You won't be able to resist it!

So, please, please, just persevere and keep reading it, it will blow your mind!!

Of course, I wouldn't say "nay" to a glossary at the beginning of the book. :)

So, Xhea, an outcast in her own world, someone used to live as a city rat, has however a strong ability: She can see ghosts.

So when one day a man approaches her, carrying with him a girl's ghost, Xhea's life will never be the same. Shai is unlike any ghost Xhea has ever seen and, after awhile, these two very different girls start becoming friends.

But Shai has a very important role to play in her society despite being dead, and there are people who won't stop at anything until they get her back.

With cunning political intrigue, and moral dilemmas thrown into this plot, Xhea and Shai will have to rely on one another, and trust in their friendship to survive their ordeal.

As you can read, there's no romance in this story. *YAY!*

That means that if you're like I used to be, until about five years ago, a person that needed a romance thrown into the story to feel that things weren't too boring, then this book isn't for you... now.

In a couple of years _take my word_ you'll love it.

If... however, you like strong and intelligent characters, are sick and tired of cheesy romances, and are over and done with love triangles/quadrangles/... whatever, then **this book is most definitely for you!**

The plot is unlike any other I've ever read, and it kept me anxiously turning the pages to figure out what was going to happen next! The action and the visual setting that it gives us is so unique, that it is bound to make your head spin!

But if you're afraid that this is only about non stop action, forget about it!

This book deals with some strong abandonment issues. This means that the emotional part is as strong as the action one.

Xhea as been through so much in her life that you just want to give the girl a hug. If she would let you.

You know... up until a couple months ago, reading arcs had the interesting development of steering me away from books that I would not, NOT, ever buy in my lifetime, because they were that bad!

Now, it has just the opposite effect! Because this is most definitely a book that I'll want to have in my bookshelf!

Go Read It!!

p.s- And luckily it appears that the second volume, *Defiant*, is going to be released in May 2015!! :)

Now I just have to get my hands on the author's short stories, and try to figure out which of them garnered a Nebula nomination!

Sarah says

(Source: I received a digital copy of this book for free on a read-to-review basis. Thanks to Perseus/PGW/Legato/Consortium and Edelweiss.)

“The magic... it’s sick, wrong. Broken. It’s all going wrong, all of it wrong – it’s eating me from the inside out and I can’t – I can’t – I can’t stop it.”

This was a YA dystopian/fantasy story about a girl who had no magic, but could see ghosts.

Xhea was quite as stubborn character and kept fighting even when things seemed hopeless. I also admired the way she cared so much about Shai and her wellbeing.

The storyline in this was about Xhea who had no innate magic, living in a world where magic was everything. The thing that Xhea could do though was to see ghosts, and to change who they were tethered too, which is how she met Shai. Shai wasn’t a normal ghost though, and Xhea just ended up in more and more trouble for trying to help her. The pace in this was quite slow though, and the storyline was a little confusing in places.

The ending to this was pretty action packed, and it will be interesting to see what happens in the next book.

6 out of 10

Molly Mortensen says

I'm sick of dystopians but throw in fantasy and ghosts, and you've got my interest.

The story and worldbuilding are definitely unique. A lot of thought went into this society. The world was cool, with floating towers for the upper classes and the lower classes living in the ruins. All technology is run by magic, so magic is currency. Xhea has no magic, so she's essentially always broke. She can see ghosts though and that's where the action comes in.

I love good friendships in books and I really fell for Xhea and Shai's. Though on their own neither character was anything special. Shai's a big question mark, because her history is the mystery of the book. Xhea is a the kind of character, which on paper (figuratively speaking) I hate. Bitter, angry, and a bit of a magic addict. (Though she didn't face any of the problems normal addicts face, so that part didn't bother me.) But in the end she was a sympathetic character. At first she comes off hard, but we quickly learn that she isn't really.

There were a few minor characters but none got enough page time to get to know them. Lorn, the young ruler of one of the lower skyscrapers, has the most promise. I'm curious about his mysterious history with Xhea.

The plot was rather slow, despite all of the action and running. Xhea just reacted to everything, not really having a goal. Towards the end, she gained a goal but not a plan or the intellect to enact it. (Which was

annoying but still entertaining.)

I hadn't planned to read the sequel but I might have to. No cliffhanger, but the author didn't answer all my questions!

Justine says

Absolutely first rate speculative fiction reminiscent of *Archivist Wasp*, another personal favourite of mine. More people should be reading this book; it is a definite standout and is going on my favourites shelf for 2016.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.com/2014/11/18/r...>

Is *Radiant* science fiction? Or is it fantasy? Perhaps it is both, just as I like to think this book could fit comfortably in both the Adult and Young Adult categories. No matter how you look at it, it seems there's something for everyone in this brilliant and unique cross-genre piece from debut novelist Karina Sumner-Smith.

It all begins with a ghost. Teenager Xhea may have been born without magic – not one bit at all – but she has a power that allows her to see and speak to the dead. Forced to live in the Lower City where those with little to no magic struggle to eke out a living, Xhea manages to survive by scavenging and selling her services to the haunted, offering to take on their ghostly burdens for a few days in exchange for some food or money.

This is how Shai comes into Xhea's life. Even as a ghost, Shai has so much magic that she can use it to generate the power that keeps the floating towers of the city's upper class supplied with endless fuel and energy. This is because Shai is a Radiant, a rare individual who is literally a magic generator and there are powerful factions out there who will stop at nothing to get their hands on her. To these individuals, Shai is nothing but a tool. They care nothing about the pain and torture her ghost will endure, and it is up to Xhea to protect and fight for her new phantom friend.

The story of *Radiant* revolves around this incredibly beautiful relationship. Xhea is a down-on-her-luck outcast who has survived years of abuse and trauma. Shai is a dead girl who, in her living years, only knew a life of luxury and comfort, albeit burdened with the responsibility of being a Radiant. And yet, a friendship is forged between these two very different characters, and the bond only strengthens with every page.

This central dynamic serves as the novel's entire backbone, and I'm glad for it. There is very little fluff or filler content to distract from the main plot, no stale romantic arcs or angsty teenage drama to get in the way, just a compelling journey of two strong young women who go through many adventures and much strife in order to help one another. Even divided into three parts, the story is tightly told, and I enjoyed Sumner-Smith's straightforward and easy-on-the-eyes writing style. She doesn't go overboard with descriptions or the details of the characters' backgrounds, providing enough to keep the reader engaged yet also satisfy the folks like me who crave world building and character development.

The remarkable friendship between Xhea and Shai alone makes this a very special novel, but I also loved the world the author has created here. Like I alluded to in my introduction, it would be impossible to assign just

one genre to Radiant – and quite honestly, it wouldn't do the book justice if I did. There's a mix of so many things here. Potent magical spells existing in harmony with advanced technology. The images of glimmering gargantuan towers in the sky suggest a futuristic setting, while the dirty and crumbling ruins of buildings and defunct subway tunnels in the Lower City are reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic dystopian. Mindless, shambling undead creatures resembling zombies stalk the broken streets at night, injecting a bit of horror into this already mind-blowing blend of spec fic elements.

Radiant truly stands out. As a debut novel from an author already highly acclaimed for her short stories, there is a quality of rawness to some parts of it, but it's nevertheless a very polished and great book. Karina Sumner-Smith is one to watch, and I'm eagerly awaiting the release of the next installment in the Towers Trilogy.

Renay says

Oh man talk about LADY FRIENDSHIPS I am HERE FOR IT. I need the next book IMMEDIATELY.

(I still don't quite understand the magic system.)

(This is not the book's fault.)

Robyn says

Very original world & compelling friendship, as well as excellent writing. However, for some reason I just wasn't as gripped by this as I wanted to be; I really had to force myself to finish the last half. Maybe a mood thing!
