



Wicked Saints

Written by Emily A. Duncan

Published by griefconvention

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Wicked Saints

Wicked Saints

By Emily A. Duncan

Wicked Saints Book

An instant New York Times bestseller!

Wicked Saints

Wicked Saints Review

A girl who can speak to gods must save her people without destroying herself.

Wicked Saints

Wicked Saints Arc

A prince in danger must decide who to trust.

Wicked Saints

Wicked Saints Amazon

A boy with a monstrous secret waits in the wings.

Wicked Saints

Wicked Saints Excerpt

Together, they must assassinate the king and stop the war.

Wicked Saints Characters

In a centuries-long war where beauty and brutality meet, their three paths entwine in a shadowy world of spilled blood and mysterious saints, where a forbidden romance threatens to tip the scales between dark and light. *Wicked Saints* is the thrilling start to Emily A. Duncan's devastatingly Gothic *Something Dark and Holy* trilogy..

Ah yes, the place I truly dwell, a cold eternity of endless disappointment.

Fine. I'm just being dramatic (again). But seriously"being this sensitive is really inconvenient. Your most anticipated book of the year doesn't live up to your expectations and you have to cancel your plans for the day to mourn.

So, what's this book about?

For a century, Kalyazin and Tranavia bled great goutts of men into a holy war that served no greater cause than one country's fear, and one empire's hubris.

Nadya, a Kal Ah yes, the place I truly dwell, a cold eternity of endless disappointment.

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For a century, Kalyazin and Tranavia bled great goutts of men into a holy war that served no greater cause than one country's fear, and one empire's hubris.

Nadya, a Kalyazi cleric who can commune with an entire pantheon of gods, is training in secrecy in the holy mountains by priests who sought to wield the power that sheltered inside her into the one thing that could save Kalyazin from sinking to its knees. But a sudden Tranavian attack on the monastery sends Nadya's destiny spilling out into the air, the storm of it no longer a far future to be reached, but a typhoon here and now. All this mayhem is like blood in the water, and Nadya isn't the only one swimming in it: Serefin, the High prince of Tranavia and a powerful blood mage, has scant interest in anything unless it involves alcohol but now finds himself forced to constantly look about him in trepidation for those who might be in a position to oppose his succession, including his father, the king. And there's Malachiasz, a Tranavian defector whose real intentions are shrouded in secrecy and with whom Nadya forms a reluctant alliance while they're both on the run from the Tranavian soldiers.

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Nadya soon discovers that unknown forces are scheming to carve a new avenue to power and fulfilling her destiny of helping the gods reclaim their hold on the world might prove harder than she'd thought.

“We’re all monsters, Nadya,” Malachiasz said, his voice gaining a few tangled chords of chaos. “Some of us just hide it better than others.”

Reading the first couple of chapters, I was intrigued by Wicked Saints’ twining of religion, politics and magic, and the provocative questions it rises at every turn, but, sadly, what tatters remained of that interest quickly deserted me as the story progressed.

I expected more from this book than a sequence of interesting situations and a setting that felt more built from analogues than originality, a little more than a scaffolding made of concepts like holding up a cracked mirror to the world. I was also disappointed with how the political exposition and the magic system sometimes read messily, especially towards the end when suddenly the logic that belonged to the story seemed as if it had remained behind, like luggage on a dock. I was also “and I can’t stress this enough” really bored. Yes. Tension clambers up. Portents simmer. Dark magic threatens to consume everything it touches. But nothing much comes of any of it until the final pages, when the narrative bends towards a showdown that was massively anticlimactic.

I saw a lot of people evoke how similar this book was to The Grisha Trilogy, and I have to agree. Quite frankly, it felt like an uninspired rip-off. The intricate plot turnings in TGT are so strong and so compelling because Bardugo spends so much time placing us in the minds and hearts of her characters, ensuring that we care about them long before danger comes for them. That isn’t the case with this book at all. I couldn’t connect with any of the characters. There were some minor characters and relationships I wish had been focused on instead of others: Rashid and Parijahan—Malachiasz’s companions and the only POC in the story as far as we know—make brief appearances but we never really get much chance for them to settle into being multi-dimensional, or find out what their revenge agenda is.

This is not the only way that Wicked Saints doesn’t entirely commit to its potential. The premise of the story led me to believe it wouldn’t adhere to genre conventions, clichés and staples, which meant I was really dispirited when it did. Wicked Saints plays the enemies-to-lovers romance without any attempt at subversion. I feel as if some deficiency of the soul has made me unable to ship Nadya and Malachiasz. I couldn’t give a tuppenny damn about their relationship “for many reasons. Least of which is the fact that there was absolutely no real reason for them to hate each other in the first place, other than that they’re on opposing sides, and no real reason for them to fall for each other, other than because that’s the trope. But chief of which is this: my least favorite thing in fantasy is when a female character is reduced to a love interest.

It couldn’t be more obvious that this was Malachiasz’s story and Nadya was merely a minor player in the drama of her own life. Sometimes, she wasn’t even the focus of the story within her own POVs. In the beginning, we learn that Nadya had grown up in a monastery, trained in the hope that

sheâ€™d prove to be a weapon against Kalyazinâ€™s enemies. The face of the world was long kept veiled from her and I was really excited to see her take possession of her destiny and determine the path of her own life, but, in the end, it seemed she had not learned how to hold another shape other than what others dictated for her. Malachiasz honestly raised my hackles by coming out of nowhere, like an impossible vision, and making Nadya immediately buckle under hisâ€™extremely attractiveâ€™stare. (The appropriate response is usually an eye roll.) It was repeatedly revealed that amidst so many secrets, he too seldom shared his truths, and whenever Nadya tries to settle into his memory, she quickly realizes that she knew him so little that he was not really hersâ€™yet, that was still not enough to finally break through her blindness and naivete. It was so frustrating.

I've read a staggering number of excellent fantasy books recently with lady leads that had their own agency on full displayâ€™from Arden's Winternight Trilogy to Novak's Spinning Silver to Kuang's The Poppy Warâ€™and I think it's done things to my head because I now can't settle for anything less extraordinary. I certainly don't deny the allure of stories where a powerful, shadowy man is wholly committed to the female protagonist and her own innocent mystiqueâ€™but hereâ€™s the thing: female characters can have strong, compelling narratives without preventing them from experiencing love, intimacy, and affection. It's frustrating when books make it seem like women must choose between a romantic interest and depth of character and ignore a far more productive message: women are capable of possessing both.â I kept waiting and waiting for the author to twist the trope into something original and interesting, but the unexpected just never arrives.

I hope the events of the sequel will smooth out this rough patch, but I'm honestly not sure if I'm curious enough to find out.

TW: self-harm and parental abuse.

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Wicked Saints Kirkus

ARC given to me by my kind friend - Lilly at Lair of Books!

“If you fall to him the war will be lost. You have to live, Nadya.”
 I’m going to be really honest with you all; I feel like Wicked Saints is the book of my heart. From the lyrical writing, to the cold atmosphere, to the beautiful themes, to the characters that I’d already be willing to give my life for; this book just felt like it was written for me. This debut fantasy, all about blood magic and a cleric who can speak to all the gods
 ARC given to me by my kind friend - Lilly at Lair of Books!

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 I’m going to be really honest with you all; I feel like Wicked Saints is the book of my heart. From the lyrical writing, to the cold atmosphere, to the beautiful themes, to the characters that I’d already be willing to give my life for; this book just felt like it was written for me. This debut fantasy, all about blood magic and a cleric who can speak to all the gods (be still, my wishful D&D heart), blew me and my expectations out of the water.

The author very much pulls from Russian and Polish inspiration and we get to see two countries, the Russian inspired Kalyazin, and the Polish inspired Tranavia. There is also the desert lands of Akola, which we meet a few characters from, but I think the land will be explored much more in later books! But we quickly see how differently the first two places view religion, and how both nations are willing to do whatever it takes in the name of their beliefs. These two countries are warring, and the author never shies away from that, but they are also beautifully woven together to create such an immersive and captivating world and setting.

“Cannons only meant one thing: blood magic. And blood magic meant Tranavians.”
 But this tale starts out with a girl who has lived and hidden within the protection of a monastery’s walls her entire life. She has a power unlike any other, and it is her people’s hope to not only restore the faith of the gods, but bring them back into power. Yet, there are people who are willing to do anything to make sure the gods and their religion(s) stay silenced forever. And one night, the girl’s monastery is brutally attacked, and she and her friend barely escape with their lives, while everyone else stayed back to ensure they could run away. Yet, the war commander prince notices that this girl is not among the dead. The girl, desperate to live and to not have the gods be silenced, is willing to do anything it takes to live. Even if that means getting help from a powerful rebel mage, who is harboring many secrets of his own.

“The girl, the monster, and the prince!”
 ½ Nadya - The cleric who can speak to all of the gods.
 ½ Malachiasz - A blood mage, who believes he is a monster.
 ½ Serefin - Bisexual icon. Also, a blood mage prince of one of the most powerful realms in this world,

but the king is trying to ensure that no one can contest his power, while also wanting to use his son as a martial pawn. He also has a visual impairment and is unable to see out of one of his eyes.

(Breathtaking art by Therese at warickaart!)

And all three of these characters? As morally grey as they come. And they all equally stole my heart. Okay, maybe I have a little bit of a soft spot for Serefin, but I can't help it, okay? But there is more disability and sexual representation with some of the side characters, and many characters of color. I am truly in love with all the side characters, and I can't wait to see them develop even more, but Ostyia was easily my favorite and the author confirmed she is a tiny murder lesbian, and I've never read anything so perfect in all my life.

Okay, I'm going to spend a little more time talking about Nadya because I truly was obsessed with how the author crafted religion and the saints in this book. First off, I'm Catholic, so you know that I fuck hard with saints, anyways. But, on the opposite end of the spectrum, I have played probably over a hundred D&D campaigns in my life, and I swear to all the gods that I have probably rolled a cleric at least 50 of those campaigns. Seriously, teenage Melanie (and her Pathfinder loving friends) was obsessed with Sarenrae. But reading a book about a cleric who could speak to ALL the gods, and harness their powers if they allowed it? I am quaking. Also, the banter between Nadya and all the different gods, all of whom have very different personalities, was probably my favorite element of the entire book.

Again, this is a very dark book and I implore you to read my trigger and content warnings listed down below if you are on the fence if you are in the right headspace or not. But one of the major magic systems in this book is blood magic, where people will use their own blood (most of the time, freshly cut) and merge it with pages of a spell book to be able to wield their prepared spells and harness their magic. I loved this. I loved this so much. It is something that I feel you see so much in D&D and videogames, but never in literature and I really think it was expertly done and completely made the book for me.

I feel like I should talk about the romance, since I see many early reviewers not loving it as much as I seemed to. I always thought Nadya was the star of this book, regardless of who she was developing feelings for. I mean, you all know I always fall in love with the one the main character doesn't pick, so there is that, but I still loved the romance in this book. Also, I kind of hinted a bit about this in the character breakdowns, but when Serefin was following the king's wishes to find a marriage? I was invested, friends. Too invested, probably. But during all the situations, the angst almost killed me, in the best way possible, and I can't wait to see where the author takes everything in book two. It was the perfect slow burn feeling, while giving us so many breadcrumbs that all tasted delicious.

Overall, this book just had too many things in my personal wheelhouse for me not to completely fall in love with it. I mean, I originally heard this pitched as "a gothic Joan of Arc" and I knew from that

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moment my life was going to be changed. I think Emily A. Duncan has really crafted such a unique story, and such a beautiful debut and start of a series. I can't wait to see what comes next, especially because the end of this book truly slayed me and every emotion I have ever had.

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The quotes above were taken from an ARC and are subject to change upon publication.

Content and Trigger Warnings for self-harm (both as a magic system, and talk of self-harm in the past), torture, parental abuse, abandonment, abduction, a lot of alcohol consumption (maybe addiction), gore, violence, and war themes.

Buddy read with Jocelyn at Yogi with a Book! â• ¢

...more

Well look what came today on my Bday! Owlcrate April Box! I knew this book would be in there but now I'm going to have to reorder the white one =) As always, click on the link below the picture to see all of the amazing freaking goodies!

THE GOODIES

MY BLOG

OMG! OMG! OMG! PLEASE LET ME LOVE THIS.....

Thank goodness I loved the book! Let just give you a little skinny on the book first before I tell you WHY I love it.

The book starts out with a bang; action right out of the Well look what came today on my Bday! Owlcrate April Box! I knew this book would be in there but now I'm going to have to reorder the white one =) As always, click on the link below the picture to see all of the amazing freaking goodies!

THE GOODIES

MY BLOG

OMG! OMG! OMG! PLEASE LET ME LOVE THIS.....

Thank goodness I loved the book! Let just give you a little skinny on the book first before I tell you WHY I love it.

The book starts out with a bang; action right out of the gates. We have Nadya, she's a cleric and has been hiding in a monastery forever! She has powers and some peeps found out about her and all hell broke loose. She has to go on the run with a friend in order to not be killed or captured for other horrible reasons.

We have Serefin who is a Prince and a mage and he is after Nadya. The POV's are his and Nadya's but we get other characters through their story lines.

Then we have Malachiasz who is another mage character and from the same place as Serefin, but who helps Nadya and her friend get from point A to point B.

I loved the book in the very beginning but the only reason I kept loving it is because I fell in love with the villain! Yes, you heard it first here people. And there are actually a few villains in the book.

I also love the Vultures! They are bad guys and girls in the book as well. What is it with me and the bad guys! I don't always love them so there!

I am interested to see where this will go in the next book because that ending had me "shook" and I'm not over it yet. I hope that it gets better and doesn't suffer from second book syndrome!

Anyhoo!

Thank you to Netgalley and the Publisher for a digital copy of this book to review.

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Mel TM¥ ...more

Wicked Saints Quotes

'we are all monsters, nadya. some of us just hide it better than others.'

this book is so seductively dark and holy, so gothically bloody, so cruelly romantic; and my black soul has never been happier. ðŸ–œ

the strength of this story is the magic, the ferocious yet satisfying magic. hands down. the characters are brutally intense and beautifully developed, but its how magic affects them and their world that is so captivating. the entire plot is driven by the opposing beliefs about the nature of mag 'we are all monsters, nadya. some of us just hide it better than others.'

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the strength of this story is the magic, the ferocious yet satisfying magic. hands down. the characters are brutally intense and beautifully developed, but its how magic affects them and their world that is so captivating. the entire plot is driven by the opposing beliefs about the nature of magic and i thought emily duncan did a great job at bringing that struggling debate to life. its impressively well thought-out and a real high point to the story.

i will admit this isnt without faults. the romance is a very insta-lovey and the writing can get confusing/muddled at times, but there is such a strong foundation here that i know great things can be expected from the future installments of this series.

also, the physical aesthetic of this book is so drop dead gorgeous, it makes me want to cry. the incandesce foil artwork, the colour tones, the spine, and overall design is just so much, i cant stop looking at it. this gets 5 stars for that alone!

â† 4.5 stars ...more

â€œHe was a liar and she wanted his truths.â€•

Trigger Warnings: Self-harm and parental abuse. The author has been very vocal about it â€” which I appreciate â€” so readers, just be aware before diving in. Please take care of yourselves!

Anywayâ€¦!

Most clerics hear the voice of one god who grants them a particular power. Nadya, however, hears the voices of all the gods, and they all grant her power when she asks â€” which puts a target on her head. The opening pages immediately set the tone, where weâ€™re

“He was a liar and she wanted his truths.”

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Anyway!

Most clerics hear the voice of one god who grants them a particular power. Nadya, however, hears the voices of all the gods, and they all grant her power when she asks “ which puts a target on her head. The opening pages immediately set the tone, where we’re thrown into the middle of a war as Nadya’s monastery is attacked by an enemy prince “ a dangerous blood mage. Nadya is forced to flee and leave behind the only friends she’s ever known because if she stays, he could kill her and take her power.

While on the run, she ends up alongside a group of rebels (for lack of better words) who want to end the war. Their “leader”, Malachiasz, convinces Nadya to help them infiltrate the enemy palace! and that’s all I’m going to say. Since we’re nearly a year from the release, I don’t want to give away too much of the plot. What I loved were all the twists and turns, the characters that beg you to trust them when deep down, you know you probably shouldn’t. I love finding new morally gray (or are they?) characters to root for. Nadya reminded me a little of Alina from Shadow and Bone (my favorite series “ in fact, I think I caught some nods/references “ heyooo). I will add though - don’t go in this expecting the Darkling.

There was a heavy focus on magic and religion and the theological debates that accompany them. In fact, I often found myself switching sides on who was right, who was wrong, and who Nadya should trust (and if she should trust herself). The magic system was unlike anything I’ve read before, and same for the world. Though inspired by Russia (and Poland if my assumptions are correct), it totally stands on its own.

What I loved most was the “anything can happen” fast-paced plot that had me turning pages like nobody’s business. From the first chapter, I was totally swept away and there was no turning back. And trust me when I say the world is dark dark dark (probably the darkest I’ve read), which after following Emily on twitter, I think she’d take that as a compliment ðŸ˜‰

On that note, I highly suggest taking a look at fanart to get a good feel for the vibe! [Click here to see it!](#)

The hardest part about having read it is that I’ll have to wait forever for the next book.

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*A huge thank you to Wednesday Books for this gorgeous early edition, and allowing me to read and review!

All quotes are subject to change in the final copy

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Wicked Saints Pre Order Incentive

This is for everyone who shipped Alina and The Darkling. WHICH MEANS THIS BOOK IS FOR ME, OKAY? NO TOUCHIE. MINE. ahem.

It's like if you go into a snow-dusted forest to free a beautiful maiden/dude from a glass casket only when you get there, that person has been devoured and this glorious, talon-ed creature with killer hair, a only-way-to-get-rid-of-my-smirk-is-to-kiss-me mouth, and eyes so dark they look like a freaking dimension is chilling on top of said casket, which is now smashed to pieces This is for everyone who shipped Alina and The Darkling. WHICH MEANS THIS BOOK IS FOR ME, OKAY? NO TOUCHIE. MINE. ahem.

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That's this book. ...more

Update 10.17.18: Hi! We have a cover! It's black metal as hell and I adore it! The book is also up for preorder if you feel so inclined! The link will lead to a landing page that directs to all major retailers. <3

Update 5.10.18: So the book is going into the world now and I wanted to note some content warnings. There's a blanket content warning on self-harm because this book has multiple blood mage characters and that rather comes with the territory. However, on page 350 (in the bound MS) Update 10.17.18: Hi! We have a cover! It's black metal as hell and I adore it! The book is also up for preorder if you feel so inclined! The link will lead to a landing page that directs to all major retailers. <3

Update 5.10.18: So the book is going into the world now and I wanted to note some content warnings. There's a blanket content warning on self-harm because this book has multiple blood mage characters and that rather comes with the territory. However, on page 350 (in the bound MS) there's a conversation about a character's past self-harm. It's small and they're talking about scars but, still, the allusion is there.

There is a torture scene early on in the book in chapter 5. It's not particularly graphic but I do like to warn about that.

And another kind of blanket content warning on parental abuse. There's a specific incident on p. 290 (again, bound MS) however where Serefin is struck by his father so just a warning. Stay safe and only read what you feel comfortable with.

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Update 4.4.18: New title! The book is now WICKED SAINTS and Something Dark and Holy is the trilogy title.

I mean I COULD rate this five stars but I won't. I'll just say I'm very excited for everyone to meet my weird cast of kids. I love them a lot and I hope you all do too.

For clarity I'm going to add some facts to this. WICKED SAINTS is high fantasy, the Joan of Arc bit is a marketing comp, this is not a Joan of Arc retelling, this is a story completely its own that takes on thematic elements similar to Joan of Arc's story. Nadya is her own person, she is not Joan.

The book takes place in two countries, Kalyazin, which is a Russian analogue, and Tranavia, which is Polish.

The book is also dual POV, while the trilogy as a whole has three main characters (oh, yeah, goodreads has it listed as a stand alone, it's a trilogy).

That's all for now! Xoxo ...more