



## A Rising Darkness: Book 1 of the Hand of Justice

**Nikki Dorakis**

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British novelist Nikki Dorakis begins “The Hand of Justice” fantasy series with a novel featuring themes of loyalty, discipline, love, and loss.

Highly skilled mage and adviser to his king, Anubis takes on an apprentice to save the boy from the Crown Prince’s unsavory depredations and to call in an enchantment debt. Under Anubis’s tutelage, young Meriq discovers his own magical skills and, upon his master’s death, is elevated by his king to the rights and titles Anubis had garnered. Still less than twenty, Meriq is swept into conflict with a dark and deadly force. It takes all he has as a wizard and a man to fight through the menace that threatens not only his country of Zetaria, but all other known lands as well.

Dorakis has deftly collected life experiences from his globe-trotting days and wrestled them into a fantasy world which is at once familiar and strange. The created languages are natural-sounding, easy to pronounce, and unobtrusive. Martial aspects of Zetaria’s culture blend smoothly with its social structure and political stance, as do those of other countries with which Zetaria forms alliances.

Perhaps the greatest success in *A Rising Darkness* is the ease with which bisexuality is portrayed as part of the norm in Zetarian society. Its neighbors in Morla don’t share that view, which makes for effective tension between characters and within the story itself. Second in success is the dialogue: its flow is so consistent that readers will feel they have known these characters for years. In addition, revenge isn’t off the table when wrongs must be punished. Readers can boo the bad guys and cheer the heroes. The pacing of the novel is nearly breathtaking.

Two technical errors teeter on the edge between being reasonably ignorable and incredibly frustrating, and both are spread throughout the text. First of all, extra spacing between paragraphs (that is usually used to separate two scenes in the same chapter) is employed on every page, for every paragraph. This makes the text look like an email and unnecessarily creates excess pages. The manuscript could have been reduced by at least a third if the extra line spacing was deleted and all paragraphs indented. The second error is in the misuse of periods and commas.

Despite those problems, *A Rising Darkness* should become a new favorite of fantasy readers who look for more inclusive reads than those of the classics in the genre. *The Dread Wolf* continues the story, and if the first installment is a true indicator, the second book and any future volumes should be well worth the wait.

J. G. STINSON (December 19, 2012)

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