

Hidden Magic: The Portal Opens

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Hidden Magic breathes new life into the urban fantasy genre.

In *Hidden Magic: The Portal Opens*, the mythological and the everyday collide as a young girl comes into incredible power with the fate of two worlds hanging in the balance.

Nicole Jameson leads a fairly normal life in Yuma, Arizona. Though her mother has abandoned the family, Nicole enjoys a strong relationship with both her father and her brothers. Her normal life comes to an abrupt end when a portal opens in her backyard and Raiden, a seer from another realm, stumbles through it.

The portal connects Nicole's reality with another—one that supernaturally gifted people fled to long ago and that is strongly associated with the mythological fey. It soon becomes clear that the portal opened because Nicole is a fera, a type of mind-bogglingly powerful fey.

Their futures now entwined with supernatural powers, an ancient war in the fey realm, and an uncertain destiny, Nicole and Raiden are thrust onto a dangerous path.

At the center of *Hidden Magic: The Portal Opens* is the headstrong, intelligent, and independent Nicole. Rae deftly avoids the clichés of “the Chosen One” and the “damsel in distress” with the portrayal of this character.

Nicole's home life is fairly stable and loving, and she's a hard-working student and athlete. The sudden discovery of her power isn't to answer a desire for change, but is simply a fact. Likewise, Raiden isn't there to rescue Nicole or to show her love is everything. One twist—in which Nicole suddenly distrusts Raiden and is driven into danger—does go against her established personality, though.

Nicole isn't the only character with a refreshing and engaging characterization. The character Gordan—a dragon in human form freed from the villain's captivity—seems to be introduced as a possible third leg of a love triangle. Despite a relatively small amount of backstory, he is incredibly well fleshed out with a potentially momentous character arc.

Amarth—a fey known as a death keeper—haunts Raiden after taking his mother to the other side. Amarth speaks of life as song and comments on major characters' life songs in a surprising and fascinating way, adding a breath of fresh air to the story.

While the plot is never artificially pushed forward, chapters tend to jump forward in time erratically, making it difficult to track progress. This isn't enough to hamper the flow of the story, and the strong characterizations help to divert attention away from the jumps.

Hidden Magic: The Portal Opens breathes new life into the urban fantasy genre. A novel take on the typical fey mythology, strong characters and strong character dynamics coalesce into a page-flipping adventure. While it is obviously aimed at fantasy fans, readers of character-driven adventures should also pick up this first installment

before the series takes off.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January 24, 2017)

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