

Ravenbourne Slavery: The Ravenbourne Trilogy: Book 1

Benjamin H. Barnette

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In the intricate fantasy novel Ravenbourne Slavery, a warrior and an intelligent girl meet in a kingdom marked by slavery and class divisions.

In Benjamin H. Barnette's fantasy novel *Ravenbourne Slavery*, medieval prisoners of war are relegated to different types of slave labor based on gender; they struggle to earn their freedom.

Kaelin is a slave who hails from the fallen city of Opar. He stops an assassination attempt against the lord of Ravenbourne and is recruited into the lord's elite army. He meets well-read Natasha, who catches a glimpse of her future lover in a pool. The wise women of Ravenbourne, who worship the goddess Asa, know something about Natasha that she herself does not. Meanwhile, other people, noble and enslaved, navigate the world around them in their own ways.

The worldbuilding is lush and sensuous, as with descriptions of a "gracious, lavish fête ... [a] praiseworthy table overflowing with strong drink, succulent meats, spicy wild fowl, sweet fruits, marble-white feta, breads, honey, and olives." The land of Ravenbourne itself, first depicted by a crude map, grows better defined when the mythology of Asa, who "put streaks of gold, the same color as the melted lava stone from deep inside the earth, in the hair of favored girls," is introduced.

But flashbacks mix with present-set scenes to sometimes distracting effect, and the book is too expository when it comes to introducing its characters and sharing their histories. The focus is lost amid chapters devoted to distracting backstories and world-building tidbits, some of which are off-putting. The custom of sitting on floors covered by rugs and pillows, for example, is described as "barbarous," and enslaved women and girls are called "females." Further, one of Lord Ravenbourne's slave girls speaks in affected pidgin: "When male smell, no can stay away. Male run to her, he want sex her. Is true?"

Secondary characters are ill-incorporated—including Rohan, a lieutenant who is introduced early on, but who doesn't truly factor in until past the book's halfway point; Melissa; and an enslaved mother and daughter. Indeed, Natasha and Kaelin themselves are centered for less than half of the book. Grammatical issues also inhibit the book's delivery, including extra spaces between completed sentences and recurrent spelling errors; awkward phrasing is a further distraction. The book ends on a salacious note—and with a peek ahead to coming volumes.

The first book of a trilogy, the fantasy novel *Ravenbourne Slavery* follows as a girl and a seasoned warrior meet and fall in love in a war-torn world.

STEPHANIE MARRIE (January 2, 2024)

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