

The Rubicus Prophecy: Witches of Orkney, Book Two

Alane Adams

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The Rubicus Prophecy is an immersive and empowering fantasy.

Alane Adams's entrancing middle grade fantasy series returns to focus on Abigail Tarkana, a plucky second-year student at Tarkana Witch Academy. *The Rubicus Prophecy* features her daring mission to stop the past from resurrecting.

Second in The Witches of Orkney prequel series, this latest novel deepens its intricate world building. Rival covens mix with Norse gods including Odin, whose curse is predicted to be broken by a witchling. At the storm's center is Abigail, an orphan who is the most likely candidate to be the Curse Breaker, but who hasn't learned the full truth of her origins.

Abigail struggles to stop a fellow witch from bringing Rubicus, a powerful he-witch, back from the dead. Meanwhile, the bond between Abigail and her friends Hugo and Calla is heartening and built on loyalty, and both friends are empathetic, even when Abigail is struck by a behavior-changing spell.

In her all-girls boarding school, Abigail faces familiar bullying. She rejects her school's code to be a witch with a "heart of stone." She fights the hold a dark spell book has on her. Her internal girlhood pains are stinging in their realism, but Abigail doesn't dwell on them. She's a sharp lead who knows when to take action and when to hold back.

While Odin functions as an inspired advisor, guiding Abigail with wisdom, the girls and faculty whom Abigail combats are not as multifaceted as she is. Their dialogue is sneering and underscores the threat that Abigail poses to them. In inventive classroom scenes, Abigail's differences manifest in the unusual color of her witchfire and smart spell casting. Her discomfort over standing out butts against the part of her that enjoys the "intoxicating" feeling magic brings.

The academy, from its curriculum that includes Fatal Flora and Horrible Hexes to the witch history of its background, is thoroughly constructed. References to earlier events in the series result in some questions, as do hints at a new war on the horizon. There's enough context to glean the basics without divulging series-long arcs that have yet to unfold, though.

Telescoping between Abigail's immediate problems and the ongoing drama of Balfour Island, the book captures her dilemma: she has to stay loyal to her coven, even knowing that it may cost her friends. Surprising turns move the story toward a cliffhanger ending that teases at the next volume's dark events.

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KAREN RIGBY (July 11, 2019)

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