

The Tea Dragon Festival

Katie O'Neill

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Katie O'Neill's graphic novel *The Tea Dragon Festival* is a standalone story set in the gentle and popular Tea Dragon fantasy world.

Rinn is a would-be cooking apprentice who discovers a dragon, Aedhan, in the woods. Aedhan is a real dragon—as opposed to the smaller, cuter, and less formidable Tea Dragons—who was appointed guardian of Rinn's Silverleaf Village long ago, but who has slept through the past eighty years. The two become friends. Rinn helps Aedhan adapt to the modern world and cope with his feelings of guilt, and Aedhan offers Rinn helpful dragon wisdom in return.

There is some excitement as Aedhan battles a dangerous creature called an eaglefang, but this entry has a calm tone, concentrating on relationships, nonviolent resolutions to problems, and learning about one's self. Rinn, who is presented as nonbinary, sees commonality when told that dragons can switch back and forth between male and female.

A joyous festival results from the pooled efforts of the entire village, and Rinn discovers a passion for gathering even more than cooking. Even the “monster” responsible for putting Aedhan to sleep is revealed to have meant no harm.

This kind of plotting may not be to everyone's taste, but it presents a true, unique alternative to the kinds of fantasy stories that turn into colossal wars between good and evil. O'Neill's art is cartoony, clean, and colorful. Comforting, inclusive, and peaceful, *The Tea Dragon Festival* is a refreshing dose of the best things in life.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2019)

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