



Circle at Center

Douglas Niles

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With his acclaimed Watershed Trilogy from Ace -- and his phenomenally successful "Dragonlance" series from TSR -- Douglas Niles became one of the most promising stars of epic fantasy adventure. Starlog magazine raved that Niles "writes so well that his characters come to life after only a few sentences". Now this gifted storyteller has created a rich and complex new trilogy filled with centaurs, goblins and trolls, druids, elves, and other fantastic beings who live in a world of peace -- until now...In the realm of the Seven Circles, harmony has reigned since time immemorial. That is about to change....Disaffected members of all the races are gathering into a force that may spell the doom of the Seven Circles. Strangers to brutality and warfare, the inhabitants need a champion who can teach them to defend themselves. For this, they recruit warriors from a world where only the strong survive. A primitive world where life lasts only as long as you can fight for it...

A world called Earth.

Circle at Center Details

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Author : Douglas Niles

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From Reader Review Circle at Center for online ebook

Sandy says

It was ok I have read better books

Andrew says

I have a lot of respect for Niles' work as he is an enthusiastic and prodigious writer with talent for bringing strange fantasy worlds to life, but this one left me cold.

From the extremely generic and bland dialogue, to the even more generic character descriptions (often left to minimalistic and over-worn phrases like 'an elf', 'the dwarf') and ridiculous logic like 'oh, we're at war and people are being slaughtered and fed into evil dwarf horde cook-pots. Let's party!'

The BBG has it in for the female Seer, and gives up his entire race war to pursue her, but then suddenly goes (figuratively) blind right at the most critical moment, not that it makes any difference anyway.

Almost all the characters are annoying, shallow and stupid, reading like a beginning-roleplayer's attempt at back-stories/character briefs. Half the time I wanted to give them all a good slapping.

Also as a roleplayer, the good guys have a chance to capture the Very Important Plot Device. Nah, that's too hard, better head home and talk to the committee about what you should do; whenever they can be bothered convening. (what!?)

I'm not a prude (hey, I love sex - especially with other people) but I was also pretty unhappy with the objectifying male-focussed erotic descriptions of 'romance' thrown in here and there and the rape scene was both really unnecessarily descriptive and emotionally underwhelming at the same time in my opinion. It read to me almost as though as it was thrown in off-hand to show how 'mature' and 'edgy' the subject matter was, but had almost no real impact on either the overall plot or any of the characters. To be honest it felt a bit dismissive and facile, a plot point to be ticked off to get to another point, and I think survivors of similar trauma would be unhappy to see it treated so lightly.

For me the final blow was towards the end where the narrative is ratcheted forward 25 years arbitrarily. Why? Did nothing happen? Nothing at all? It's almost like Niles couldn't be bothered writing any more and just fast-forwarded through to the 'good bits'. An attempt is made to cover the time and the effect of the ongoing siege for the main characters, but it all feels shallow and lacklustre. The elven parties still continue unabated despite the imminent extinction of their entire race and culture you'll be glad to hear...

There's some great concepts presented (the dwarven Seers and Delvers are particularly interesting) and had there been more time spent on detailing the cultures and breathing life into them, I might have cared more, but like a slasher flick, my overall impression was that these set pieces were put in place hastily simply to burn later.

Sadly, based on my experience I have no interest in reading the other volumes in this series.

Jen • Just One More Page says

[I had a hard time rating this one in the end, initially. I was waffling between three and four stars, and then asked myself, “would I recommend this book or not?” and when the answer came as “eehhhhh welll..” that answered my question pretty clearly lol.

It’s hard to describe, really. It had its issues, but it had its redeeming factors too.

Like. The descriptions were beautiful! Clearly, a lot of research was done into the factual parts (the c

Becky says

Isn't the cover beautiful!?!

I do not fully agree that a cover doesn't make a book. I think in general a title or a cover does peak our interest because when you see a million and one books all staring back at you ... where do you begin? "at the beginning ..." I don't do that.

I enjoyed the story however the book centers on a war and it lasts for 25 years. In a blink of an eye you jump from the start, which peaks your interests and brings the characters together, but quickly jumps to 25 yrs later. I felt like there was too much war but at the same time the story missed something with the blink of 25 years missing; those the characters and rhelm didn't change.

Sarah says

Just a heads up—this review doesn’t really say anything regarding what the book is about. If you’re looking for a basic summary of this book, don’t bother reading this review.

Let’s see. If I had to describe this book in one word, I’d choose: FRUSTRATING.

First of all, the book takes a very long time to get interesting. In the beginning it is very slow paced. It actually took me about three months or so to get past the first 200 pages. I kept putting it down and picking up other books in the meantime. It was just so bland. Sure, it tries to lure you in with a pretty graphic sex scene right smack-dab in the beginning, but right after that the story just drops off into boring land. But hey, the book isn’t all bad, the last 200 pages are somewhat interesting...

The other frustrating part is that every chapter is a cliff hanger. Every chapter of this book is from a different character’s point of view. It’s one of those oh-so-original schemes that brings a whole slew of characters together in the end who, previously, had no connection what-so-ever. I generally don’t mind that, but in this book I did. Every time something would get good and exciting, the chapter would end, switching to a different character’s point of view and story that has nothing to do with what you were just reading.

Generally, by the time you get back to that exciting character’s bit, you forget exactly what was going on anyway, and all the excitement that had gone along with it.

Another frustrating part is the decisions that the characters make. They are often faced with decisions that if

gone about intelligently would end all of their problems and give me back my happiness. But no! The characters have to be, well, stupid (when in all other situations they are NOT stupid) and make the wrong decision. The right choice is always quite obvious too, but they just won't pick the right choice. For example, our beloved warrior Natac here is faced with an unarmed Sir Christopher. Belynda is screaming at him repeatedly to kill him which is so out of character for her (even he realizes this and seems to understand how Sir Christopher has to be a seriously horrible dude to make Belynda scream like that) but alas, Natac just stands there like an idiot and goes... 'Duh, I can't kill him—you don't kill commanders in wars!' As the reader I was seriously pissed. He could have ended it right there! He could have ended the book and my misery! You always go after the leader! Killing the king/leader/whatever generally has a good end-the-war ratio. Belynda even states this exact fact later in the book. This would be a prime example of WRONG DECISION NATAC. Ugh, I was so mad. He apparently watches and studies war tactics all day, and he can't muster up a little intelligence to realize that killing the cause of the entire problem might end the effect? The book is filled with out-of-character decisions like this that just don't make sense. They are there simply to drag the story on.

Another example of bad decision... there's a slight spoiler here, just to warn you. It's not critical to the story but if you don't want to know, skip to the next paragraph. SPOILER >> The other amazing decision that annoyed me was with Belynda. She is taken captive by the crusaders and raped by Sir Christopher. After she is rescued, she is faced with the decision of telling Tamarwind what really happened. She decides NOT to tell him that she was raped. This is annoying. She doesn't want to hurt him, sure, because they were lovers in the past or whatever—but seriously, she should have told him. He would have been fueled by the fire of a thousand furies and went in there and kicked some Sir Christopher ass. This too, would have ended the book and my misery. Okay, so maybe this is a more personal preference, but still. I'm annoyed!

Sigh. All this just to drag on this book a little longer. Oh wait, 25 years longer.

That's my next complaint. Just as the book gets exciting and is actually somewhat difficult to put down—BOOM! The story jumps 25 years into the future. It all gets boring again here (lots of war jargon), and takes quite a bit to pick up. From here on out it's a strange mixture of exciting and boring. Mostly exciting because the story is almost over I think. Soon enough, the story ends. Now, even the ending is frustrating. I've never read such an abrupt ending in my life. It's as if the author had a set 388 pages to write the story and on page 380 he realized that he had to end a war and tie up all loose ends in 8 pages. The entire ending is ridiculous. Belynda and Daraan infiltrate the enemy camp as a last stand in desperation. With absolutely no struggle, they go in, get what they were looking for, kill Sir Christopher, and la-de-da! War is over. They also go against Zystyl, a Delver who is blind and has incredibly heightened senses. He can sense the presence and feelings people so well that he can even predict what they're going to do. Oh wait, but conveniently he doesn't sense them when they are literally five feet from his face. Earlier in the book Zystyl could smell and sense Daraan from very, very far away. It's things like this that are so frustrating. Nothing is consistent. Characters (and things in general) change so drastically just so that the story can progress. It's all futile though, considering the story is still awful and riddled with so many holes.

Anyway, so the war is instantly over just like that in like 2 pages. Oh, not to mention thousands of dwarf reinforcements happen to show up at this exact moment. Only took them 25 years to get there. Only took Belynda 25 years to realize that all she had to do was poof into the enemy camp. So then the war abruptly ends. Mind you, the author doesn't take the time to tie up any loose ends. Literally, the book just ends. You don't find out how everyone recovers or the impact the war had on the land or any of the characters. You don't find out what happens to any characters in general, nor is there any hint of what happens relationships-wise. It just ...well, it just leaves you hanging. Not to mention there's an "epilogue" thrown in there that has absolutely nothing to do with anything. I thought that the epilogue would hold the answers to the oh-so-many questions I still had, but alas nothing. It has something to do with the next book in the series I assume (which I will NOT be reading).

So if I could give you any advice, it would be to stay away from this novel. If you've already had at it, I at least hope that this review can give you some comfort in knowing that someone else has suffered through

this like you did. Maybe we can even share a laugh of agreement. I'm just so sorry if you've already managed to stumble upon this frustrating piece of work. I was originally going to give this book three stars just because I really do like the characters. Though, after that horrible ending there was no way I could give this book more than two stars. I really only wanted to give it one, but for the characters sake, it gets two. Mind you, the bad guy doesn't even get what he deserves in the end. SPOILER >> Sure, he gets tortured and murdered and all that fun stuff, but Belynda doesn't even enjoy it. Sir Christopher raped her, and the entire time she goes on and on about vengeance and how satisfying it's going to be to see him killed or kill him herself. Then it actually happens and for whatever reason, she doesn't really care. She gets you all hyped up and rooting for Sir Christopher's demise and then she just lets you down. Big time. That's what you wait through the entire book for and it's not even satisfying. Just another way for Mr. Niles to annoy his reader. Ugh!

Patrick says

Circle at Center begins with a promising concept that quickly dives into the waters of the mundane. While Niles excels at world-building (as the numerous blurbs on the book cover attest), I found most of the characters to be two-dimensional and many of the battle scenes unnecessary. Plus, there's a bizarre 25-year time jump two-thirds of the way through the book.

Sylvie Dale says

Big concept, great creatures. I am a sucker for fantastic creatures like dwarves, elves, centaurs, etc. I liked the concept that the worlds can be traversed by level, literally climbing up into the next level. The level of the dwarves was genuinely scary, but the dwarves themselves were strong and brave. I also love how the worlds are interconnected so that a problem on one can disrupt the well being of another.

Jaime Hudson says

Very slow to start, enjoyed reading about certain characters over others.

JessicaAFM says

Pretty basic fantasy fare. Very entertaining but basic. I did like that they did draw characters in from primitive Earth. We get a Viking, a Celt and an American Indian as part of our hero party in addition to the staple dwarf/elf mix. I also love how the goblins are recasted as well. Overall, I look forward to the next book.

Shayna says

It was okay. A little too heavy on war and battle description.

Jennifer says

I loved this book I was really suprised currently reading the 2nd now

Kim says

i enjoyed this book quite a bit. it's one of those fantasy books that really captures you and doesn't let go. when i finished i wanted to get started on the second in the series immediately. i would recommend it if you're looking for a fun but captivating read.

Dawn says

Unimpressed.

Tourmalily says

Really neat concept, decent execution, interesting characters and a very dramatic conflict, a lot of really problematic treatment of women.

Besides the "sex magic" used to bring warriors into the world of the circle at center (not to mention the fact that it ultimately proves fatal to the woman who initiated the ritual), there's a very gratuitous and alarming rape scene that left a really foul taste in my mouth.

Could have done without that.

Emily says

Maybe I'm just not in the right frame of mind, or this isn't the book I want to read right now, but it just didn't hold my attention well. I like the plot, but the writing didn't do it for me.

Maybe I'll give it any go after enough time has passed. Or maybe I'll forget about it.
