



The Nine

Tracy Townsend

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In the dark streets of Corma exists a book that writes itself, a book that some would kill for...

Black market courier Rowena Downshire is just trying to pay her mother's freedom from debtor's prison when an urgent and unexpected delivery leads her face to face with a creature out of nightmares. Rowena escapes with her life, but the strange book she was ordered to deliver is stolen.

The Alchemist knows things few men have lived to tell about, and when Rowena shows up on his doorstep, frightened and empty-handed, he knows better than to turn her away. What he discovers leads him to ask for help from the last man he wants to see—the former mercenary, Anselm Meteron.

Across town, Reverend Phillip Chalmers awakes in a cell, bloodied and bruised, facing a creature twice his size. Translating the stolen book may be his only hope for survival; however, he soon realizes the book may be a fabled text written by the Creator Himself, tracking the nine human subjects of His Grand Experiment. In the wrong hands, it could mean the end of humanity.

Rowena and her companions become the target of conspirators who seek to use the book for their own ends. But how can this unlikely team be sure who the enemy is when they can barely trust each other? And what will happen when the book reveals a secret no human was meant to know?

The Nine Details

Date : Published November 14th 2017 by Pyr

ISBN : 9781633883413

Author : Tracy Townsend

Format : Paperback 366 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Science Fiction, Steampunk, Adult

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From Reader Review The Nine for online ebook

Laura A. says

The Nine: Thieves of Fate - Book One

Full disclosure – I did not purchase this book. I won a free copy at Readercon. I was not asked to write a review or recommend it to anyone, but really, I felt I had to get the word out. Because I was hooked from the moment I first heard Tracy Townsend do a reading of a whole 2.25 pages from a mid-section of the book, about which, I knew nothing. It was that good. I won the copy and stayed up far too late reading it, immersing myself in the world and characters she created.

This will be spoiler-free review, so please read without fear. By far the most interesting part of the world-building to me did not revolve around technology or environment (more on those later). The most fascinating part was the invention of Theosophy (The science of religion) and what happens to religious fervor when Reason and scientific principles are the foundations of a theology. Fundamentalism and devotion to reason can overstep concern for people, making it not too different from current religious practices, but in an entirely new way. Because what happens when humanity realizes that God is a scientist too, studying the creation? And what happens when the object of study starts studying back? What happens when we start looking back up at the microscope trained on us? Does God make mistakes? It would seem so. Or at least so it seems to Doctors of Religion who stumble across God's notebook, which writes itself and crosses sections out. I longed for more input into this book, into the creation, but of course, that's what also drives the Doctors of Religion. And I love the idea of god as scientist and note-taker.

The point of view characters that provide glimpses into other parts of the world, and other sentient species are the other delicious slices of this world. The three sentient species sharing the planet are only sparsely drawn in, and yet, they imbue the world with the color that would otherwise be lacking with just human habitation. The very few scenes with the Lanyani stole the show for me, providing subtle hints about how an intelligent, mobile, plant society might coexist with human cities of iron and stone, while the Aiga are suitably terrifying creatures, made more so by man's treatment of them. In all, the mixture made for rich reading.

My one overarching question that kept coming up during my initial reading of the book involved the technology in this world. At times it seemed steampunk in nature, at times Dickensian, and at others, as if particle physics was well established. I wasn't sure if this was due to different classes of people having access to different technologies, if the technologies were simply inconsistent, or if it was my own fault as a reader. You see, the plot and characters and world swept me along, so I read this in huge gulps, a desiccated lanyani whose roots have just found water, sucking it up with abandon and fervor. Perhaps on closer reading, that question would resolve itself, and if so, I promise to write an addendum to this review correcting that impression.

Overall, what I can say is read this book. Read it for the world, for the ideas presented, for the questions it will raise. Read it for the plot and for the characters. Read it for the religion. Read it and then tell your friends to read it. Because this is one they won't want to miss.

D. Palmer says

The Nine is awesome. A fantastic debut and perfect introduction that left me wanting more of the adventure and wonder that it already delivers in spades.

Corma is a unique but familiar city that satisfies a Victorian, Industrial Revolution craving while standing squarely in another world filled with an addictive mix of modern and familiar along with antique and fantastically outmoded tech. This is a world of rust and sparking coils, horsecarts rolling alongside gyroscopic automobiles, and secret cabals of starch-collared priests working with and against street thugs, alchemists, and master thieves.

Moreover, The Nine shows us an intriguing amalgam of Science and Religion, a theo-technocracy that bears along with it all the wonders and terrors that could spring from a society that values Reason and Rationality above all else.

Townsend populates this already fascinating world with impeccably defined characters – urchin Rowena, the mysterious Alchemist, roguish Anselm Meteron, menacing Nasrahiel – and wonderous new sentients living alongside humans: the hulking aigamuxa, drawn from Khoekhoe myth, and the inscrutable lanyani.

This is a world and an adventure so well-done, you expect to look outside and see it beyond the hand-wrought iron rail of a rickety fire escape, smoke glowing yellow from the illumination of alchemical bulbs; a world that I can't wait to get back to.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum [https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/12/12/...](https://bibliosanctum.com/2017/12/12/)

I love reading fantasy, I love reading science fiction, and occasionally I'll even be in the mood for a bit of both at once. Is it any wonder then that The Nine hooked me on page one? Defying genre traditions and labels, Tracy Townsend's debut is a fresh and bold novel that marches to the beat of its own drum, delighting me at every turn. By blending together a number of speculative elements, the author has created something that's altogether different and new.

Taking place in an alternate universe in which science has become a religion and God is seen as the great Experimenter, The Nine involves a magical self-scribing book which lists the nine people whose actions will determine the fate of world. It's the mother of all experiments, and needless to say, there are various factions who will go to great lengths to affects its outcome. Caught up in this epic struggle is a thirteen-year-old girl named Rowena Downshire, who works as a black market courier in the hopes of one day freeing her mother from debtor's prison. One day, her employer Ivor tasks her to deliver a mysterious package to the most feared man in the city—a man only known as the Alchemist, who is said to possess dangerous magical abilities. En route, however, Rowena is attacked and robbed by something called an Aigamuxa, which are giant beast-like creatures whose eyes are on the soles of their feet. Afraid to return to the short-tempered and abusive Ivor with news that she has lost the package, Rowena decides to take her chances with the Alchemist instead, continuing on to her destination in order to let the recipient know what has happened.

But to Rowena's surprise, the Alchemist does not immediately smite her on the spot. Instead, he provides her

with safety, food, and shelter, informing her that anyone who has had contact with the contents of that stolen package is now in grave danger. Meanwhile, as proof of this pronouncement, the Reverend Doctor Phillip Chalmers wakes up battered and trussed up in a cell, facing his monstrous kidnapper. The creature has a book for him to translate, and doing what his captors want may be his only chance of survival. Already, a colleague of his has gone missing because of what she has uncovered, and Chalmers has reasons to fear the worst.

For a novel with so many characters and interlacing plot lines, *The Nine* is surprisingly well put together and tightly paced. Townsend also balances her storytelling with outstanding character development and layered world-building, with the mythos creation being especially impressive. The subjects of religion and science are explored in a way I've never seen before, opening up plenty of opportunities for reader engagement, considering the vast number of possibilities for the direction of this series. Almost immediately, the setting feels at once familiar but also strange and exotic enough to be a full-fledged secondary world with all the escapist potential a fantasy fan could ask for. I loved the idea of all life and creation being seen as the ultimate experiment, with God being worshipped as the great Experimenter who is constantly assessing, adjusting, and applying the appropriate interventions based on the observations of how nine randomly chosen human beings live their lives. What a mind-bending concept!

As well, the world is populated with intelligent beings other than humans, such as the aforementioned Aigamuxa, and there is also a race of sentient walking tree creatures called the Lanyani (though their diet is far from plant-like). These three groups exist in a state of tension, with some of their past history and conflicts touched upon in the main story line. Furthermore, it's clear that Townsend has a knack for world-building, weaving different genres through her narrative so that the setting has this cool mish-mash of steampunk and historical fiction influences.

That said, it's the characters who steal the show here. Realistically portrayed and nuanced, they provide readers with the opportunity to experience the full story, the multiple perspectives allowing us to see things from all angles. Rowena is one of our main protagonists, and she is a clever, brave, and determined girl. The people around her are also complex, as there are no simple black-and-white characters here. Rowena quickly learns not to trust anything at face value, realizing that everyone has a story to tell. I especially enjoyed her early interactions with the Alchemist, as we discover along with Rowena just how wrongly the old man has been perceived by the rest of the city. Then there's Anselm Meteron, a former mercenary who now feels entitled to a retirement of indulgent access after all that he's been through. While there are many characters, these three stand out as our central figures. The trio of them make for an interesting group of allies, but the result is some fantastic dialogue and quality interactions.

All in all, *The Nine* was a delightful read, its exquisitely dark and twisted plotline packed with genuine surprises. As much as I've written here, we've only begun to scratch the surface of what this terrific novel has to offer. Tracy Townsend has written a dazzling debut which positively crackles with imagination and enigmatic charm. If you're looking for a clever and magnificently crafted genre-bending fantasy, I wholeheartedly recommend this superb opening volume to the *Thieves of Fate* series. And believe me when I say I can hardly wait to see what happens next.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

This new fantasy sounds really interesting. Heads up on a giveaway of 3 copies going on right now here at Fantasy Literature, along with an interview with the author that's definitely worth reading. And, as always,

the odds of winning one of those FanLit giveaway copies are great.

Ivan says

Znam da je neka knjiga ne samo vredna pažnje već i lako moguće jedna od najboljih knjiga tekuće izdavačke godine kada počnem da razmišljam kako bih preveo neke rečenice ili pojmove dok je čitam.

To mi se dešava vrlo retko - možda u slučaju 10% prioritanih knjiga godišnje, ali ta zapitanost je gotovo uvek pitanje trenutka, određene rečenice, lika u knjizi. U slučaju *The Nine* taj poriv me je držao tokom dobrane dve trećine celokupnog teksta.

Nažalost, ovu knjigu nikada neću prevoditi, niti će se ona pojaviti u nečijem drugom prevodu na našem tržištu. Jednostavno, suviše je uvrnuta.

Pod ovim nisam mislio ni na zaplet, ni na spisateljičin stil, već doslovce na (pod)žanr u koji bih smestio ovaj naslov. Od svega što savremena fantazija nudi, *The Nine* se najviše uklapa u međe koje je postavio zajna Mjevil sa svojom "Stanicom Perdido" i potonjim delima smeštenim u njen svet.

Trejsi Taunzend vrhunski barata rečima i vidi se na delu da se njeno školovanje isplatilo (diploma i master iz kreativnog pisanja). Njen svet titra između neoviktorijanskog stimpaska, urbane fantastike ali i angažovane naučne fantastike usmerene na kritiku kolonijalizma, kapitalizma i organizovane religije tako i nauke u službi ideologije. U suštini, "Ošenz 11" sa teškim primesama socijalizma.

Taunzendova štiklira bezmalo sve aktuelno sošel džastis kucice, pa su tako likovi relativno diversifikovani, jakih ženskih likova ima više nego muških i zapravo nema nijednog lika koji nije bitan za radnju. Ton romana koketira s estetikom grimdarka, koja je inače kao stvorena (pun intende) za stimpank a autorka ne preza od Martinovskog odnosa makar prema sporednim likovima.

Roman je u suštini jednostavne radnje, ograničen na jedan grad, tako da širi svet samo naslučujemo - ali to što vidimo obezavlja veličanstvenost spisateljičine vizije. Odluka da se ograniči na usko pripovedačko polje svakako je išla na ruku romanu-prvencu, ali vrlo je očito da je ova priča predviđena da raste i da se razvija.

U osnovi kriminalističko-zaverenička priča, radnja *The Nine* ne trpi od preveliko razotkrivanja, pa neću ni pokušavati da izbegavam spoljere i nutkam čitaoce na čitanje nučenjem pojedinosti iz radnje romana. Mislim da je dovoljno da kažem kako je ovo možda najimpresivniji prvenac koji sam video u poslednjih nekoliko godina - iako vrlo neuklopljen u savremen marketinško-trgovačke trendove u izdavaštvu fantastike, zbog čega ga samo još više cenim.

4/5 ali i Nightflier's Seal of Approval.

Bookwraiths says

Originally reviewed at Bookwraiths.

The Nine is a genre blending work from Tracy Townsend that isn't afraid to blaze its own trail in fantasy,

mixing and matching the most exciting elements from other genres into something new, something all its own. And while 2017 has been a year filled with great fantasy releases, this opening installment of the *Thieves of Fate* series is among my favorites.

Right out of the gate, it becomes apparent that while the setting of this narrative might seem familiar it is actually an alternate universe. A world which resembles our own in times past but is uniquely different in many, many ways. Foremost among these differences is that this is a place where religion is science and God is worshiped as a being who created the cosmos as the ultimate scientific experiment. The focus of this divine study “The Nine.” Nine beings whom God has chosen at random and whom he observes as they deal with life’s inevitable struggles; their actions to determine the final fate of all of humanity!

But all is not well in this world. For while there are many who are devoted followers of God and attempt to live their lives uprightly as if they are one of the Nine, there are others who have more nefarious purposes. Factions, groups, and individuals who desire and struggle to cause the ultimate experiment to fail, the Nine to cause the destruction of humanity. These people’s focus fixed on a book which thirteen-year-old underworld agent Rowena Downshire has in her possession; a tome which writes itself and might be God’s own observational notebook on the Nine!

Like all works of speculative fiction, *The Nine* is built around a compelling “hook” to draw you into the story. Here it is the idea of Theosophy, the religion of science. This core concept opening up so many avenues for Townsend to study the human condition, specifically mankind’s religious behaviors, trend toward fundamentalism, and so many individual’s sincere devotion to a creator God. For this narrative plays with the idea of how people would react if they knew there was a God. Understood that the divine was watching, measuring, and ultimately judging their fate like a scientist in a laboratory. How would those truths affect their behavior and their society? All interesting questions to ask and attempt to answer.

Great concept or not, books succeed due to compelling, relatable characters, and the author attempts to give readers a plethora to choose from here. Rowena Downshire is the clear lead, revealed as a stubborn, smart, and fierce youth able to take care of herself in harsh, dark world. Opposite her is the cold, calculating Alchemist who seems sullen but also shows hints of a heart somewhere under his bitter exterior. And, finally, there is Anselm; this cynical and decadent retired mercenary willing to openly proclaim himself a self-serving villain out only for himself. The interaction between these and all the numerous minor characters quite well done; paths crossing, ideas exchanged and plots moved forward even by the most forgettable scenes and by the most minor of characters.

As for the world Rowena and company transverse, it can be best described as a cross between steampunk and gaslamp environment with more than a little flintlock fantasy mix in for good measure. But even with its origins unclear, this is a vividly portrayed place. The seediness of many locations is palpable. Violence abounds. Bitterness and divisiveness grow nearly unchecked. And the three main races of this world are far different and have many long standing problems with one another. Humans showing an innate selfishness which far exceeds their needs. The huge Aigamuxa filled with rage that is easy to understand but difficult to completely justify. And the sentient, walking trees called Lanyani both compelling and hard to warm up to. All of these elements combining to make this a world readers will wish to explore and learn more about.

Even with all those things said, I have to admit that there was one main reason I enjoyed this novel: the mysteries explored. The scenes where certain characters are attempting to decipher the book from God and unravel the universal truths of this cosmos were quite breathtaking. Certainly, the action and adventure expertly interspersed around these more intellectual scenes did help keep my attention riveted to the pages, but the mystery is what kept me turning those pages to find the next nugget of discovery.

All in all, *The Nine* was a fast, easily digested read which entertained and satisfied — but did not make the mistake of fully satisfying, leaving me thinking about unresolved plots and unrevealed mysteries, waiting in anticipation for all my questions to be answered next time. So with that said, I believe I can call this book a successful debut and leave it at that.

I received this book from the publisher in exchange for a fair and honest review. I'd like to thank them for allowing me to receive this review copy and inform everyone that the review you have read is my opinion alone.

Jena says

“It was a bloody awful way to die. It had been a bloody awful way to live.”

The Nine is a debut fantasy novel and what an incredible debut it is!!! Townsend has built an incredible world, full of interesting species and a plot with enough twists and turns to make the read feel like you’re on a roller coaster. And the characters!

Rowena Downshire is a young girl trying to make it in a cutthroat world. Her mother, and only living relative, is locked in a debtors prison. Everything she earns, and most of what she steals, goes to paying down that debt. But, with new charges always being added, the battle feels never-ending to her. Her job as a courier for a black market delivery boss is the best life she can hope for, even if he is cold and brutal and unforgiving.

When Rowena is robbed delivering a mysterious book that seems to write itself to the even more mysterious and feared Alchemist, Rowena is terrified Ivor is going to kill her for the blunder. Deciding to risk going straight to the Alchemist instead, she finds herself in the middle of a complex and deadly mystery.

“It was the question Rowena had been dreading. She’d been under the Alchemist’s roof for nearly an hour and barely had anything been said of the package.”

Revered Phillip Chalmers didn’t intend on being part of anything historical or groundbreaking. His research with his partner Doctor Revered Nora Pierce was exciting, but he should have known she would push boundaries. Now, days before they are give the keynote speech in front of their peers, Nora has gone missing. When a young girl courier delivers a note from Nora making him fear the worst, he insists on giving the girl the book that started it all. Except, when the door to his office shatters later that night, he realizes that he should have known it wasn’t going to be that easy.

Rowena and The Alchemist, also known as The Bear, turn to Anselm Meteron, former mercenary and all around nefarious character for help. They have a history extending far back, though how exactly they are intertwined comes much later in the book.

“Something in the cold calm of Anselm Meteron’s voice told Rowena there were very few games he played that were at all fair to his opponents.”

Rowena, The Alchemist and Meteron must figure out who took the book and why, and how the missing Reverend Chambers fits into the puzzle. Of course, that isn’t easy with bribed officials trying to put you in jail, along with the deadly aigamuxa hunting down anyone even loosely associated with the book.

There is a lot happening within these pages. It isn't just the primary mystery driving the plot forward, but also the smaller mysteries within the characters. The Nine is an amazing blend of both plot and character driven momentum and each page demands to be turned so that you can be closer to unraveling the answers to all the questions presented. It is complex in all the very best ways!

The world building is fascinating. It feels as if it could be our own world propelled far into some distant future, but the addition of the species the lanyani and the aigamuxa makes it clear it is a world far different from ours. With nods to steampunk, this world is detailed and unique.

One of the most fascinating parts of the plot was the blending of religion and science. In fact, this is one of the key tenets of the plot, the book that God wrote to keep track of his experiment, The Nine.

“Magic was just what the ignorant called systems they couldn’t understand in an organized universe.”

It was very interesting to read how they veered from the Old Religion to incorporate religion and all it's tenets into a pillar of science. The tenets of the science was well done as well. Not overly explained, but not vague and uninteresting. I actually really liked how it was presented, examined and how it tied into the plot. Not to mention the Grand Experiment, which I won't get into for fear of spoilers.

We get many more characters sprinkled throughout these pages, and even the more minor characters are very fleshed out. Rare was one of my favorites, although, she did drive me crazy with some of her decisions. City Inspector Gammon, Beth and Lord Regenzi were some of the more notable side players, and it was very interesting how their importance was woven in. But none of them quite weaseled their way into my heart the way Anselm did.

“My name is Anselm Meteron, and I’m a villain with a penchant for self-aggrandizement and a portfolio of maladjusted habits.”

I mean, come on! How can you NOT love someone who introduces themselves like that?! I want to be friends with Anselm and all his maladjusted habits. Also, is it bad form to steal that line for all future introductions?

In all, this was a very fast, very enjoyable read. The Nine is a first in a series, and I know I am dying for book two! The ending isn't quite a cliff hanger so you do feel satisfied, but there are enough loose ends that when you start thinking about the book, you get questions bubbling to the surface. Amazing debut and I am thrilled I was able to read this!

The Nine is released TODAY! If you love complex fantasy with amazing characters, awesome world building and a ton of mystery, this book is definitely for you!

Thank you Prometheus books for sending me a copy to read and review!

Tracy Rowan says

I am deeply ambivalent about this book, so I think I'm going to go through the things which pleased me first, and then the things which absolutely did not.

First, it's reasonably well-written in spite of awkward passages that sometimes bring the story to a grinding halt. The prose can be a pleasure to read in a purely aesthetic sense, though, and the universe is well realized, making it a world that the reader can enter easily. The characters are fairly well-developed. We get enough to understand what makes them tick, which is important.

But the fudge factor is, for me anyway, twofold. First, the plotline, with which I have two problems. It seems that God has chosen nine people to be his control group for all of humanity. Nine people to serve as indicators of how humanity is doing in general doesn't seem like a big sample to me. I'm not sure how many people live in this universe, but even 900 seems a bit mingy if you're going to measure the success or failure of a species. And we don't even know what God is looking for. Enlightenment? Obedience? Disease-resistance?

But okay, let's for a moment assume that we buy this. Why is God keeping notes, and in a notebook which s/he/it seems to have misplaced? Now it's in human hands and this is what everyone is after. Is God's memory that bad? Again, okay, I can suspend my disbelief on this one. Or could have if I hadn't run smack into the creatures called aigamuxas. (And let me get the purely picayune complaint out the way first. How do you even pronounce that word? Seriously. That kind of thing bothers me because I love words and language.)

Aigamuxas are these creatures that have their eyes in their feet. No, I'm not kidding. They have to lift up a foot to look at anything, giving the impression that they walk on their eyeballs, though some passages suggest that the things are in their heels, which could mean not only that they can only see when they lift up their feet, but they're always looking backward. They also swing through the air like apes, which seems weird if they can't see what they're grabbing hold of. I could also do about ten minutes on the concept of binocular vision and depth perception, but I'm not going to because I shouldn't have to. These things are ridiculous, and frankly they threw me right out of the story every time they showed up. Y'know what? That's bad. You don't want to lose your readers over a lack of common sense.

It may seem like a small problem but it means that one of the primary groups of players in this book is so badly thought out that they seem ridiculous. How they're supposed to be horrifying is beyond me.

In the end, there are things to like about the book and things which made me roll my eyes and wonder what Townsend was thinking. I don't think I'm going to be reading the rest of the series. Alas. Because it did start out well.

Kristen Burns says

3.5 Stars

Review:

I received a copy of this book from the publisher. This has not influenced my review.

I have to admit it took me a good percentage of the book to really get into it---the world was confusing at first and the seven or so POVs made it hard for me to connect with the characters---but eventually, as the story really got going and focused more on Rowena, the Alchemist, and Anselm, I got more into it and found myself wanting to keep reading.

By the time I finished, my favorite thing about this book was the three main characters. Rowena was a scrappy, willful, street-smart orphan. The Alchemist has done some things in his past that were not ok, but he was very sweet and fatherly to Rowena, despite his stoic nature. Anselm was kind of an asshole, but entertainingly and charmingly so. And by the end of the book, I was rooting for this strange little group of allies. I also loved the dynamic between the three main characters and seeing how it evolved as the story went on into a sweet little found family.

Another thing---I appreciated that the author didn't try to sugarcoat or downplay the selfish and negative aspects of any of the characters. Most of them weren't great people, and the author just presented them as they were without making excuses for their behaviors. There were reasons and motivations and sometimes good traits and behaviors in addition to the bad, but not excuses. And that only makes it that much better that I still liked some of them anyway.

The world was bit hard to get a grip on---kind of an odd mix of time and place and real and fantasy---but there was a lot of uniqueness and detail in it. (Note: I thought this was high fantasy when I read it, but after reading the second book I realized it's kind of an alternate Earth.) There were groups with different religious beliefs, a whole society and backstory, and a few different types of creatures: humans, lanyani (basically living trees), and aigamuxa (monstrous humanoid beings with eyes on the bottom of their feet). There was even a bit of a steampunk feel. And the premise of there being nine people chosen by God to help him gather data for his experiment, in order to decide whether humanity was worth, is one that I've certainly never seen before.

The plot had a complex mystery/conspiracy element to it involving the above-mentioned book with God's notes. It was fairly slow-paced for a while, with the occasional bout of action, but it got more interesting as it went on and picked up some speed near the end.

So overall, as I said, this book took me a while to get into, but, by the end, I was hooked and looking forward to spending more time with this strangely lovable team of street urchins and ex-mercenaries!

Recommended For:

Anyone who likes alternate Earth fantasy worlds, scrappy underdogs, ex-mercs with soft sides, and cute character dynamics.

Original Review @ Metaphors and Moonlight

Derpa says

This one is typical for the type of books that have good ideas, start out great, then the problems kick in and you become a lot less enthusiastic about them. It's also... a first book. I wouldn't say the author used up her awesome ideas when she should have waited, but this would have been better if it was refined.

In Corma religion and science got united, so the commonly held belief is that God is a scientist who looks upon the world as an experiment and people are just the rats running around in the labyrinth. The Nine refers to the nine most important people God is interested in observing, the nine who have to justify the necessity of the whole existence of the world. The catch? Nobody knows who they are. They could be the hobo down the street or the mayor. They also don't know what kind of an outcome is expected by God, what he wants to see or find out.

Scientist priests decided they could approach God the most through hard work in scientific fields, but nobody knows anything for sure.

The city of Corma is kind of shitty, though, full of crime and such. Rowena is one of the many, many street urchins who managed to find work as a delivery girl for a semi-legal businessman. Through her work she gets involved with some big things that endanger her. She has to team up with the mysterious Alchemist and a man dealing in some criminal matters to see the end of it.

I remember reading *A Madness of Angels* a few years back and thinking Kate Griffin was the most annoyingly verbose author ever. She killed her vibrant world's energy with overwriting EVERYTHING so goddamn much I felt like I wasn't even making any progress with reading. All the sentences had way too many adjectives that made it uncomfortable to read any of it and I quit three books in (which I should have done earlier, but I used to be an idiot with too much time)

This one wasn't quite so bad at that. Really, some scenes flowed quite nicely. Still, it wasn't tight enough, some sentences made me think of teenagers trying to just... lengthen their works with these cryptic, emo sentences that they think are clever and poetic foreshadowing, but in fact for the reader they are just unnecessary fluff. My favourite example:

"I could write about that scent pressing into my cheek a thousand times over and still not find the words to say how much it mattered."

Tone it down. Stop with the flowery crap, don't thesaurus us to death. Just do your fun ideas and different characters and such. This is not needed.

Rowena was my other problem. She isn't too bad, she wasn't an annoying little snowflake who is too special and perfect for this world, which is how many teenage girl characters are written nowadays. But... she wasn't that great. It's especially weird because she is supposedly someone important.

The side characters were much more fun, though. The Alchemist and Anselm were both kind of fun and interesting. I also really liked the scientist Chalmers. Luckily this book works with all of them, not just Rowena, so that works.

I wouldn't say any of the lot twists were that big. You can see them coming, I think the most clever part about this book was the world building and the basic idea. On the other hand we didn't get into the big, overarching story too much, so I have no idea how long this series is meant to be. If it's a trilogy then I have no idea how we'll have any story that opens up the world, but if it's longer everything should be fine. Of course maybe I will be surprised. We'll see. I'm definitely going to read the next book, not because this was that much of a favourite of mine, but because I think with some guidance and learning the author can do much, much better.

A side note; I love the colours and the artwork of the cover, I just wish the human forms would have been bigger, because they look good, just small. I am iffy about human faces being on the cover, because it can be a kind of... uncomfortable to stare right at someone when you look at your book. This one is pretty good, though.

I like smaller authors putting effort into their covers, because that stuff does work.

Have a nice day and pray hard this experiment works!

Lukasz says

The Nine doesn't sit comfortably in any singular genre. Rather, it reshapes various fantasy subgenres in an

engrossing tale that takes place in an alternate universe.

Imagine a world where Science has become a religion. God the Experimentor maintains life as an experiment. He continually reevaluates his experiment by observing the way The Nine (randomly chosen human beings whose names remain unknown to anyone but God) live their lives. Some factions and creatures want humankind to fail God's trial.

Thirteen-year-old underworld courier Rowena Downshire loses a book that writes itself to a creature called Aiganamuxa. Afraid of her brutal patron Ivor, she chooses to report the theft to book recipient – infamous and dreadful Alchemist. Accompanied by Alchemist old friend/foe of dubious morality – Anselm – they're thrown into a **dangerous quest**. They become the target of conspirators who seek to use the book for their own ends.

The Nine hooked me from page one. Mix of imaginative secondary world, vulnerable and relatable characters and a layered plot was hard to resist. While I consider myself atheist, I'm fascinated by religions and the way Tracy Townsend touches the subject is interesting and intelligent. It gives plenty of space for spinning and reassessing ecclesiastical theories. Religion, though, is just one side of the story focused on character arcs. The idea of creation being an ongoing experiment is fun, but the book focus lies elsewhere. Don't expect it to be a philosophical treatise; it's a fascinating adventure tale that touches more serious issues.

The journey we're taken on seems well-conceived. Parts of the plot intertwine in surprising ways, and some twists are genuinely surprising. All ideas presented in the book come together in elegant ways. The world is admirably dark, filled with people struggling to survive in poorly lit alleys. Given that Rowena's mother is enclosed in debtors jails and our protagonist tries to repay her debt, the story has some Dickens vibe to it.

Apart from humans, there are two other races in the city – **anatomically impossible aigamuxa with eyes in the soles of their feet** and Lanyani – kind of living trees that enjoy feeding on human bodies.

Characters presented in the book are well portrayed. Rowena is stubborn, loyal and fierce. The Alchemist POV is introduced later in the book, so while we observe him through other characters eyes, he seems reserved and sullen. On the other hand, we see enough to acknowledge that underneath grumpy appearance, he's a good guy with a big heart. There's also Anselm. Anselm is cool. He's cold and cynic ex-mercenary who enjoys his decadent retirement. He describes himself as *a villain with a penchant for self-aggrandisement and a portfolio of maladjusted habits*. At one time he states:

Turpitude is my problem, not degeneracy. A law-abiding life was out of the question from the start.

Also, interactions between the three characters are done very well. There's another character I liked a lot that, sadly, was killed by Tracy Townsend. After her r/fantasy AMA I thought she was a nice person but, clearly, I was wrong. Killing cool characters is uncool, you know.

If you look for intelligent, well-plotted book that mashes political intrigues, conspiracies, heists, found family, steam- and clockpunk stylings, redemption arcs, interspecies conflict and grey morality, you can stop right now. This is it. Do yourself a favour and grab a copy.

Lynn Williams says

Who am I kidding with 4.5 stars - this is 5 stars without doubt.

My review:

<https://lynns-books.com/2017/11/09/th...>

I enjoyed this book so much that I'm actually nervous to write a review – this is not a thing that happens often, not because my reviews are brilliant or simply flow from my brain into the written form with ease and flair, but because I really want people to read this book and this makes me worry in case I don't do the book justice and you read this review and feel simply ambivalent or worse. So, before I have a chance to mess this up – read this book. It is that simple. This will, without doubt make my end of year 'best of list'.

I just loved this book. I'm gushing on a little bit now but that's because I have such high hopes for the rest of this series and frankly I'm excited – because finding a new series like this is always a thing of joy. The imagination at work here is wonderful, I loved the world that the author has created and more than that I loved the characters. It's complex and intricate and yet brilliantly simple all in one. Complex because of the characters and the roles they play, intricate because of the detail and attention that bring everything to life for the reader and simple in that the plot fundamentally revolves around a book. It hooked me from the first few pages and then reeled me in until I was completely absorbed in this world.

As the story begins we make the introduction of Rowena Downshire, a young girl who works as a courier and is about to take on more work as one of the other couriers has gone missing. Rowena works for a black marketeer called Ivor. Nobody double crosses Ivor. He's a nasty piece of work all told and although he may provide a roof and a crust to those in his employ this is not benevolence but business. Rowena finds herself on route to the Alchemist with an important delivery when she is attacked and robbed. Her choices are simple, she can continue on to the Alchemist and seek help, although his reputation is little better, if not worse, than that of Ivor, or she can face her employer and a beating that she might never wake up from. I don't really want to give a lot away about the plot, there is murder and mystery, there's the whole issue of 'the book', there are many threads being woven together in terms of the different parties in play here, there is adventure and recklessness, banter, bravery and, well, everything else that I want in a book and then some.

The world building. Townsend has created this wonderfully dark world that feels seedy and grimy, it reminds me of some sort of mash up of Dickens and Lynch in it's settings that take us through poorly lit slums, to debtors jail, to sumptuous masked balls and underground tunnels. I loved the world created here. It's has a period feel in terms of the clothing and means of transportation, and then I can't decide whether this is gaslamp, flintlock or steampunk – I'll leave better brains than mine to figure that out although ultimately the definition matters not one whit – I'm sure you get the general feeling I'm going for and perhaps Ms Townsend defies definition.

The book is full of imagination and new ideas. Firstly we have the religious/scientific aspect to the book. To be clear, this is not a book about religion and isn't trying to sell any ideas or preach to the reader. The concept here revolves around 'creation' being an experiment, an experiment that is still in progress. That's all I'll say about that side of the story. In terms of the other species here we have the Lanyani and Aigamuxa. What creations are these! The Aigamuxa are quite terrifying – imagine jungle book in the style of Pan's Labyrinth, well, that's about the closest I can come to describing them. Similarly the Lanyani – an equally fascinating creation that puts me in mind of a tree ent combined with all the endearing qualities of a triffid. These two just blew my mind. The thing here, these aren't overly used or discussed and yet they feel fully

formed and completely intriguing.

And, I've saved the best bit – although there are no bad bits – to the last. The characters. How I love these characters. All of them, good and bad. They all come together in the most perfect way to make this story a rollercoaster of emotions. Rowena. She's a tough little cookie. She may be small and skinny but don't underestimate her. Rowena has grown up on the mean streets of Corma, she is threaded through with steely determination and yet something in her undoubtedly brings out the better side in others – as it will do in you the reader. I really cared for Rowena. She's fiercely loyal, stubborn and doesn't always think things through but she's an excellent character. The Alchemist, also known as the Bear, is also a wonderful creation and one that I just loved. One of those characters that's all bristles and bark but really, underneath, there's so much more to him. Finally, Anselm. Oh dear God what has happened to me – I loved his character too. I'm undone. It's just that he plays his role so well. And the three of them together. What can I say. Just read it and you'll see what I mean. There are of course other characters and to be honest they're all well drawn – in particular I must give a shout out to Rare.

I have no criticisms. I could probably dig around and try to conjure up something but I'm feeling on a book high and I don't want to dampen the mood.

The only thing I would say about this book is that you need to fully immerse yourself. This is a book that needs reading and digesting. It's not a difficult book to read at all but there are plenty of characters and a whole web of ideas – they of course all come together quite beautifully but in the meantime you have to gather all the threads and keep them in your mind, ready and waiting until they fulfil their course and spin a thing of beauty.

So, if you fancy a dark fantasy, packed with ideas, full of intrigue, populated with imaginative species and characters you can love, hate and fear then grab yourself a copy of this. I can't say enough good things about this book, although I've given it a good try. Do yourself a favour and give it a shot.

I received a copy through Edelweiss, courtesy of the publisher – for which my thanks. The above is my own opinion.

Tammy says

The nitty-gritty: A complex and unique story that delivers on all levels. Simply brilliant!

I was initially drawn to *The Nine* because of its brightly colored cover, but believe me when I say the cover pales in comparison to the story that's inside. This is one of my best, happiest surprises of the year, and I can't say enough good things about this book. Tracy Townsend has created a fascinating combination of fantasy elements-- including steampunk and flintlock fantasy, with shades of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* --that somehow all work brilliantly together. The characters' voices are firmly planted in the Victorian era and have an unexpected formality which really grew on me, and it was the characters that stole the show and elevated this to one of my favorite books of the year. Add in unique and unusual world-building and an intricate caper story and you have a very special book.

There are a *lot* of players in this story, however, so readers will need to be patient while Townsend takes her time introducing us to all of them. Rowena Downshire is a thirteen-year-old street urchin/courier who does odd jobs on the streets of Corma for the disreputable and sleazy Ivor Ruenichnya, trying to save enough

money to free her mother from debtor's prison. One day Rowena is tasked with delivering an old book to the Alchemist, a dangerous man believed to have magical powers. But on her way to meet him, she is attacked by a creature called an aigamuxa, who steals the book and nearly kills her. Rowena decides to keep her meeting with the Alchemist anyway, more fearful of what Ivor will say when he finds out she didn't complete the job.

Meanwhile, the Reverend Doctor Phillip Chalmers receives a packet of secret notes from his associate Nora Pierce, having to do with their research into a theory about the Grand Experiment, which suggests that God has chosen nine people to watch and judge, and the actions of these Nine will determine the fate of humanity. The book that Rowena was supposed to take to the Alchemist is a magical book that writes by itself, and Phillip believes it is the hand of God himself making notations.

But now Nora is missing, and the book has fallen into the hands of the enemy. Even worse, those who know about the book—including Rowena, the Alchemist, and the Alchemist's former rival Anselm Meteron—are in grave danger. And when Chalmers discovers the identity of one of the Nine, he must protect that information at all costs.

I've barely scratched the surface in this short recap, and I haven't even introduced all the characters! In fact, I read half the book before I figured out who the characters on the cover are (Rowena, the Alchemist and Anselm), because the cast is so large. But don't let that scare you away. Remember, this is the beginning of a series, and characters who don't seem to be important right now may have bigger parts to play in the next book. Townsend's complex plot is well planned, and by the end of the story, even the seemingly unimportant scenes and characters make sense.

In this world, there are three intelligent species who share space: humans, of course; the aigamuxa, huge beasts whose eyes are on the bottoms of their feet (which believe me, makes for some very odd visuals!); and the lanyani, who are basically walking, talking trees. The aigamuxa play a big part in this story, as they are responsible for a lot of the violence, but I also felt sorry for them. The author makes a point about how greedy humans can be when it comes to using the earth's resources and not being able to coexist peacefully with other species, and the aigamuxa, who started out as slaves to humans, definitely have some strong opinions about this. I was fascinated by the lanyani, although this really isn't their story. I'm hoping in the next book they will play a larger role (and based on the ending, I'm pretty sure that's going to happen!).

But the real reason I've given this book five stars is because of the characters. Rowena might be my most favorite character *ever*, I can't believe how much she grew on me. Townsend has a gift for bringing characters to life, especially the downtrodden ones, and Rowena might only be thirteen years old, but she's one of the fiercest and most loyal girls I've ever come across in literature. Not only has she had to learn street smarts, but her boss Ivor regularly beats her, and more than once during the story she ends up being pummeled by an aigamuxa. Even better, when she meets the Alchemist, their bond becomes one of a father and daughter, something the fatherless Rowena truly needs in her brutal life. When Meteron enters the picture, the three of them form an unlikely family unit that was unusual but heartwarming.

The Alchemist was another of my favorite characters. He's an older man and he's been through a lot, but I loved the way that Rowena changes some of his world-weary attitude and gives him a reason to keep living. He also has an interesting power that comes in *very* handy during the story!

I also loved a girl with the quirky name of Rare Juells, a cat burglar and spy who is Anselm Meteron's lover. Rare and Meteron have an...interesting relationship, but my first impression of it changed as the story progressed. There are lots of tangled familial relationships among the characters which made the story even

more interesting.

The whole idea of the Nine was fascinating, and I loved the way science and religion seem to go hand in hand in this world. The scenes where Chalmers is trying to figure out the mysteries of the book were some of my favorites, and I'm so curious to see what happens in the next book.

There are so many other little details that I don't have time to mention, and you'll just have to discover them for yourself. If you haven't realized by now, I highly recommend this book to any fantasy fan who loves detailed world-building and characterization. Don't start *The Nine* if you don't have time to immerse yourself fully. This book can be challenging at times, but sometimes challenging books can be the most rewarding.

Big thanks to the publisher for supplying a review copy. This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

Dezideriu Szabo says

Right when I knew exactly what my favorite books of 2017 were, this Rare Jewel came out of the nowhere and blew me away. Superb characters and the best idea I heard in years. This is the best fantasy (or whatever strange gender this is) debut of the year and probably one of the best books of the year.

<https://cititorfantasy.wordpress.com/...>

Mary Robinette Kowal says

This is a complex, thrilling political, heist novel that has steampunk that makes sense. So look, I love the aesthetic of steampunk, but it is frequently frustrating to me because people have gears without actually thinking about *why.*

The world of The Nine makes sense. Glorious, weird, wonderful sense.

The characters are vivid and alive and flawed. I am eager for the next book in the series.
