



# Rising From the Ashes: The Chronicles of Caymin

*Caren J. Werlinger*

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**Rising From the Ashes: The Chronicles of Caymin** Caren J. Werlinger

Ancient Ireland – an era of clan wars, petty kings and invasions by raiders from the north.

As Christianity tightens its hold, magic and the old ways fight to keep their place in the hearts of the people.

Born into this world is Ash, orphaned and maimed, left to die. She is rescued by a clan of badgers and raised to be one of them. As she grows, so does her magic, until at last she comes to the attention of other humans. Some of them want to protect her; some want to use her.

When she bonds with an orphaned dragon cub, the two of them become pawns in a bid for power. Forced to flee, dragon and dragonmage embark on a quest to seek the answers as to why they were bonded and what their future holds.

## Rising From the Ashes: The Chronicles of Caymin Details

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Author : Caren J. Werlinger

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# From Reader Review **Rising From the Ashes: The Chronicles of Caymin** for online ebook

## **Barb Taub says**

When I started reading *Rising From the Ashes*, I was skeptical. Dragons in Ireland? I went straight to my favorite Irish myth expert, Ali Isaacs, who didn't let me down. In her blog post, *The Serpent in Irish Mythology*, she recounts several stories of heroes battling dragons. And best of all, she mentions their Irish name—*péista*.

So when the young apprentice mage Ash meets the strange creature who tells her it's name is *Péist*, I knew we were in for some fun. The story is an alternate history, a coming of age tale in the best fantasy traditions, complete with authentic historical details reminiscent of Monica Furlong's classic *Wise Child* and *Juniper*, combined with the adventure and heroism of Robin McKinley's *Hero* and *Crown* series.

Adopted by badgers (badgers!) as an infant after her village is destroyed by invaders, Ash survives because of her ability to communicate with animals. Although discovered and accepted as apprentice by mages, Ash and her new friends' existence is threatened by the increasing influence of the Christianity introduced to Ireland by Saint Patrick in the fifth century.

Author CJ Werlinger treads a delicate path here, balancing between the magic lore taught and practiced by her fictional mages and the reality that we know the Christians were eventually successful. The young heroine isn't a warrior, and her motives are to protect her friends, her forest, and the mysterious *Péist*. I admired the way Ash's acceptance of her own vulnerability is both her protection and her strength. And I particularly liked the way she and *Péist* bond to form a union that is more than the sum of their parts.

The world building is wonderful. Not only do we get the strong sense of the realities of everyday life, but we also watch Ash grow into her own unique strengths and convictions. The tale begins slowly, and then moves ever faster as the threat grows for her little band of mage teachers and student apprentices. For the most part, characters were well-drawn and memorable. The voices of the various narrators were believable, whether told through the scent-focused badger, the displaced young girl, or the old woman with a lifetime of learning to share. The story arc is wrapped up beautifully, with just enough to introduce the new challenge that awaits in the next volume.

Although I did find it a bit difficult to accept how quickly Ash mastered what seemed complex magical concepts, that is really my only critique of the tale. I wouldn't hesitate to give it five out of five stars for originality, strong voice, and a terrific concept. If I knew a YA reader looking for a story with a strong heroine, compelling story line, and (best of all!) dragons, I would recommend *Rising from the Ashes*. I know I'm looking forward to reading more of this promising series.

**\*\*I received this book for free from the publisher or author in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.\*\***

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## **Lexxi Kitty says**

My first book by this author.

I've been kind of reading a lot of romances of one kind or another this year, and wanted a break. So, a fantasy book. Starring a young girl who was raised by badgers (yes, badgers).

So, this book stars one 'Ash' (I suppose it isn't a spoiler to note that she is also known as Caymin, since the book itself has 'The Chronicles of Caymin' on the cover). When Ash was around 2 or so, her village was attacked, and she was tossed into a fire. She squealed and cried for help. Help came in the form of badgers. Oddly enough, Ash had been calling out to in the badgers their own, mental, language.

Ash, as the badgers call her, spends the next bit of time growing older with these badgers. Being, more or less, a badger. Sure, she didn't seem to want to eat the worms her badger mother attempted to offer her, but she ate other things, and a bond of love developed between Broc, Cuan, and Ash.

One day, while out doing whatever it was she was doing (gathering food? Hunting?), Ash hears a fight break out. The squeals of badgers. The growls of wolves. She hurries over and drives away the wolves, but not before they grievously injured one of her badger parents. And in a move of instinct, Ash moved in to help her parent. Laid hands on the furry critter, and more or less glowed (well, at least her hands, if I recall correctly). She then slumped over very very tired. Next to the now healed badger.

The point of mentioning all that, the attack and healing, was to get to the next part wherein I mention that her use of magic sent out a very powerful vibration, which was felt very far away. A magical vibration. Felt by an older woman named Enat. Who lived in a magical forest. Enat travels around looking for who sent out this vibration, and eventually finds Ash. An offer is made to train Ash, - said offer being one made to Ash, and to be answered by Ash. With sadness at leaving her clan, the badgers, Ash reluctantly agrees. And is taken to the magical forest area.

This is a deep, detailed, rather riveting book that pulled me from beginning to end. There were certain plot points whereupon the author could have gone a different direction, and the vast majority of the time I was quite happy with the direction the author choose.

The ending both somewhat dragged, and ended abruptly. I cannot really say exactly what I mean, since I'm referring directly to the end of the book, and there is no real way of expressing with more detail what I'm referring to. Let's just leave it as what I've said, plus the part wherein the book ended setting up a sequel. A sequel that I wish to read, oh, now.

As I had mentioned at the start of this review, this is the first book I've read by this author. I had been examining the shelves of friends, looking for authors that I had not yet read, though they had read and rated at least one book 5 stars. Looking for those lesbian fiction authors that I had, as of yet, not tried. I mention all of this to note that I had not gone into this attempting to find a good solid coming of age fantasy book. I went into it to find authors to add at least one of their books to my maybe pile. Came away from that examination with a book to read. And eventually read.

It should be noted, as at least one other reviewer has noted, this is not a lesbian fiction book. At least it isn't currently. Maybe the series will get there as Ash/Caymin ages. At the moment, all I can say is that the concept of people 'mating' with those of the same gender is mentioned in this book (Enat being one who had had, at some point, a female partner – this is mentioned in passing). Ash, though, is of an age where in the concept of finding a 'mate' isn't exactly something she is interested in; though she thought enough about it to believe that she wouldn't be one who ended up with a mate. What with her being a 'two-leg' in a clan of

badgers.

On one level I'm vaguely sad that I read this book now. Because it was released February 1 2016. I like gobbling series as soon as I find them. Yet now I'll have to wait. I'm not very patient.

I recommend this book to one and all – though with the understanding that this is a book that has, as a main character, a young girl, involves magic, and is open to the idea of same sex relationships (at least it's mentioned in passing). Oh, and open to the idea that those who follow the Christian God might not always and in every situation be on the side of good. I mean, the book is set in ancient Ireland at the time when 'the monks' were 'invading' and strenuously attempting to convert everyone around them, and suppress everything that would stand as an obstacle to their power.

March 4 2016

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## **Kirstie Ellen says**

### **3.5 stars**

*I received this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. Thank you!*

#### **Initial Thoughts Upon Finishing**

I really enjoyed this! Obviously, the best way to please me is to write a book about dragons - so I've been very excited to dive into this one and see what it's all about. It was a really cool take on dragons altogether and I loved that the author tried a few quirky changes on the traditional sense of a dragon. I'm keen to read the next book to see where it goes because I wasn't left quite satisfied with the ending having been holding out for an epic battle scene that was clearly just waiting in the wings!

#### **Rising From the Ashes**

So firstly, perhaps I should apologise for such a delay on this review. Let's not even count how long this book has been waiting to be read. It's a crying shame! Rising From the Ashes was a really enjoyable book and promised so many things that I love in a story. The book follows the tale of a girl called Ash who has an unusual life and ends up bonding with a young dragon - it's set in ancient Ireland and revolves around Celtic mythology. Like I said, everything you ever asked for.

I was immediately drawn to this book because of it's synopsis and I definitely think it delivered! Whilst things took a little while to get going, and there was way less dragon action than I was anticipating, I still really enjoyed the narrative. We meet a bunch of characters and get glimpses into segments of this not too alien world of what is potentially to come.

I enjoyed the action and I loved the lessons of learning how to harness magic. I'm seriously excited to

continue reading the series because I have high hopes that this series is only going to expand and become even more epic than it is.

### **Mythology or Epic Fantasy?**

I've been having some difficulty trying to work out exactly what genre this fits into. The story itself doesn't overly press the point (except for written-in accents) that it is set in Ireland, or at least a likeness to it, and is supposed to be in ancient times. The blurb does that. So for the most part this feels like a sort of Epic Fantasy narrative.

Either way, it doesn't quite fit the bill right. The main focus of the story is the life of the druids and the existence and purpose of magic. Not to mention the curious and troubling presence of a dragon - a species that is no longer around in this story's world.

I've decided that therefore this story must fit better into just generic fantasy because of its high focus on magic and dragons driving it from the epic, but also with the potential for it to be mythology. Celtic mythology that is.

Whichever way we want to define this one it's certainly a novel to tickle your brain into imagining this awesome world of misconceptions and magic and hey! dragons and magic are always a sure safe combination, right? The only thing that sometimes frustrates me with these types of books is the pronunciation of names! Gah! Phonetic guide please?!

### **Characters**

I really enjoyed the broad cast of characters in this novel. I loved Enat and the motherly stance she took to Ash. It was a fascinating story of self-growth and from the way things panned out in this book I'm expecting that the books in the series will only become more and more fast-paced from here on in. So if you're reading this and tiring of not too much happening, I beg you to keep reading and get to the end. It's a slow burner but good.

Ash herself was a great character. She was fierce and wonderful and pure. I loved that despite her restrictive physical disabilities she was still able to shine in the magical classes and be equally respected among her peers (well, for the most part, #drama). I also loved how level headed she was with thinking out decisions and the way she viewed the world. She is honestly the most pure fictional character I've read, I'd say. I'm really looking forward to seeing how her character grows in the next book.

The other children that she trains with were equally interesting. I liked how they were all unique and I loved the drama of guessing what all their intentions were. The conflict is constantly brewing underneath the main plot line which I loved - it certainly made you feel ready and eager by the time conflict does arrive! The contrast between the spiritual beliefs of the druids and the outsiders (Christians) was also an interesting touch to the story which I appreciated from the historical perspective.

### **Dragons and Slow Plots**

The one thing I was disappointed in for this book was how slow it was and it's lack of dragon presence. If you came here for the dragons then you'll have to be patient, but I have faith that things are going to get amazing. Things really do take a while to get going and as much as I enjoyed meeting the characters and setting things up, I think it could have been sped up by at least a couple of chapters - that's coming from someone who loves her world building!

Nonetheless, dragons *were* featured in this book and in an entirely unique way. I loved this more than anything. Piest was fantastic as a character and had me very curious as to how the whole dragon thing was going to manifest. I loved finding out the back story eventually and just overall absolutely *adored* Werlinger's approach to the traditional characters of dragons. I would hands-down read this book just for that factor alone.

(view spoiler)

### **Summary**

This is a great book! I'm so glad I finally had the opportunity to read this one because I had a blast. It's a slow going book to start with but not a slow read. You'll end up flying through it and I am tortured by where we leave off in the first book. Whilst it would've been nice to have just a bit of the action promised to come in this first book, I'm still really excited to read on and have faith that all this world and character building in book one will put us in good stead for the rest of the series!

Happy reading!

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### **Cait • A Page with a View says**

I think this would have been one of my favorite books in middle school for sure! The ancient Ireland setting is gorgeous and so detailed that it felt surprisingly realistic. Plus, the writing is good, the plot is original, the pacing is perfect, and the story is genuinely entertaining.

Ash/Caymin was found by badgers as an infant and is raised by them until another human comes to train her in magic. There are other pupils around her age and it's entertaining to see her process the human world for the first time. Caymin is able to communicate with animals, which includes DRAGONS.

[image error]

I loved all of the Irish names and the forest settings! This is a quick read, so definitely check it out if you like middle grade or YA stories that involve nature, ancient Ireland, dragons, and magic.

Thank you to the author for sending me a review copy!

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## **Crazy4Books says**

After reading *The Beast That Never Was* and absolutely loving it I wanted to read more fantasy books by this author. She's definitely become one of my new favorite authors. Both her fantasy books were 5 star reads for me. It took me almost 2 months before picking this one up because I had so many other review books to get to and now I wish I would have picked it up sooner. The summary of this book does not do it justice. It's so much more amazing than that.

A girl raised by badgers. How awesome does that sound. I loved how right in the beginning you get the mother badger Brocs point of view when she rescues the main character Ash. It was incredibly fascinating. When Ash discovers she has magic abilities Enat finds her and convinces her to leave her sett to go train with other apprentice. She needs to be careful as she learns that humans are capable of evil she could never have imagined living among badgers.

I really enjoyed watching Ash's character develop as she gets accustomed to living among humans. She was a kind and honorable character. She was also very mature for her age and being raised by badgers gave her a unique perspective. Since Ash can talk to animals you get to know some of them as characters. I liked all the animals but the crow Beanna was my favorite. I also got attached to her badgers parents Broc and Cuan.

Once Ash gets to the village with the Elder Enat we meet a lot of characters and some of them felt more developed but that's normal since you can't spend a bunch of time getting to know every side character. I think Enat made a wonderful mother figure and something about the apprentice Gai really intrigued me. The other elders weren't as memorable as some of the other characters but I still enjoyed reading about them. I also ended up really liking Garvan.

There are a few LGBT references but it's not the main focus. I'm hoping this will change in the sequel because I would love to see Ash with one of the girl apprentice, like Ciana, Maeve or Daina. Maeve would be my first choice and I hope they reunite in the second book but I also really liked Ciana and felt like they had a connection since they both have the ability to talk to animals.

The importance of nature and animals were something I really appreciated. Since this is the Dragonmage Saga you can imagine that dragons will be an important part of the story. I freaking loved the dragons and I'm glad I went into it without knowing much about them. It reminded me of *Eragon* in a way but the main character was even better. This story completely captivated me and the characters were extremely compelling.

I was lucky enough to receive this copy for review from the author Caren Werlinger. I would like to thank her for the chance to review another amazing book and would be honored to review any of her fantasy books in the future. I'm so happy this is a trilogy because I really need the sequel *The Portal*. I can't wait to find out when it will be available. This book was amazing and I would definitely recommend it.



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## Written Melodies says

Full review: <http://whatstheword-saywhaaat.blogspot...>

3.5 Stars

Rising from the Ashes is the fifth dragon tale I've read and it's the best one I've read to date. The cover couldn't have been more perfect in illustrating the contents of the story. The snowdrops liberally scattered across the foliage highlights the buoyant tones of the ancient, mystical forest inviting the reader into its enchanted domain. Though there is relatively no action, the plot builds slow and steady preparing the reader for the following action-packed sequels. The character-driven narrative allows the reader to get to know the characters--their personalities and motivations.

Rising From the Ashes is well written and researched. Before starting this book, I knew zilch about badgers. While reading, I found myself researching them and watching badgers videos on YouTube. I definitely will continue reading the series and look forward to the second installment.

**\*\*I received a complimentary copy of this book from the author in exchange for an honest review.\*\***

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## Ginger Miller says

**A fantastical , magical, world.**

An incredible world brought to life in words so descriptive that one can easily picture the forest, dragon, the mages, the entire village. Their journey over the ocean was exhilarating as was the cave. I can only imagine what comes next. Will Caymin find her mother? Will she save her teacher and her friends. And what of Gai? Is he friend or foe? And Garvan? Does he have a secret plan. Most of all. Will Caymin arrive at the magical forest in time to prevent its destruction? Such a good book. Highly recommended.

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## Amy says

This was a fascinating start to an epic tale. I've decided to call this type of book historical fantasy, as it combines elements of both historically based novels and fantasy based. The mix is entertaining and completely enjoyable. This is somewhat of a foundation novel, explaining the early childhood and major events leading up to the development of the last Dragonmage. The interesting part is that the bonding between dragon and mage wouldn't have happened without the way the badgers raised Ash. Ash's lack of deception and artifice, her lack of understanding about why these things are important to two-legs, or humans, give her a kind of innocence that allows her to approach the undeveloped form of the dragon in a manner that allows the bonding to occur. It will be interesting to see how the events that occurred during her young life, and the friendships and knowledge she gained during her training, affect the person she becomes throughout the rest of this tale. This is high fantasy with an edge of history and the result is one of the best stories I've read in a long time. Definitely recommended for fantasy lovers everywhere.

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### **Natallia says**

I received a copy of this book from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I personally didn't enjoy this book as much as I thought I would. The cover of the book and the name captivated me, but I was let down with this book I wasn't able to finish. I felt like the story had a slow start with not much happening and characters bland. I did however like the writing style of the author, in terms with descriptions that she wrote and the detailed adjectives. I did feel that the story was good with a clear direction, but I didn't feel like that the rest of the story would be for me compared to other books that I usually read.

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### **Sharon Clark says**

This is an excellent read: fast-paced, wonderful characters, and great story. Never expected to be concerned for the adventures of a twelve-year-old girl, but this story certainly held my attention. Couldn't put the story down.

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### **Annika says**

I was asked to review *Rising From The Ashes* by Caren Werlinger.

When I first began reading this book, I was very skeptical. It was labeled under YA, but it seemed like it should have been targeted to a younger audience. It didn't challenge my reading which is something I normally look for in a book. Another reason I thought this book started off slow was that the plot didn't really begin until halfway through the book. I was just reading aimlessly, hoping that a plot would pop up out of thin air. But, once it did, the book took a turn for the better and after reading it, I found myself wanting to read more. Also, the character development and characters as a whole didn't seem to be the top priority which is really something that drew me away from the book. I will say though, that Caymin is a very likeable character and her relationships with others throughout the book can be very touching. One character I really sympathised with was Gai and I hope to see more of him in the future.

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### **Velvet Lounger says**

Before we start and to be really clear – this is NOT a lesbian fiction title. It is a fantasy based in Eire in the 8th Century set in the Celtic-druid landscape. I don't normally review non lesbian fiction titles, but this is such an excellent book, and so many of us also love fantasy, that a book written by one of the best storytellers around needs a shout out to all you Mage/Dragon/Fantasy Fans.

The Dragonmage Saga Book 1 is the story of Ash, a child orphaned by a night-time raid on her village, left to die in the fire, rescued by badgers who raise her as their own. Scarred and apart from the two-legs of nearby villages Ash can talk to the four-legs and learns to live as one of them, scavenging and hunting by

night, holed up in the sett by day.

An attack by wolves on her beloved badgers brings out Ash's magic, untrained and untamed, when she instinctively heals a deadly wound. The reverberations of her power brings a Mage to collect her for training, and so begins her journey into the world of human interaction, magic, druid rites and her destiny.

To say this is an excellent tale is an under-statement. As an avid reader of this genre who considers Robin Hobb, George R R Martin, Barbra Hambly and Anne McCaffrey among the best of the best, I would rate this first book in the series to be right up there.

Ash is a wonderful character. We watch her grow in every way, and her transition from four-legged youth to two-legged power gives Werlinger the perfect vehicle to explain the world. As Ash grows and learns, we learn. What particularly sets her apart is her imperfections, burned by the fire she is disfigured and disabled.

She is surrounded by a varied and deep cast of animals and humans, treated equally and with well rounded characters from those we barely touch upon to those who we come to know in depth. The four-legs are wonderfully drawn with personalities to match their type. The two-legs show how far humans have come from the simpler morality of the animal world, with both good and bad impacted by deceit and the lust for power.

Ireland in the 8th century provides a wonderful setting and the perfect canvas upon which the story unfolds. The forest and lands play an important role in Ash's journey and are drawn with a perfect balance of description and understanding. Love of the landscape shines through the writing and draws us even further into the story.

Werlinger is an excellent storyteller. The Celtic/Mage/Dragon lore books seem to attract them, perhaps because the whole Celtic/Druid tradition is one of oral history and places such a value on the bard. Her lesbian fiction titles are all intriguing, varied and unusual. Now she has stepped out into the fantasy genre and her light touch of description, intelligent characterisation and stylish writing have created an awesome first novel... I stayed up all night reading this and I literally cannot wait to for the next book in the series.

If you are a dragon lore/ fantasy fan.. you will love it. If you aren't – give it a try, you wont find a better example of sympathetic writing, elegant prose, a wonderful heroine, and the storytelling of a genuine bard.

(publisher review copy received)

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### **Anne Monteith says**

I first began the first book in this series over a year ago but it seemed so middle-school that I abandoned it to read other things until recently and while it is a book for that age it is also a book that anyone who loves stories of the old ways of magic in ancient Ireland before the Christians managed to almost eradicate it will enjoy this series.

Ash is two when her village is attacked and she is pushed into a fire. Watching things unfold is a female badger, she hears the child calling Mam and it is the first time she has been able to understand what a two-leg is saying. With the help of her sister and her mate they manage to drag the child to their den, they call her Ash because she was found in the ashes. Ash has terrible scars from the fore and limbs because of the

way the burns on her leg heal; all the animals of the forest are her friends, she understands them and they understand her. The people who now live in the village call her "the ghost-child", sometimes they give her a bit of food but most of the time the dogs steal it for her while she distracts them.

One night the male badger is injured by a fox and Ash manages to heal him but does not understand how she did so. This use of magic is felt far away and one of mage teachers who live in a sacred, protected forest comes looking for her hoping to convince her to come with her and learn.

I love the character interactions in this book, Ash is so innocent, she has no guile but her heart is huge. This is one of the books that I was so glad that I had the rest of the series to read immediately after finishing one book although this close to Christmas I'll probably have a hard time finding the time (heavy sigh). This is a great fantasy tale suitable for all ages.

4.75/5 STARS: \*\*I received a free digital ARC in exchange for a honest, unbiased review. I sincerely thank the author and/or publisher for providing an ARC through NetGalley.\*\*

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## **Woody says**

Total page turner

Brilliant start to a three book series. I love fantasy books especially delving in the forest and animals. Fabulous world building so realistic. Wonderful characters and I engaged with Ash/Caymin at once. Expertly written, total page turner. This series is going on my favourite to read again list. First book that I have read by Caren J Werlinger and will definitely read the other two books in this fantastic series.

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## **Lisa says**

The most compelling heroes are often the unexpected ones. They are the heroes we root for, and the ones we relate to the most. If we go by the traditional expectations of our society, Ash is an unlikely hero. She is a girl of about ten who does not know much about the world. She lives with a clan of badgers, separate from human society, and scavenges for food. However, within her is a powerful magic. A move to a new home in a sacred forest among a community of mages who train Ash, and other children, in the practice of magic changes her life drastically. There, Ash's bond with a mythical creature - a young dragon - sets her on an epic journey to protect the people, animals, and ideals that she holds dear.

Rising From the Ashes: The Chronicles of Caymin is set in Ireland around the years 700-800 C.E.. Christianity is spreading, and as a result of this shift, those who practice magic are becoming less accepted and have moved even farther to the edges of society.

The protagonist, Ash, and the story as a whole, are exceptional for many reasons, which I'll discuss in this review.

The characterization in Rising From the Ashes is very strong, and builds upon important themes.

Caren J. Werlinger is adept at bringing the reader into the setting and into Ash's journey. For Ash, both the

world of humans and the ways of those who practice magic are new and unfamiliar, and, as readers, we learn about them gradually, along with Ash.

Ash has a unique perspective of the world around her. The fact that she was raised by badgers separates and differentiates her from other humans, even those who, like her, practice magic and are capable of communicating with animals.

Ash is bright and precocious in many ways, but while some new things come easily to her, others take hard work and careful study. Just like anyone her age, she must learn to deal with her emotions and get along with her peers. These are all things that make her so realistic and relatable.

I love that our hero, Ash, is a strong girl, but one who is far from perfect, and is different in so many ways. As a result of being thrown onto a fire as a baby, Ash has scars on her face and body, and a physical disability, but none of this hinders her in what she sets out to achieve. One result of Ash's badger upbringing is that she is not self-conscious about her physical appearance. When she begins to live among humans she realizes there are some implications of moving differently from others, however, she overcomes any loss of confidence about her differences. As a character, Ash redefines what is perfect or beautiful or strong in terms of our physical form.

Ash embraces her physical differences, and she also learns to be proud of what sets her apart from others, in terms of the person she is becoming. In a very important sense, *Rising From the Ashes* incorporates the values of accepting and embracing what makes us different and unique as individuals, even in the face of what a majority of society may think.

One key theme in the story is Ash learning how to be human, but retaining her badger-like behaviour. I particularly liked the gradual transition from Ash's badgerish thinking and behaviour and her learning to understand human behaviour and emotions. Ash begins very badgerish, and in some ways, she seems innocent. She is incapable of lying. Through her interactions with the others in her new home in the forest, and the guidance from the elders there, Ash learns about human society. She even learns basic human gestures. Ash feels emotions that she has never experienced before, and learns to understand their implications. In a way, she is becoming human. Yet, she retains important elements of her personality influenced by her badger-upbringing.

Ash gradually become aware of the differences between animals and humans. As she learns more and becomes more aware of the ways of humans, as well as the dangers she faces, we see some of her innocence beginning to wane.

The cast of characters is interesting and varied and includes both humans and animals, or as you'll come to say, two-legs and four-legs! Many of my favourite characters in the novel are of the four-legged or winged variety and what's great is that some of them provide an additional element of humour.

Although some human characters in the novel have the ability to communicate with animals, a distinction between humans and animals is retained, and there remain behavioural and cultural differences between them. Animals have their own mannerisms, ways of speaking, and instincts.

All the supporting characters are layered and well developed, and we see that within each of them there are complex motives and reasoning behind their actions. No one is purely evil or purely good. And, in some cases, there are surprises as to which category characters fall into.

Many of the broader issues in the story, such as a clash between religious and world views, are very relevant in our contemporary society.

In the story, we see a chasm between those adhering to the traditional pagan religion that existed in pre-Christian Ireland, which was more open to practitioners of magic, and the more recently arrived Christian religion. There is distrust on both sides. Although Ash lives among those who practice magic and celebrate the traditional pre-Christian festivals, she comes to learn that there are good and bad people among her own kind, and among outsiders. Individuals within each group stir distrust, when peaceful coexistence might otherwise emerge.

There is also a strong theme of environmental protection, although the characters use the terms and concepts of the era and of their own society. Ash learns about the interconnectedness of the trees in the mystical forest in which she resides, mirroring the concept of an ecosystem. The characters practice sustainable living, caring for the environment, and respect for animals and all living things. This is not only because it was a necessity at the time, but also because of their dedication to protecting and caring for their home in the magical forest, a place that protects them as well.

Another element I really appreciate about *Rising From the Ashes* is the inclusion of strong female characters. Strong girls and women are integral to the story. Feminism and the empowerment of girls and women is a subtle, yet significant, theme. Ash and the other female characters participate in just as much action and adventure as any of the male characters. (Perhaps even more so!) They are treated equally in terms of their skill in magic, and are trained in the same fashion in self-defence, archery, and sparring.

All aspects of the setting - historical, physical, and magical - are well developed.

The Irish landscape gives the story a strong sense of place - from the greenness of the trees and moss and lichens, and the mist surrounding the forest, to the magnificent cliffs, and the old and powerful stone circles, which were ancient even to those in 700-800.

The entire book has a sort of earthy feel - Caren J. Werlinger creates an atmosphere that permeates the story, and it's one that leaves a strong impression. The magic in the book also has an earthy feel as Ash and the other young students learn about magic and controlling the elements of water, fire, and earth.

All aspects of the book are defined within the historical setting, from the way the characters live to the way they perceive the world. The passage of time is marked by the characters in the older ways of the era by phases of the moon, or "winters". The characters celebrate the traditional Irish festivals that fall throughout the year, and we experience them with Ash.

The story is one that pulls you in from the beginning, and entices you to keep reading just one more chapter, and another, and another. The plot is complex, with many twists that will have you guessing until key elements and figures are revealed.

*Rising From the Ashes* includes several majestic fantasy scenes, as well as action scenes and battles. All such scenes move the story forward and all give us insight into the psychology and motives of the characters.

This book will appeal to readers of all ages and backgrounds. It can be enjoyed by younger readers from about eight years old, all the way up to adults.

*Rising From the Ashes* has the feel of a book that has staying power. It's just as fantastic on multiple re-

readings, and I think that it follows in the tradition of many of my favourite classic fantasy novels. If you enjoyed the Chronicles of Narnia, The Dark is Rising series, Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials series, and of course, Harry Potter, you'll love Ash's story.

If you're a reader of Caren J. Werlinger's other books, I think you'll really enjoy this one as well. It has a slightly different flavour, but is still her great writing - complex, eloquent, and full of depth. You'll also appreciate that in the world of those who practice magic, it is understood and accepted that anyone can be partnered with someone of the same gender, and the woman who cares for and teaches Ash in the ways of magic had such a partner.

While it is the first in a series, Rising From the Ashes is a complete story on its own. The ending, while entirely unexpected in terms of where the story began, is satisfying in the way that it brings Ash full circle in one aspect of her life. However, the book also leaves us eager to read more about the characters and their adventures in future volumes of The Dragonmage Saga.

Overall, Rising From the Ashes has a timeless quality. Caren J. Werlinger's writing is lucid and elegant. She employs beautiful imagery throughout the story. This book is both literary and compellingly readable, and in my view, it will find a place among the classic fantasy novels.

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For the sake of full disclosure, I beta read the manuscript, and read a copy in advance of its publication.

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