



To Summon Nightmares

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Three years ago, Cohen Brandwein was "Ireland's Favorite Daughter", a popular teenage author and internet celebrity. But ever since he came out publicly as trans, the media's treatment of him has been less than golden, and these days, Cohen is desperate for escape.

When he inherits an old house in the country, Cohen sees it as a perfect opportunity to escape the press and work on his new book. What he doesn't count on is becoming embroiled in a small town murder mystery and falling for the primary suspect, a man whose reality makes Cohen's fantasy books seem like child's play...

To Summon Nightmares Details

Date : Published November 5th 2014 by Less Than Three Press LLC (first published 2014)

ISBN :

Author : J.K. Pendragon

Format : ebook 164 pages

Genre : Lgbt, Transgender, Fantasy, Paranormal, Romance, Glbt, Queer, M M Romance, Contemporary

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From Reader Review To Summon Nightmares for online ebook

Karen Wellsbury says

This is the review that should have been on Scuttlebutt, but isn't.

I thoroughly enjoyed this. The combination of some totally sympathetic characters, a gentle and moving love story and a good dose of horror is pretty compelling.

There are some established elements of horror here, the old house, left by a deceased relative, the small village where everyone knows everyone else and people who have lived there for 20 years are still outsiders. Selling something to a demon, and the consequences thereof. And they are dealt with very effectively, its scary.

There is also a gentle and moving love story between Cohen and Niall, which I found incredibly moving, I can't remember that last time I cared for a character as much as I did for Cohen, his honesty and integrity was beautiful. JKP writes him as a geeky self conscious man, but it was wonderful to read about a character who was beautiful because of what was within, as opposed to a description of physicality. What I particularly enjoyed was Cohen's acceptance of himself.

The book starts with a bang, and then gently builds up, there is a pervasive feeling of how can this be resolved, that hangs over the last 30%, but it is. And successfully.

While I don't believe that a sequel is on the cards, I would defiantly read one, and will be looking out for more from the author.

Meredith Katz says

To Summon Nightmares by J.K. Pendragon was pretty much everything I wanted to read when I started it a few days ago and then it just kept right on being everything I wanted at all times. I came home and rambled about it excitedly to my wife every evening (and, sometimes, texted her on my lunch break too).

It's a paranormal story: Two boys, Jacky and Niall, are lovers. Still teenagers, they struggle with how to deal with Jacky's abusive father and ultimately decide the best option is to summon a demon. Needless to say, the situation gets *more* than out of hand. Some years and a point of view shift later, we meet Cohen Brandwein, a popular author and internet vlog celebrity, who is moving to his aunt's old house in a countryside town to try to get away from the stress of the media's negative reaction to his coming out as trans. Little does he realize that he's walking right into the middle of a horrifying set of serial murders, nor that the prime suspect is a hunky, self-admitted witch named Niall...

I *loved* both Niall and Cohen. Niall's bravery and determination to do the right thing while agonizing over his sense of responsibility and lingering love is very tangible, but he's kept from being a tortured love interest by

both his sort of strange sense of being slightly *off* after everything that happened and also his blushing excitability (I was *completely* charmed by his being one of Cohen's fans and trying to play off how starstruck he was). And Cohen was a *delight* as a point of view character. He was the perfect mix of reasonable but not gullible, clever and understandably dubious, risk-taking but with clear limits. He came to life in so many little ways—his decision to walk into town to get gas for his new car, and ending up sweaty and wheezing and Regretting yet still *committed to this mission because dammit he started it* was just. I feel you, dude, I feel you. It was a delight to get to read about him navigating through a mix of dealing with his family, his new neighbours, a new crush and, you know, horrible murders. And he and Niall were *really* sweet together.

Add to that a deeply enjoyable plot with a complex entanglement of risks and sacrifices all woven together with a really strong narrative voice, and Pendragon sold me not only on this but on picking up everything else of theirs. The only thing I found an odd choice (and even then, didn't dislike, and it certainly doesn't impact my rating) was having a complete point of view switch. I found myself wanting to get back into Niall's head more, having already been there once, to get the full picture from both sides. That said, I still loved everything we got.

It's been a few years since Pendragon wrote this, but I sincerely hope they do a sequel someday, because I will read it in a *heartbeat*. I want to see how Niall adjusts to his own [spoiler], and, of course, how Cohen reacts to [much bigger spoiler]. Because damn, that ending!

Izzy says

4.75*

What a child might use as a toy, an adult would use as a weapon...

This story could be seen as a cautionary tale about being careful what you wish for. I read 'To Summon Nightmares' with great enjoyment and relish. The story is intriguing, the characters likewise intriguing, interesting and likeable. The pace of the book and the created atmosphere means the reader is always slightly off balance, anything can happen and probably will.

Set in an alternate reality where magic exists unknown to society, and a shady organisation governs those who have and use magic. This organisation has become corrupt at the top levels and two young men, Niall and Jacky, are kept and tortured by the 'Guild', following an 'incident' when they were sixteen. Their story is one thread of this novel, which eventually entwines with the story of Cohen.

Cohen Brandwein is a trans* man who has 'escaped', from the comforting world of his family in Dublin to transition, and discover if he can survive by himself. He inherits a large old house, in a small Irish town from an aunt who was thrilled when he became a young published author. His books, a fantasy series, are very popular, but Cohen has also made videos for You Tube in which he has detailed his thoughts, as a young trans* man on his path to transition. These have become very helpful to, and popular with, his readers. I love the character of Cohen he is kind, sensible, brave and although he has such needs, he is never needy. The writing that details the pain and anxiety, surrounding his gender dysphoria, is so heart wrenchingly real it made me cry.

Stories entwine when Niall saves Cohen from a rain soaked walk, when his lawyer fails to pick him up from the train station. Unable to gain access to the inherited house, Cohen stays the night at Niall's and life will

never be the same for either of them.

This novel is so much more than the sum of its parts. It is a romance, and one in which the relationship, and especially the sex scene, is very sensitively and believably written. It is a mystery, as there are murders occurring in this small town, and Niall is the main suspect in the beginning. It is fantasy, and contains magic with references to myth and legend. However, the story also includes small town prejudices, family and individual struggles with gender identity, moral dilemmas regarding the common good and magical battles.

The author subverts gender norms and stereotypes with aplomb and it is a joy to read. I suspect it could have been a temptation to some authors to make the young trans* man the weaker of a couple, emotionally as well as physically, but J.K. Pendragon does not fall into this marketing trap. Cohen is mentally very strong and has had to be all his young life. Niall is the more lean muscled gay man with the power, but he leans on Cohen for much of the book both for emotional support, and for moral direction. The more I write for this review the more I see in this novel. A must read.

Elizabetha says

3.5 stars

It's all a bit improbable.

But it *is* a story about magic, after all.

Cohen is the unsuspecting new guy in a creepy small town somewhere in Ireland. He just moved into a dank and creepy house. His inheritance from a recently deceased aunt. Cohen is a popular online writer and videographer. He's looking for peace and quiet, needs to write that next book and escape the hordes. Ever since he came out online as trans, he's been too much in the spotlight.

The story starts with a conjuring, some five years in the past. Two teens, Niall and Jacky need help from a powerful demon. These two have some capacity for magic but do they really know what to do with it?

Improbable, yeah, but I just went with it. The author had me in the palm of their hand with this one. I just never knew quite where it was going. What is the connection? -- between magic and a young trans man who desperately wants the right body to live in? It becomes clear as you read. What a clever way to delve into the dilemma.

An odd, trip of a story... Witches, monsters, a serial killer, lots of bloody gore, all-round creepiness...

... but what makes it special is the treatment of Cohen. This is my first romance with a trans main character. And what a compelling guy... kind-hearted, generous, sweet, courageous... The story also digs into Cohen's pervasive feelings of dysphoria, as he calls it. His constant fight with depression. Of his longing to feel comfortable, within himself and without, but always feeling inadequate. His longing for a body that matches who he is inside. It never feels manipulative or laid-on-too-thick. It touched my heart.

"Cohen had never had a boyfriend before, and he'd never allowed himself to think that he might... he'd

identified as a lesbian and had a string of girlfriends before ever coming out as trans. He'd always known he was bi, really, but he'd also always felt like gay men were unattainable to him, like he was an imposter for even being attracted to them."

When Cohen meets Niall in that remote village it does seem improbable. Their connection is immediate; their relationship takes off suddenly. But why not? They are two lonely souls who desperately need physical connection and acceptance. They fit together.

When Cohen gets the incredible chance to set everything right, he makes an important decision. An ‘ah-ha’ moment that illuminates his waking nightmare-- his twist between self-hate and self-love-- and his depth of character.

I have to recommend this (please heed the tags). For Cohen. To Cohen.

(The ending is totally WTF, though-- it seems that the creepiness wins out. I'm so wondering what is up next.)

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher/author in exchange for an honest review. For this and other reviews, author interviews, and general fabulousness, visit **Love Bytes**:

Lore Graham says

To Summon Nightmares is a solid romance with strong elements of mystery and fantasy. The protagonist, Cohen, is a transgender man who has just recently come out. While I'm transgender myself, I'm confident that this story is accessible to readers who may be less familiar with trans issues.

Both Cohen and his love interest are likable characters with their own struggles. The plot moves along, perhaps a bit quickly at times, but never growing dull or aimless. While I labeled this book fantasy for my records, it's set in the modern world (specifically in Ireland), with magic being a rare, unusual, and hidden thing.

Cohen's gender and transition was handled extremely well. Since he was the narrator, we saw and felt dysphoria, misgendering, and harassment from his perspective, communicated in an effective but not over-the-top way. The amount of emphasis on his gender felt appropriate. The book neither shied away from the unfortunate realities of being trans in a world where many people are still hostile to trans folk, but it also didn't turn Cohen into a tragic figure who was constantly crippled by gender-related misfortune.

My only complaint with the story is that for the first two chapters, I had no idea how the story related to what was promised in the book's description. I kept looking at the back to ensure I had the right book, and flipped through it to see if I could find the protagonist's name in it later. Either the description or structure of the book should have been tweaked, since I think it would have discouraged me if I hadn't already read stories by this author.

Overall, I would definitely recommend *To Summon Nightmares*. They aren't nearly enough stories with trans protagonists that aren't solely about their transgender experience, and this book does an excellent job.

Eli says

Things I like about this book:

**Cohen*. The main character delights. He fills the "ordinary-person-discovers-magical-underworld" trope, and what makes him a rare gem is that he's still ordinary after he finds out. He doesn't fulfil a prophecy or discover latent magic or an aptitude for weapons. He's in over his head, and sometimes he makes bad decisions because he doesn't know what he's doing. That feels very real to me. I appreciate Pendragon's handling of Cohen's dysphoria, though I wish even passing mention had been made of the fact that every trans* person experiences and deals with dysphoria in their own way.

**The pacing*. For 90% of the book, both the action plot and the romance plot move at a believable pace, and Pendragon does a nice job of making each plot integral to the other.

**The love story*. Though I would've liked to get to know present-day Niall better, given what we learned of his past, making him something of a cipher makes sense. I'm kind of over the "mysterious guy with a tortured past" trope, but Pendragon rescues Niall by maintaining his ability for empathy and keeping his "self-sacrificing idiot" quotient low.

Things that didn't work for me:

**The order of scenes* (aka "the other 10% of pacing"). While I don't adhere to the rule that the love interests must meet on page one, we don't meet Cohen, the purported MC, until *a third of the way through the book*. I really struggled with this and almost abandoned the book several times because of it. IMO, this book would be stronger if it started with Cohen on the train and meeting Niall at the station and we got the rest in flashback later. This would introduce the MC faster and heighten and prolong the mystery of What's Up With Niall. A win-win.

**The math*. The book never specifies how many books Cohen's published. It's at least two, and I infer three, because of how well-known they are *as a series*. But paper book publishing is a *glacially* slow process--especially if he's working with one of the Big 6, which he would almost have to be to gain the kind of international notoriety he seems to have.* So unless "The books I wrote when I was 16," means he wrote all three books in one year, I can't swallow that he's had time to: write and publish three books; rise to international acclaim; come out as trans*; fall out of public favor; AND make the decision to retreat to the country by age 19. It wasn't a constant problem, but every time someone mentioned Cohen's writing career, "doing the math" threw me out of the story.

**Cohen's deal with the Titan*. Yeah, I said I like that Cohen makes mistakes, but if ever there were a time for him to get his shit together, this was it. He *had a Titan* under his command. If Jacky could've used the Titan to destroy the Guild, and Cohen used them to alter the Guild's memory of Niall, why not make the Titan create a change of heart (and practice) for the Guild? It can still police the magical world, but without the unfeeling consequentialism of its current practices. Even granted that Cohen didn't have a lot of time to plan, his list of demands still feels like the contents of my shopping cart look when I go to the store hungry and without a list.

**The ending*. OMG, THE ENDING. This book was released on 11/4/14, so I *really* hope a sequel is in the works, because THE ENDING. (view spoiler) An abrupt and unsatisfying conclusion--unless we'll be seeing more of these guys in the future, which I would certainly welcome.

Kathleen says

Tags: Gay, Fantasy, Trans, Explicit, Graphic Violence, Scenes of Self-Harm/Cutting (From Publisher)

The story begins with Niall and Jacky as teenagers. They are trying to summon a demon in order to have the power to stop Jacky's Dad from abusing him. The ritual works but there are consequences that neither could have anticipated. Namely, The Guild. They end up spending the next five years in a Guild facility undergoing tests. Eventually, they are able to escape but Jacky has become so angry that Niall and he end up splitting ways. Niall settles down to a life of hiding and anonymity in a small town. Everything seems to be going well until bodies start showing up - bodies he is pretty sure Jacky is making.

Enter Cohen. Cohen is a writer who is overwhelmed by all the press and family pressures after coming out as trans. He is having the epitome of a horrible, terrible, no good, very bad day when he is dropped off at tiny train station, in the rain and his ride doesn't show up. He is met by Niall who gives him a ride home. Cohen ends up being Niall's alibi when he is suspected of the murders Jacky is committing. Cohen and Niall bond as Niall reveals his past and Cohen helps him to make some difficult decisions regarding his old friend.

This book was very exciting. I read it as a serial on the Less Than Three Press website and every week, I waited with baited breath for the next installment. J.K. Pendragon did a lovely job weaving the relationship and emotional plots with the action and magic plots. It never felt bogged down by one or the other. Furthermore, both characters felt very authentic and neither were easy characters to write. On the one hand, Niall is trying to decide what to do about a murderous friend with the full knowledge that stopping means giving up his life (to death or imprisonment). On the other hand, Cohen is dealing with dysphoria and a growing attraction that he isn't always sure what to do with.

One of my favorite parts about this book is the ending. I'm not going to say much about it because that would be more spoilers than I would ever want in a review. Just know that the day is saved in a way I did not expect. Also, the last paragraph was golden. I am hoping it means there might be a sequel but even if there is not, I love the feeling that we got to travel with these two on a very important part of their journey but their journey is far from over.

The only warnings are those stated in the tags. Especially if Self-Harm is a trigger for you, you might want to avoid this or have someone you trust read it first and let you know what parts to skip over. Other than that, I would definitely recommend this book. I give it 4 Stars.

For more of my reviews, visit my blog, Romancing the Word

willful says

(This is an edited review, because my original arc of the book had a major error. Reviewed from an e-arc provided by NetGalley)

3 1/2 stars. At 16, Niall helped his lover Jacky raise a demon, hoping to save him from his abusive father.

Instead, both boys wound up endowed with frightening power, with their relationship permanently disrupted and a government agency called The Guild after them. Niall is hiding out in Ireland when he meets Cohen, a young trans man who's beginning to physically transition and needs time away from his family. It could not be a worse time to find a new love, because Jacky is out for revenge against the Guild, and he has no scruples whatsoever about achieving his goal.

I haven't read many books with trans* characters and I appreciated finding one which isn't *about* the character's gender identity, although of course it's a very important aspect of his life. I don't know enough to say whether the portrayal of Cohen is accurate, but it felt very real and created a lot of empathy in me for him. I would have liked to see the rest of the story fleshed out more -- it's a little short and thin for the complex issues it raises, and the ending is quite abrupt.

Meł says

This was just great! I thoroughly enjoyed reading 'To Summon Nightmares'. It was so easy to read, suspenseful, romantic and sweet, and had great characters.

Not only the protagonists were immensely lovable and three-dimensionally crafted, I thought it was remarkable that the two adversaries in the book had a lot of depth to them, too. They were both tragic figures, but villainous still. I actually loved that I had to make up my mind if I considered them evil or not.

Cohen and Niall are very sweet together and made for a great counterpoint to the scary, gory parts. I loved how they started their relationship, how it processed, and how Cohen's issues with being transgender did not magically disappear.

I also found the suspense plot to be believable, awful, and entertaining. I had actually started the book once when I was in the mood for something 'harmless', but had to put it aside. This time I was in the mood, and wasn't disappointed :D

I could relate to and understand the protagonists's struggles and actions. The ending... was a little WTF, but after thinking about it some more, I think it is a happy ending with a promise of an interesting future. (view spoiler)

I think it was absolutely amazing how the author wrote this lovable transgender character who was a hero and not a victim, but still had and has to figure things out.

I am looking very much forward to more books by this author. Recommended :D

Oh, I forgot. Gosh, can these two kiss. *melts*

Kira says

This book is like a skeleton of the story or a small painting done with very big strokes where you can't see any details. It also has a pretty misleading summary, so if, like me, you didn't look how it was usually shelved as, you should know that it's paranormal, not contemporary. I was hooked in by a prospect of a bestselling writer who happens to be trans, but instead I've got a trans person who, as it mentioned several

times, happens to be a writer. The circumstances of his career, family or transition are really vague. We don't even meet Cohen till chapter 3, and I had to check a couple of times before that to see if I bought the right book.

I'm not saying I don't like books with magic, but it was startling and, like the writer thing, didn't really live up to its potential. There're a lot of blanks to fill in, about magic and the Guild, about Niall and Cohen and their life before they meet. Cohen experiences as a trans person are detailed, and it is clear that this topic is dear to the author, but the rest was at times so sketchy, it felt like a trans self-help book.

There was also a pretty big plot twist in the last couple of paragraphs that turns the ending into a cliff-hanger. Seeing as the author doesn't plan to continue the story, I'm left scratching my head. Was that really necessary? This book leaves too much to our imagination as it is.

Overall, it was an okay read, but more as an educational book, not a real, full-fledged story.

Alison says

I loved this novella. It's got magic and love and murder and some quite creepy stuff and two lovely, very human Irish guys, one of whom is trans (and bi and Jewish, and the other one is vegetarian--score for diversity!). It's a vivid, exciting story and I thought it was very well done. I really liked the characters and their relationship and I loved how the gender stuff was written--it seemed honest and it was quite moving at times. This is a big story in a small package. I might even say it's much too short, but it's a fast, gripping, and enjoyable read. Plus, the ending is cool. Recommended.

K.J. Charles says

Absolutely cracking. Loved Cohen, a terrific character, brave and vulnerable and very human. Cohen is trans, which is not the greatest of his troubles in this book, and the way his gender dysphoria is portrayed is amazing. I don't know a lot about this but it was written in an extremely powerful and convincing way, all the more so because it wasn't the main focus of the book.

I wanted this to be longer! Why do all the best books I've read recently run short while the world is full of 800pp behemoths that I don't want to read?

Lovely use of magic. Great atmosphere. Niall wasn't as fully characterised as Cohen but a very likeable hero indeed, the sex was really well done, and the horror really creepy. The author controls the points of view very well, with a few necessary shifts done in a way that isn't confusing or head hoppy.

(NB Don't be put off by a couple of editing fails if you download the sample first, it's absolutely fine in the majority of the book.)

A strong, vivid author with a lot to say, and I hope they relax into a longer book next time to give the worldbuilding more chance to breathe. Very good stuff.

Shira Glassman says

This book in one sentence: (mostly secular) bi Jewish trans man vs. his new gentile boyfriend's Scary Past with the Occult.

I don't read a whole lot of horror/paranormal/urban fantasy, so as an outsider there I can speak to the clear and easy to follow worldbuilding of this book's magic systems, government entities, etc. In other words, if you're here for the Jewishness or the written-from-a-trans-author transness, don't be scared off by the whole 'summoning demons' and 'government conspiracy' angles. And if you're here *for* that, well, I think you'll find it well constructed!

Warning for violence, minor character deaths, self-harm/dysphoria, and some random microaggressions/misgendering.

Ami says

Once again, Pendragon started out so well, but had faltered by the end. There were too many unanswered questions, not enough characters were fleshed out well and the end was incredibly rushed. This is a tale that would have done better in the telling with at least a hundred more pages. And a much better synopsis on the cover; this is certainly not what I would term a mystery.

Pam Faste aka Peejakers says

Wow, fantastically gripping story! Once I started reading, I couldn't drag myself away; I found myself wanting to tear through the book to find out what happens with the suspense & horror elements of the story, yet reigning myself in to properly appreciate the characterizations & relationships & all the other great parts of this story.

I really liked Cohen & the story of his developing relationship with Niall. Cohen was an intensely sympathetic character & the parts about his gender dysphoria were so emotionally affecting; it wrung my heart to read them. Cohen is a young trans man & the moving story of the challenges he faces based on that, physically, psychologically & socially, and the courage with which he deals with all of it, would make this a book well worth reading for that reason alone. But there is also romance, horror, suspense & magic! What's not to love?!

Niall is a sympathetic character as well, but it's Cohen who formed the heart of this story for me. Their romance is fraught with difficulty for multiple reasons & his dysphoria makes sex with Niall quite scary for Cohen, particularly as (view spoiler) but their relationship is really quite moving & lovely & warm.

The suspense is really just riveting. One morning it took me over an hour to prepare a simple breakfast because my eyes were so glued to my Kindle; I didn't want to wait one extra second to find out what came next ;-) There are also some truly horrifying, even gruesome scenes involving the supernatural, but always intrinsic to the plot. And there is some just plain deliciously scary-descriptive writing. Like this: "The beast drew breath, and smoke and fire and death bellowed forth from its glowing centre." Omg! *shudders happily*

There is also witchcraft & magic! Spells great & small, much of it dark & frightening, but some of it just plain wonderful. For the big stuff there is one fantastic scene involving two major characters (view spoiler) that I totally loved; it was absolutely cinematic :-) For the smaller stuff, I was utterly romanced by a (view spoiler) Eee! Talk about hard acts to follow!

I will leave the balance of plot description to the blurb & other reviewers. But I really enjoyed this book & will be looking forward to reading more from this author.

As a caveat, readers should bear in mind this is not pure romance but a horror story that contains romance, so bear in mind with regard to the ending (view spoiler)
