Kate Daniels Series

The Kate Daniels series is a note-worthy novel series by Ilona Andrews. The series is a fascinating hodgepodge of genres. Though it is most often labeled an urban fantasy, it also applies to the genres of action, mythology, science fiction, humor, and even romance. This writing choice of pressing a bunch of genres together often results in catastrophe, but Andrews’ series is one of the few that got a gem out of it. One of the series’ strongest points of interest is the witty and realistic humor; though the sheer amount of research the writer has done to form the intricate and intertwining dimensions of the series’ classic fantasy creatures and cultures is what pulls it through for most.

One of the first skills I look for in a fantasy or science-fiction author is world-building. Is the world the author depicts complex, but believable? Is justification provided for the more incredulous readers? Was any effort put in at all? World building is shown throughout the series to be a definite strength of Andrews. The world she built is one of fantastical creatures blooming in a realistic modern America. However, for a modern fantasy, many authors use the excuse of “It just happened.” To explain away the creation of their world. Not Andrews. A detailed backstory is given not just to the plot and the character, but to the world itself. Though the magic growing in this universe is quite new, only spanning two generations, it’s magical history spans back to an era before humanity. Magic existed long ago, an like a pendulum, power was shifted from it to technology. This is a tip of the hat to our own time and culture. And when a pendulum swings one way, it must swing back. The plot of the series takes place during this swing, when magic is steadily gaining control over technology. It is even insinuated throughout the series that this back and forth will someday, in the near-infinite future, come to an end, leaving a calm balance between the two forces. At no point in the series is the excuse of “cuz magic!” used. Everything has an explanation (exempting, of course, a couple one-liners about a pile of slime on the street or such). The only flaw in Andrews’ world-building is the sheer volume of it. She takes cryptids, folklore, mythology, and culture from sources all over the world. This can make keeping up with them throughout the series a bit difficult and more than a smidge messy.

What else is important in any story, be it any genre, even non-fiction? It’s characters, of course. The main character of this series, Kate Daniels. I consider Kate as my favorite character of all time. Oftentimes, authors must make a choice between creating a strong heroine or making one that is relatable to the reader. Andrews broke through this line with a sledgehammer. Kate is an inspirational character in that she both has a highly-relatable personality, with fears and temptations most people would align with, and she is a bad-ass. My only issue with this amazing character is the fact that she is a bit over-powered at times. There are moments in the series that let off a juvenile “the power was in you all along” vibe, which can be off-putting to an adult reader. Despite this, a mass-majority of Kate’s numerous accomplishments are achieved through a mixture of hard work and sheer bull-headedness, making the reader root for her every step of the way. Her development as a character is also complex and slow. One realizes after three books that a prime trait of hers has drastically changed, having happened so slowly and naturally that it’s easy to miss. Despite making drastic changes to the character, Andrews made certain that these changes would not be unrealistic in a real person. Overall, the main character of thee series is a prime example of character design done right.

Let’s not forget the other characters now! The Kate Daniels series boasts a multitude of brilliant and interesting characters, most of which I could realistically imagine meeting on the street. It also provides a powerful main antagonist that is slowly humanized and humbled in the eyes of the reader, along with various sub-villains that readers love to hate. Despite rooting against them every step of the way, I often found myself wishing in slow moments for a glimpse of that one beautifully horrid villain of the arc. Every side-character also provided support or guidance in some way for the protagonist while maintaining a sense of individuality and motive. There was at one point a character introduced as a crude sub-antagonist that left me a sobbing mess when he died a few chapters later. The best characters of a novel are established by a reader’s emotional attachment to them, and Andrews provides these characters in spades.

Any story, no matter how good it is, will leave readers with fading attention if not maintained by an appropriate pace and tone. For me, this shines through in the series’ action scenes. These scenes are vivid, yet without fanfare. The point is reached with just enough detail to make a reader feel engaged in what’s happening. They also show the subtle weaknesses of various characters. As I’ve said, the humor is witty and realistic, but this humor can be pushed at times. There are moments that left me thinking “Very funny, but can we get on with it now?”. Andrews shows her own weakness in knowing exactly when to switch the tone from humorous to serious, though she has improved this skill throughout the series.

As a general statement, I would recommend this series to anyone above the age of 18. If you’re bored of the generic fantasy or sci-fi novels, or want a read that will make you fall absolutely in love with the characters, or even just want to experience a realistic bad-ass heroine, this is the series for you. However, if you’re a lover of the classics or are sensitive to offense, this wouldn’t be the best choice of a read. Even if you’re not one for fantasy of apocalyptic genres, this series is worth a read for its sheer uniqueness. Though it does have its hiccups, this is my favorite literary series for a reason.

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