



The Scholomance

R. Lee Smith

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For centuries, there has been a legend of a hidden school where magic is taught by the demons who dwell there to anyone who seeks them out, but they ask a terrible price: Anyone who reaches the door of the Scholomance may enter, but the Devil takes every tenth student who tries to leave.

A hidden school. Demonic masters. An inescapable fate for one out of every ten graduates. But Connie would do anything to have the magic her best friend was born with.

And Mara would do anything to get Connie back.

The Scholomance Details

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From Reader Review The Scholomance for online ebook

Sophia Triad says

You may call me naïve, but I thought that this would be a magical book about a magic school that resembles Hogwards but for grown up readers. A dark, doomed, not innocent school near Bucharest, located inside a mountain, with demons as teachers, with talented cruel adults as students.

Thus, I was really excited before I started this story.

But not for long.

I suppose my main issue (which I suppose it was an issue for the most people who read this book) is the main female character aka Mara: A young really gifted with mental power girl who is looking for her best friend, Connie. Connie wanted to become powerful, so she started attending this magic school and she disappeared from Mara's life until she sends a letter crying for help. So, Mara runs to find her friend and she ends up as prisoner/student in the school of magic.

Mara. I have read five books by R.Lee Smith, this is by far the most annoying main female character. She tries to pose as a kick ass, powerful, strong-minded heroine. She manages to look like a pathetic, cold-hearted bitch who is angry with everything and everyone and for no particular reason.

I did not like getting lost inside her head and her Panic Room. I did not like listening to her thoughts and her reasoning.

Kazuul. The main male character is weak - although he tries to be (unconvincingly) a strong demon. He does not have the substance and the personality of Kane, Meoraq, Azrael, Sanford.

The secondary characters are actually more interesting:

-The follower and wannabe best friend Devlin (the 'humorous' parts of the book).

-The professor and mentor Horuseps (the 'explanatory' parts of the book)

Moreover, the pace of the book is really slow and the way the demons talk does not help. Lots of "thou" and "thee" and "thy". I wanted to bang my head on the wall every time a demon was talking.

The mystery about the disappearance of the best friend which covers the majority of the book, after a while is not really important. Every time Mara was asking 'where is my best friend, I know she is alive', I was thinking 'yeah, yeah whatever...'

The most interesting parts of the book are actually the description of the school, the inside mountain, the caverns, the cells where the students are sleeping, the Great Library, the theatres, the labyrinth, the lyceum, the chambers, the dining hall.

Overall a really weak book. Unimportant characters. Uninteresting story. I was expecting something that would push my morality and ethical boundaries as it usually happens with Smith's books. Instead I was just bored.

The answers in the end of the book about what happened to Connie and who really Mara is, they did not satisfy me and they did not convince me. I felt that everything was left unfinished.

Nicola says

I loved Heat and read on a blog that The Scholomance had the same feel to it... but it lacked the humanity factor needed to make me feel for the characters. This seems a pointless criticism since many of the characters aren't human, and their demon nature is explicitly depicted on purpose, but without any emotional pull I didn't find myself caring whether the main character died at the end or even on the next page. Mara is a sociopath and devoid of any feeling, even physical pain, and is so all-powerful that she's impossible to relate to in any way other than breathing. The side characters meant to add humility and humanity aren't featured as POV and thus they too lose their relatability when shown through Mara's eyes. I think Smith has a wonderful way of slowly unraveling rich plot devices and keeping the reader hooked even when there's nothing the reader can pinpoint as 'the hook'. I found myself reading to the last page because the writing is excellent even if the book was missing the heart and soul I've read in Heat and The Care and Feeding of Griffins. Smith can play with demons and aliens and world-bending until I'm knee-deep in creep, I love her style, just as long as she brings it back to 'human level' every now and then, like she did using the characters of Taryn and Lindaria. Mara just wasn't the best lead to make this novel come to life, but it wasn't a total train wreck.

Choko says

*** 2.45 ***

This is a very hard book to review. The main reason is the fact that I actually hated the story and strongly disliked the main female protagonist, if such she can be called. However, I try never to rate on personal emotions alone, so I have to admit that the author is actually a brilliant wordsmith! I would probably appreciate anything written by her, but this story made me feel ... not-human... It was cold, cruel, and so disconcertingly disconnected from all that is humanity, that I felt ... diminished as a human being... I experienced such weird emotions by this, that I am not sure I can explain verbally all I feel. I had nightmares for days, and it had nothing to do with the killing and gore as such, but by the way that killing and tortures were perceived as ... normal and every-day by all, including our protagonist... Things that were startling and hurtful to my soul were just pedestrian in this story...

So, once more, a very, very talented author with a very disturbing to me personally story, reminding me once more I should stick with romance novels:):):) One thing is for sure though, if the author was trying to create a story which would stick with you, mission accomplished - I will never forget this one!

Steelwhisper says

This is much like the other Smith books an incredibly elaborate, tall tale with wonderful worldbuilding. There was a decidedly strong heroine, and two rather engaging heroes both vying for her in what wasn't really a love triangle.

Yet while I have to start out with a full 5* I quickly and irreparably had to deduct 2* for something I find loathsome and extremely unerotic to read: angry sex. And this book had practically nothing but angry sex-- except for two instances of cheating sex.

I noticed that above all the US American culture appears to be fascinated with angry sex and sex per se and for itself, but nothing could be less erotic for me. I never slept with anyone I was angry with--ever. It didn't

even remotely cross my mind to do so. I don't intend to ever do it either. The very thought makes me want to puke and curls my toes in distaste.

So, while there was the usual, copious amount of sex in this book that you find with this author, I actively disliked reading these angry sex scenes.

Still, the worldbuilding was a blast, the last revelation a real revelation and punch, and the whole an entertaining journey. For once the romance in this was no romance for me, though, and the sex largely distasteful.

Pam Godwin says

Welcome to the Scholomance. This isn't a nursery school. It attracts the most depraved humans. Shoving fellow applicants off a Romanian cliff increases the odds of admittance. Tuition is affordable too. That is, if your life has little value.

This is a trippy but effective shock-suspense horror about a psychic girl on the hunt for her "missing friend, her best, her only friend." The sick sympathy this book extends to its heartless anti-hero, Mara, separates it millions of worlds away from the traditional hero/villain horror fantasy. Often, it's inappropriately sensual in a beastly-eel-penis kind of way. Sometimes, it's overwrought in a repetitive kind of way. And once in a while, it's shockingly touching.

RLS uses the densely mysterious plot to create a tucked away world packed with unforgiving rules, sadistic magic, and terrifying demons with myriad attributes, such as quills, horns, countless eyes, and overlong arms that cling to the memory even if you don't want them to.

This exploration into the darkest, filthiest tunnels of the demons' mountain is just as easily a study of the suppressed depth of Mara's true identity. With her knife cut white eyes, she wades through a savage student body and a pompous clergy of demon Masters, panning their nonsensical and frightening truths. Bold, even for a horror novel, it's a touch slow in the middle, but its mission glows like a beacon throughout. Find her friend. Get the hell out of Dodge.

Engrossing, different, and very long, this book is poised to reach a narrower audience with its horrific, creepy-crawly tour of the rectum-like passages of the Scholomance, which are vast, dark and skin-slithering alive, by the way. It's not a gore-fest, but you might feel like taking a shower when you're finished. And in the same spirit as RLS' Heat, you might fall in love with the cruel monsters against your best judgement. Really, it's hard to dislike a book in which the fearsome demon consistently asks, "Shall I disrobe?"

Sh3llraiser (grumpybookgrrrl) says

[fucking (hide spoiler)]

Holly says

My least favorite R. Lee Smith book so far but I still enjoyed it. The author has said the book came to her

from a nightmare and having read it I can totally see it. The book is twisted and gets more so throughout. I was on board with the plot for the first 25%. The middle 50% I got a bit worn down by all the angst. The book felt like it was dragging on. Things picked up by the end and I was blind sided by the twist ending. Maybe I should have- but I did not see what was coming. The final chapter was so nicely written it made up for a lot of the middle.

Having read Gann and Arcadia (loving them all) this book didn't have enough romance for me. One of my favorite things about her other books was how human she makes these very non-human characters feel. The relationships that build out of her books are deeper than most I've ever read about before. This book dealt with demons and they were so alien in nature that I couldn't quite connect with them.

Interesting read.

Vernieda says

I actually had to create a new genre shelf for this book! (Ero-guro.)

Books like this one are the reason why self-publishing should exist as a viable venue, imo. These are the books that just too risky and too strange for a mainstream publisher (from the NYC Big 6 to the smallest e-pub) to take a chance on. It's also not easily categorized so marketing would be a nightmare. If I had to pick a genre for Scholomance though, I'd choose horror.

I would never say the writing here (on a technical, quality level) is good. It's not. It's far more tell-y and introspective than I prefer. And yet I could not stop reading because the main character, Mara, is so compelling. I couldn't care less that I'd just spent the time reading 10 pages about her homicidal rage.

As a protagonist, Mara disproves the notion that your main character must be likable or even sympathetic. She's not. She's a sociopath. But it was fascinating to read about her. There are so many books that *tell* us someone is a sociopath. That word is never used to describe Mara but you know it -- in the way she views the world, the callous way she thinks about people, in her lack of reaction or connection to other people.

I don't think I've read a book quite like this before. There's an intensity to it that I like in my fiction, and it leads you down dark places. There was a point in the book where I worried that we'd be heading down the cliché route but we never did. Mara is never broken. She's never "tamed." She remains a monster to the end.

What I liked best though was despite her monstrous nature, Mara would do anything for her best (and only) friend, Connie. She travels halfway across the world for her. She tears apart a mountain trying to find her. To me, that particular storyline, especially its conclusion, was very beautiful. No seriously, Kazuul, the demon that tries to claim Mara as his lover, is completely jealous about her relationship with Connie. Because even though Mara does not love in any recognizable human way, she places Connie above everything else in this world.

There is a lot of sex in this book, and definitely not vanilla sex either. Or even consensual, for that matter. I didn't find it titillating or even gratuitous, but your mileage may vary. If you're interested in reading this book but have triggers, feel free to ask me about content! I would never send anyone into this book unaware. Parts of it are disturbing and parts of it are definitely grotesque. Parts of it remind me of the Hellraiser movies. Other parts reminds me of darker hentai titles like Bible Black.

All that said, I don't think it approaches the level of nightmare fuel as Junji Ito's works. Again, your mileage

may vary. I'm well aware of the fact that my tastes run dark. Definitely worth checking out if this sounds interesting to you. I'm going to try out *Heat*, another book by this author next.

ETA: Here's a link to January's review, which has more info about the plot since tbh, the cover copy is really kinda terrible. I do kind of agree with Courtney Milan's comment that I would have liked Mara with the other demon but I do think she ended up with the "right" one.

SubterraneanCatalyst says

This is my least favorite book of Smith's and I believe I have now officially read all of them.

Don't get me wrong- not only did I enjoy this but I laughed many times reading this book which is typical when I read Smith, and Mara is definitely a very interesting heroine. One thing I enjoy about reading Smith is that her characters don't just talk the talk- they walk the walk. What I mean by this is there are a lot of PNR authors that want their heroine to be all "badassy" and they sashay around in leather and can command any male within a five mile radius because of their sexiness. Mara is deadly, she's single minded and she's going to get what she plans on getting (in this case to retrieve her only beloved friend in her life from the Scholomance school) no matter WHAT IT TAKES.

I also agree with other reviewers who think that Mara is a sociopath. At the very least her character has strong sociopathic tendencies. I guess it doesn't disgust me because after a lifetime of strong innate telepathy from birth what kind of person do you think that produces? I feel her attitude in life is befitting her circumstances and frankly sometimes it's a relief to read a character that isn't necessarily going to save every kitten crossing the road. Mara is entertaining! She is cold, she is petty, selfish. Her one memory of ever appearing a beautifully genuinely good person is the memory of her best friend's thoughts. Her girlhood BFF had one shining thought of what Mara appears to her and Mara has held on to that moment her entire life. It is the memory she breaks out any moment she feels herself a heartless monster- she examines this memory and comforts herself, yes I do have a heart.

My main issue with this book is that it does tend to drag on. Once Mara arrives at the Scholomance we get to the point somewhere in her lessons there where we have to ask...umm the search, lets get this search going on. Pretty Please.

None of the books Smith has written are suitable for the feint of heart and this book is definitely hard core in terms of violence, sexual assault, gore, horror, violence, and just plain human ugliness. In fact, Smith is so good at going no holds barred regarding the petty trashiness of a human soul it makes me wonder about her! (I'm just kidding!)

So despite the fact that it's my least favorite- it's a good book. It just had moments during which I wondered how long is this going to last which is unusual for me when reading Smith. Usually when I pick up a book of hers I read it nonstop and cannot put it down and lose sleep. This took me about a week to read. I had a better review written in my head, but: Skyrim. :p

Jessie Morgan says

OMG, what to say about this story. I think I have just been sold as an R. Lee Smith fan for life.

Mara is not your ordinary heroine. She is antisocial, reserved, hard as nails and a powerful psychic to boot.

Her only real emotional weakness comes in her affection for her best friend since childhood, the only person in Mara's life who has ever really loved her, Connie. Then Connie disappears and one day Mara gets a letter. In its totality, it reads: 'South of Altenmunster. West of Lake Teufelsee. Look for the door on Halloween night ONLY. I was wrong about this place. Please come and get me.'

And so, Mara goes to Romania, fully intending to rescue her best friend. And like the Terminator another reviewer compared her to, Mara pursues this single-minded goal with unstoppable devotion, taking the reader on a oftentimes horrific journey through the Devil's School, a place where only the worst among men go to learn the kinds of magic that only demons teach.

It took me all weekend to read this book, and I did it in true Smith style--totally engrossed from page one, The Scholomance in one hand and a dictionary in the other. Mara was a hard heroine to like. She breaks all the stereotypes, not just of what a heroine should be, but of what a woman should be, too. I loved this story from beginning all the way to twisted end. It is a dark, dark fantasy with erotic undertones that come out in the most awful ways. (Horuseps. OMG. Enough said.) Expect to be fascinated, expect to be aroused, expect to be pushed beyond your comfort zone, and above all, expect the best because this author delivers nothing less.

Paige Bookdragon says

Don't read this.

Please please please, for the love of all things holy, don't read this book if you're an innocent child who thinks that unicorn poop would be the answer to global warming and world peace.

I have read a lot of kinky books (some I'm proud as hell to admit that I read it and some made me wonder why am I so gullible) but never in my whole life has I been *scandalized* with a book

.
Orgy? Sex in public? Menage? BDSM? I wouldn't bat an eyelash reading those things.

Beheading? Amputation and gory scenes? I crave those.

But this..this book just shocked the living hell out of me.

That's exactly my face while I was reading a certain chapter.

Oh, don't worry. The author's way of writing is good, the main character is a badass, and you wouldn't even know what's coming next. But what's in this book would still make the last shred of innocence shrivel up.

I know that innocent people are as rare as a pink unicorn and I don't wanna be accused of corrupting those who are considered the world's last hope to decency. So angel, don't read this.

But if you're a rebellious shit and still decided to read this book, then come find me and we'll talk about this over some coffee and pizza.

Kira says

The Scholomance is a secret school where magic is taught by demons to those who enter. The students are at the mercy of the demons and must obey their rules. Mara's only friend, after being out of touch for years, sent her a letter which said she needed to be saved from the school. Mara decided to save her, which really was quite OOC for her to do.

The demons were pathetic and spineless. I was expecting them to be badass and evil. They didn't resemble humans, which was about the only thing that made them remotely creepy. They had magic but didn't use it much, and it wasn't cool anyway. Kazuul was the ruler of the demons. All you need to know about him is this:

Okay so he didn't cry but close enough. The rest of the demons weren't much better.

Mara was a heartless bitch. She only cared about herself. I really think the only reason she decided to save Connie was so she could feel better about herself. The standards she held other people to didn't apply to her. Other people could do horrible things, and it was amoral; when she did something abhorred, it was completely justified. She used everybody, but people were drawn to her like flies to shit. I've never read a book before where I was hoping the whole time that the main character would be punished or suffer horribly; she was despicable.

I felt so disconnected from the story and characters in general. Some fucked up stuff happened, but I wasn't disturbed or bothered in the least. The passages may as well have been talking about arranging flowers for all of the emotions they aroused. Sexy times are always a good thing, but I didn't care about those scenes either. Sex was used as a tool, a means to an end; no emotion was involved.

The plot was shit. Twists never came, and the book was way too fucking long not to have any twists. Everything I thought would happen did. The characters were transparent, so it was easy as hell to figure out what was going on.

The special snowflake trope is one of my most hated tropes ever! Mara was special. Magic came naturally to her. She was desired by everyone no matter how she acted. She was so special that she was never punished for anything even when she broke many of the rules. It really got on my nerves because if there was ever a character undeserving of being special it was her.

It wasn't all bad. I was into it for the first half of the book. Then it got boring and repetitive. The writing was good. It was a great idea for a story, but I didn't give a shit enough to actually like it.

XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

Bye bye, book. Doom and oblivion are you. Because Shelly, Choko and Kira thought you was **crap**. Nenia loved it, but I won't risk it.

Kara-karina says

R. Lee Smith's books are always a revelation for me. She messes with your head, makes you question your own sanity and moral compass, and wraps it all up in a delicious plot so you aren't able to stop reading until you reach the last sentence.

If you read and loved *Heat*, *The Scholomance* is for you. In a way it reminded me of Anne Bishop's UF series as "the otherness" of R. Lee Smith's monsters is pure perfection.

I found out about Miss Smith through rave reviews of *Heat* and *Last Hour of Gann* on Dear Author. If you know Dear Author, you know that they don't rave about books very often. So I was intrigued, and then bam! these two books made my top reads of 2013 - they were so mind-blowingly good.

Mara, the main heroine of this book is a natural born mind-reader, a sociopath and a perfect antihero. Throughout her childhood she has been a very strange child and had only one friend, Connie. When Connie found out about Mara's talent she got obsessed with having a power of her own which led her to learning about *The Scholomance* - a mythical demonic school situated in mountains of Transylvania.

One day Connie disappeared, and two years later Mara received a letter from Connie saying that *The Scholomance* is not what it seemed and please, will she come and get her out?

At this point Mara is an independent young woman travelling around the globe doing something illegal with her talent and getting paid big money for it. She doesn't have feelings or attachments, but memory of Connie is the only warm feeling that sustains her.

She gets into the school and it's brutal, sadistic and horrifying. But she is a talented gal, she doesn't feel the same things most people feel and she doesn't have same motivations, so she is flying through the ranks while searching for Connie.

This is a twisted tale, very harsh and dark. It f*cks with your head, folks, but the journey is worth it and the ending is incredible. I don't even want to give you any details but this is a great horror story with a side of dark romance and monsters who don't hide under the guise of humanity. Very much recommended if you are brave enough to read it. I LOVED it!

Galatea says

Here we go, fair warning first.

It's dark. It's nasty. It makes you cringe sometimes (I didn't but I'm wired differently so the basic rules don't apply to me). My mother would probably drag me to the priest just for reading this book and liking it so damn much, even my kindle is tired of how many times it was read.

Sorry, I stand corrected, better make that a monastery, to become a nun or perhaps a mental hospital for cases without cure, rather than just to a priest.

As a side note, have always wondered how did the original word from Romanian, "Solomonan??" to be exact turned into Scholomance. No joke. I actually always did, ever since toddler me learned her letters and found her love for everything myth legend and ancient. In Romanian we call it "Solomonan??" or "?coala de solomon?rie" which means well... basically "Solomonan??" or "School of .. well solomon?rie." As far as I know we don't always have a direct translation from or to other languages for some words or terms belonging to the legend/myth category. Do note though, that it resembles the name of Solomon extremely much. So basically, a "solomonar" is a wizard. Closest thing I can think of, that is (be assured, I'm not writing crap; I'm a whiz at myths and legends and ancient history, to the sheer exasperation of every kin I have). And since my ancestor made up the term, it's more like a wizard who controls rain and clouds. And possibly hail... and storms. Or to be precise the dragons of the storms. What can I say? Romanians. We're inventive as hell when superstitious stuff is involved. Especially in Transylvania.

Scratch that, make it the entire Balkan area.

As a native, I can honestly say that some of the translations from English to Romanian and vice versa made me laugh so hard I spilled coffee on my newly laundered T shirt (nothing new here; last time I spilled tea on my laptop and I knew exactly where my salary went afterwards). "The Dancing Goat" is not "La Dansul Capra," but "La Capra Dansatoare" or "La Capra Dansând?" (don't get me started on the pronunciation because that's a whole new can of worms). "Dansul" is the noun and it's articulated as in "the dance". And for people who might get the weird idea to drop by sometimes, Hermannstadt is Sibiu in Romanian. Love the city. That and Brasov, which are old style and awesome (Just don't wear high heels on the cubic stone paved streets in the old centers). But no matter, I always prance like an egocentric, well... pony when I find Romanian bits thrown in while reading English books.

Now, on to the good stuff.

The book itself was... um epic? To say the least? For lack of a better word that transcends epic, I'll leave it at that. Well, it's no secret that I do have some weird tastes as far as books are concerned. If it's gory, catchy and gritty I eat it like the Belgian chocolate stolen good-naturedly from my aunt's cupboard. Even if R. Lee Smith was not one of my top 5 favorite authors of all time, I knew just by reading the blurb of this book that I would love it to heaven and back.

Make that to hell and back.

It had... everything? Yep, it did and then some on top of that. The descriptions skyrocketed, the whole world scene was mind blowing in the sense that beyond the fact that it was original, the sheer descriptions and plot gave it a whole new category of awesomeness. Mara was more than I expected. Even if she was not the conventional heroine, I loved her from the very beginning. The way this book was written it made me relate to her so badly that by the second half, I was already wholeheartedly supporting her, cheering for her, willing to ignore all of her transgressions and honestly not minding if she killed half the people inside that mountain. Not hard to think that considering that humans and demons alike were not exactly lovable creatures. More like, put them all in a fictional pit inside the reader's head and watch them suffer.

Of all the demons teaching at that school, nicely called Scholomance, I liked Horuseps the most. So much, that I would not have minded a lot of things. He was charming, sly, cunning and had quite a silver tongue. Shortly, just how I like them. Of course most of the creatures there had an agenda, but well, what's a good book without some plot twists good enough to launch your imagination into the stratosphere, right?

Let's move on to the good stuff. The sex scenes were.... well, I'd say a few choice words and insert a few gifs over here, but I don't want to be banned. Kazuul was a bit of my guilty pleasure to read about. And Mara's first meeting with him was equally memorable.

(view spoiler)

I did not expect the ending. I kid you not. I suspected some of the things, but still loved every second of the ending. So much, that not surprisingly, It made me read the book 4 times and cut my sleep short. (view spoiler)

Another fair warning here... if you want meaningful romance and feelings and drama and well, cheesy stuff thrown all over the place, this book is not it. There are some passages i am well aware that some of you (the majority of you, since well, you are normal human beings no doubt, and not mentally twisted like me) will absolutely, utterly and completely abhor this book from the bottom of your hearts. I am not sure if i should call it inter species sex? Um somewhere around that concept. Kind of complicated to classify. So far, we have sex.... and blood... and torture... and magic... and blood and sex.... and some demons.... and sex... did i mention the sex? Now, don't take it like that. Sure, there are some sex scenes (quite well written actually although it doesn't quite classify as um, normal sex. but this book has a plot. a very good plot with mystery, fights, detective work and, probably a happy ending. Sort of. The main people didn't die.... horribly, but that doesn't mean a pink wedding. God, but i loved the fantasy elements and the descriptions. I don't think i had a moment where i said : "hmm, this is quite dull" or "hmm now it's getting boring". So if you like smart ass demons, sassy main character who nevertheless has quite realistic feelings and reactions and whom i assure you, you won't feel the need to bitch slap every 2 minutes. Still loved it. I read all the book R Lee Smith has written and i actually almost build a golden shrine complete with black diamonds for each one of them. And this comes from somebody who has read a few thousand books in her lifetime. Did you know you can like stretch the skin of somebody using magic so you could get very creative during sex? I did not. But now i do.
