

Title: *The Bone Houses*
Author: Emily Lloyd-Jones
Genre: Fantasy

Review by: Lijia L. 8th grade

Date: 3/10/20

The Bone Houses by Emily Lloyd-Jones is a book filled with darkness, magic and a pinch of romance. This tale begins on the edge of a fictional remote village by the name of Colbren, a little over a decade before the actual story begins. The child of a gravedigger, Aderyn (or Ryn, as she prefers), is first to be introduced. She is very mischievous and bold. Her father, the gravedigger, would often venture into the forest mysteriously, giving strict orders to his children to never follow him. Ryn, however, lets curiosity get the better of her. One day she follows her father into the forest, only to get attacked by a dead 'man', known as a bone house. Her father rescues her and starts teaching her the art of digging graves and occasionally how to get rid of bone houses. One day, her father went to an expedition investigating a collapsed mine and never returned, leaving Ryn with half of a wooden spoon. After Ryn's father disappears, she takes on the gravedigger job, and her mother passes not long after. Ryn becomes colder and more distant after these traumatic events. She gets adopted by her uncle, and because of his gambling habits, they go into a debt that Ryn is unable to pay off. When a young mapmaker named Ellis from Caer Aberhen travels to Colbren to map out the area and the mountains of Annwvyn, he gets attacked by a bone house and Ryn saves him. Ellis is shy and light-hearted. He had wanted to kiss Ryn many times but was too afraid to do so. After getting attacked by a bone house, most people would be too stunned to move, but Ellis was able to crack a joke amid the chaos.

According to a legend, an iron cauldron was stolen by a man from the fortress of Castell Sidi. This cauldron had the power to resurrect the dead by giving water to them that was boiled in its depths. After the man died, his wife and child ran through the mountains and into Castell Sidi along with the cauldron. A thief that was later sent to steal the cauldron accidentally shot the child and spilled the cauldron full of water that was meant to revive the child. He later slips into a lake filled with countless dead bodies and his clothes that had absorbed magical water seeped magic into the lake. By nightfall, these bodies, neither dead nor alive rose from the lake and became known as bone houses.

Due to the incident with the bone house, Ellis offers to pay Ryn to accompany him into the mountains. Ryn agrees as she is in desperate need of the money to pay off her uncle's debt. Before their trip, however, the bone houses start swarming the village each night and killing many innocent people. This changes their goal to go to the mountains. Instead of mapping it, Ellis and Ryn must find a way into Castell Sidi to break the cauldron of rebirth to stop the bone house attacks. Along the way, Ryn and Ellis pass over a mysterious village, the mountains of Lyn Maur and the mine to get to the fortress. Surprisingly, a bone house leads them to the entrance to Castell Sidi, and from there, the two travelers have to ward off many bone houses and find out the secrets of their past.

The Bone Houses takes place in many settings and starts in the village that Aderyn is from. Her journey also takes her to the mountain ranges in search of the cauldron of rebirth and in the process, she passes through a mine and ends up in a forest. From there, Ryn travels to

Castell Sidi, the place from the many stories that she was told. The story takes place in the past as there is no mention of any modern technologies and there is even a blacksmith in Colbren.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot was very interesting, and there was a good amount of unexpected plot twists. I liked how most of the plot revolved around a legend that was told at the beginning of the story, and everything added up in the end, with no missing gaps. The legend was told close to the start of the story, so when something came up that tied to the legend, it all made sense. However, the idea of “neither dead nor alive” people (bone houses), wasn’t very original, as I have read many books containing zombie types.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was a little on the slow side, as the action only started nearly halfway through the book. However, the parts that had little action were pretty well written (although a little wordy at times), so it was still very interesting and fun to read, nevertheless.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

The Bone Houses was rather simple, with only 355 pages and no super hard vocabulary that I had to search up. Only a tiny portion of the book focused on romance, and it wasn’t super inappropriate, so it can be suitable for younger children too. *The Bone Houses* was also very fun to read, so older kids can enjoy it too for some light reading. Overall, I would say this book is suitable for grades 5-9.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to people who enjoy fantasy novels with a dark twist to them. If you are looking for a horror book with gory details, this isn’t the book for you, as it focuses mainly on the fantasy aspect. The romance also doesn’t play a key role in the plot.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

The Bone Houses was more of a middle grade book instead of a YA, because it seems to suit a younger audience. However, this book also had no overpowered main characters that could wield magic, are super smart, or are almost perfect in every way. The main characters here are just normal human beings living in a fantasy world with a slightly tragic past.

Rating: 4 stars

The whole book was very fascinating, and I couldn’t put it down, even to have dinner. There was also just the right amount of romance, action, and humor to allow character development and an exciting storyline. Many books end on a cliffhanger and have no sequel, which always drives me crazy. Fortunately, this was not one of them, and the ending was quite satisfying. However, I do prefer books that have cliffhangers after every chapter (except for the last one), but this one did not have many cliffhangers following each chapter, which made it a little less exciting than I would have liked.

Also, I really liked the author’s writing style, as she was able to describe things by comparing them to other things. For example, the author conveys the smell of burning dead bodies in Ellis’s dream by saying, “Ellis knew what smoke was supposed to smell like, knew the

slight sweetness of cherrywood, the tang of oak, the heavy scent of ash. But this smoke, this was unnatural. It was heavy and damp..." Here, the author compares the scent of burning dead bodies to the scent of different kinds of wood burning, giving you a better sense of how different burning bodies smell in comparison.

Reviewer's Name and Grade: Kyle F., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: October 10, 2020

The book takes place in what could only be assumed as medieval times (not specified), in an old mining town that decreased in population after its mines collapsed. This town was called Colbren, a town on the very edge of a magical realm in which nobody believed in anymore. Two characters, named Ryn and Ellis, went on a quest to stop the undead from destroying Colbren after one wandered into Colbren's territory. Ryn was a hardy gravedigger, who lost her father at a young age, (or so she believes) in the magical (and also undead) forest near Colbren. Ryn would be seen always vigilant and always carrying an axe, which she would use to sever whole limbs off the undead she encounters, to keep them down of course. She would then drag their now even deader corpses to the local blacksmith, and snap crackle pop, baby. Ryn cared not for her personal appearance, as after every grave she dug, she would wipe her (literally) dirty hands on her leggings. This would annoy her brother, Gareth, who was very fond of neat clothes and organization. Sadly, he is not very important (not sorry) so if you want to learn more about him, you should definitely read the book, which I recommend. Then there is Ellis. Ellis the mapmaker. The mapmaker with no surname who gets lost in the forest near Colbren because of a map. Yeah, that guy. Not as intriguing as he first seems, Ellis turns out to be a very useful person on Ryn's quest. Of course he doesn't embark because it seems fun, he goes along because he owes her, on account of her saving his life from a bone house (undead person). Ellis is the character who undergoes the most change, which is the reason I liked reading this book. He also has quite the secret about his injury with his shoulder, which is precisely why you should read until the very end. Heads up though, it gets kinda sad at parts so if you are a snowflake (one who cries from minimal provokation) then you should prepare yourself for that.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot seemed like any other at first, but as more info about the crew rolled in, it got more intriguing.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was just right. It seemed slow at first, but that is just me not liking books much. This book though, is one of the few exceptions.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

I think this book is appropriate for even 8th graders. Sevies, (7th graders) not so much.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to readers who like what I like to read. I'll be honest, I don't know what I like to read, but fantasy seems to be preferable.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

It might be helpful to know that if you aren't prepared for a good story, then you shouldn't bother reading.

I rate this book *4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading.*

I rate the book this rating because while it is definitely intriguing and attention-grabbing, I wouldn't go as far as saying I love reading it, because I don't like reading books. The book had your typical fantasy romance, but I personally liked the more action-packed parts of the book, and it had plenty. Again, the only reason it's not a five starer (is that even a word?) is because I don't like reading and I don't want to lie because lying is immoral.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Oliver W., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: December 30, 2020

This book takes place in medieval Wales. I know this because the book mentions "cantref princes." Wales was divided into land divisions called cantrefi during the Middle Ages. Aderyn verch Gwyn is a gravedigger in the small town of Colbren, which is on the edge of a forest. She lives with her younger sister Ceridwen and younger brother Gareth. As a young child, her father had brought her into the forest and showed her bone houses, the dead that only rose at night. It was said that Arawn, the king of the otherfolk, had made his home in the mountains of Annwvyn at the fortress Castell Sidi once. Arawn was immortal and brought magic with him. When a man called Gwydion of the house of Dôn heard of the Otherking's wealth and magic, he battled the Otherking and won. Arawn was disgusted at the greed of men so he took his magic and sailed to where no human could follow. Most people forgot about the magic over time. But one time, a man went into the mountains of Annwvyn and went to Castell Sidi. He found the Otherking's cauldron that brought the dead back to life. The man brought back to life a young woman that had died before he could marry her. The two had a son together. But the cantref princes wanted the cauldron and they set fire to the man's village. The man was killed in the fires, and the wife stole a horse and escaped with the cauldron and her son to Castell Sidi. The cantref princes sent armies and spies to the mountains, but none of them could get past Llyn Mawr, the lake in front of the fortress. However, one prince hired a thief who made it across and shot the woman's son. He stole and dropped the cauldron before the woman could bring back her son. The magical water had soaked into the thief's cloak and boots and he fell into the Llyn Mawr. The magic bled into the soil around all the rivers connected to the lake and spread into the forest creeks. The next time night fell, the dead in the forest came back to life but they couldn't speak. They were called bone houses.

One time in the forest, Ryn sees a bone house attacking a young man. She brings down the bone house with an ax she always carries around and saves the man, whose name is Ellis. Ellis and Ryn go back to Colbren, where Ellis reveals that he is a mapmaker and wants to map Annwvyn, which he says will make him the most sought-after mapmaker in the area. He wants Ryn to be his guide. Ellis is formal, reserved, and selfless. He was found alone by a prince in the forests around Colbren. He wants to see if he can find any traces of his parents. That night, bone

houses start to come out of the forest, which they had never done before until about a week before Ellis arrived. An army of bone houses, soldiers that the cantref princes sent to Castell Sidi to get the Otherking's cauldron, attacks Colbren. The next day, Ryn agrees to be Ellis' guide, explaining that she wants to go to Annwvyn and shatter the cauldron. She reasons that if a crack in the cauldron created the bone houses, shattering it completely could end the curse. She is loyal and stubborn and wants to protect the village where she grows up. She knows Colbren won't survive nightly attacks for long.

Ryn and Ellis start on a journey to Annwvyn. They find a village in the woods, which they thought weren't inhabited. They realize that the village was a place where people brought their loved ones who were dying so they could wake every night and still be with them. Ryn accidentally tells a girl in the village named Catrin what they plan to do, and they have to escape from the village. Ellis and Ryn must fight off many bone houses and do what no human had done in a while to protect what they care about most. On the journey, it becomes evident that Ellis and Ryn both have feelings for each other, adding a nice romantic touch to the story.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot mostly kept me interested. I liked how all the questions the reader had were answered by the end of the story. The legend of the cauldron was told at the beginning of the book, which left the reader guessing how the book was going to end. I liked how both main characters had reasons that made sense and fit their character traits to explain why they wanted to go to Annwvyn. Also, I liked how the author had Ryn and Ellis encounter Catrin and her village on their journey to show how some people benefitted from the curse and making it a harder choice for the two to make.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was pretty good. In the beginning, before Ryn and Ellis set out on their journey, not much that really captivated me happened. The author was just laying out the characters to the reader, which I was ok with. The pace sped up once they set out to find Castell Sidi and it kept me interested in the book.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

There was no profanity in this book and the story was pretty easy to follow. There wasn't anything extremely inappropriate about this book. The romance wasn't a main focal point of the book and the language isn't complicated. I think this book would be appropriate for readers in grades 6 through 9.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to readers who are interested in fantasy books with a little bit of horror and romance. The book isn't scary and it's not too dark but it is about zombies.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

I think it would be helpful for readers to know that this book wasn't very advanced and I wouldn't consider it a book for "Young Adults." It was still enjoyable to read and I think it's good sometimes to read books that aren't super complicated and have words that you need to search up to understand.

I would rate this book *4 stars*. The book was a good length and I really enjoyed the characters. Even though this book is fantasy, the characters don't have any superpowers and are realistic. Ryn and Ellis went really well together and Ceridwen had a pet goat, which I loved. I liked how everything came together and made sense in the end. The author described things pretty well and helped me imagine the setting and characters, but she didn't spend a whole page describing one little thing in a way that would bore me. I didn't rate this book 5 stars because the main characters felt a little underdeveloped to me. The characters were described well but they never felt like actual people that I could connect with and it was hard to understand what they were feeling. For example, Ellis's grief at one point in the story just seemed so unrealistic and quick and I couldn't really imagine how Ellis was feeling in the way that I have been able to do with other books. Overall, this book is well written and I liked how there was a romance element incorporated with the plot but it wasn't the main part of the story.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Anton P., 9th Grade

Date Reviewed: February 17, 2021

The Bone Houses is a fantasy novel by Emily Lloyd-Jones. The story centers around Aderyn who is a gravedigger in a small town called Colbern. Her father had told her about the dangers of the forest, the bone houses. Bone houses are the risen dead who attack anyone who comes to the forest. Ryn's father had died in a mining accident and his body was not found. Her mother died after that, leaving Aderyn and her siblings orphans. The story starts when Aderyn is 17 and she and her siblings run the house and the graveyard. The problem in the beginning is that the town's lord, Master Eyon wants Aderyn's family's debts which her dead uncle owed him. Aderyn meets Ellis who is a cartographer from Caer Aberhen which is the biggest city on the isles. He was abandoned as a child and brought to the royal palace by the prince and raised to show the prince's good deed. He wants to travel into the mountains near Colbren in search of his parents and Aderyn agrees to take him there in exchange for a large sum of money. Before they leave, the village is attacked by bone houses, Aderyn assumes that this is due to Master Eyon taking down the iron fence around the village because magic creatures are afraid of iron. After the attack, Aderyn decides to keep leading Ellis into the mountains because, if legends were to be believed, bone houses originate from a cauldron in a castle inside of a mountain. So they set off into the mountains, encountering an encampment and the mine where Aderyn's father died and after barely surviving the bone houses there, they go to sleep and Aderyn wakes up to a friendly bone house that ends up to be her dad. He shows her the way to the castle and after Aderyn's father leaves, she and Ellis travel to the castle where they find a bone house woman guarding the cauldron and we find out that the woman was Ellis' mother and sent the bone houses to find Ellis. Ellis's mother lets go of the cauldron because she had finally found her child and everything goes back to normal.

Did the plot keep you interested?

Yes, the plot was interesting and kept me invested.

Was the the pace of the book too fast, just right, or too slow?

The plot went just right but I think that things escalated too quickly at the end.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

Grade 8-10

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this to people who like adventure and action stories.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

I would say that even though the book is labeled as horror fantasy, it is not scary.

Rating:

I would rate this book as 4 out of 5 because it was a good story that kept me interested but not perfect.