

### ***The Luck Uglies* series by Paul Durham**

Series containing the novels: *The Luck Uglies*, *Fork-Tongued Charmers*, and *Rise of the Ragged Clover*

This series is an exhilarating, heart-racing adventure that plunges readers into a world filled with mystery and danger. This tale is a masterful blend of folklore and fantasy, skillfully weaving together a story that grips you from the very first page and refuses to let go.

Strange goings-on are not unusual in the Village of Drowning, and 11-year-old Rye O'Chanter has seen most of them. Children are chased through the streets by soldiers, people are charged for breaking laws that never existed in the first place, and girls aren't allowed to read anymore; in fact, some books have been outlawed all together, including a very special book that holds certain conspicuous secrets about Drowning's past.

After a perilous chase over the rooftops of the village, a terrifying encounter with what seems to be an extinct monster has Rye convinced that the Bog Noblins have returned. Before the monsters disappeared, only the Luck Uglies could defeat them, but the Luck Uglies have all been exiled and now there's no one left to protect the village.

Then one day, Rye meets a charming ragged-looking man who won't tell her his name, but says she can call him Harmless. Harmless knows Rye's mother, is friends with Rye's giant black cat (who is most definitely not all he seems), and seems to know about certain secrets and rules that only Rye's family know about. He also knows how to handle himself against the mythical Bog Noblins, who have indeed returned and have started terrorizing the villagers.

Convinced that there is more to Harmless than he is telling her, and curious about the history of her village, Rye and her friends Quinn and Folly dive in the maze of Drowning's secrets, rules, and the lies that surround them all. The more they dig and uncover, the more Rye begins to question everything she's been told about the legends surrounding the village's outlaws and beasts... and even her own heritage. Soon, Rye may come to the conclusion that maybe the heroes and the villains aren't exactly what everyone thinks they are, and that it may take a villain to save them from the monsters.

I really loved this series and found it absolutely enchanting. Durham's world-building is captivating and well written, creating an eerie yet enchanting atmosphere full of monsters and folklore that feel almost reminiscent of the real world, but with just enough dark mystery and low-magic to make it fantasy instead. The descriptions are vivid and the characters are charming and well rounded, creating an interesting dynamic between their shared relationships. For example, I found Rye to be instantly likable with a fierce determination and sharp wit that had me both rooting for her and wanting to warn her throughout the book's adventures. I also found Folly and Quinn to be a good supporting cast of friends for Rye, but the truly interesting relationships lie between Rye, her mother, and the mysterious stranger known only as Harmless. No one – and I mean NO ONE – is or acts exactly as you think they should in this book...and that makes it all the more exciting!

The mysteries that surround Drowning, its legends, and the people who live there also really drive the story forward. The tale often twists and turns in ways a reader just doesn't expect it to, and the story delves into themes of loyalty, bravery, and self-discovery all along the way.

I would say that *The Luck Uglies* is a great read for fans of a slightly darker, yet whimsical type of fantasy. I quickly devoured the first book and then continued to reach for the second...and then third...with enthusiasm. I was not disappointed with any of them!