



Expecting Someone Taller

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All he did was run over a badger - sad, but hardly catastrophic. But it wasn't Malcolm Fisher's day, for the badger turned out to be none other than Inglof, last of the Giants. With his dying breath, he reluctantly handed to Malcolm two Gifts of Power, and made him ruler of the world.

But can Malcolm cope with the responsibility? Whilst averting wars, plagues and famines, he also has to protect himself against gods, dwarves, valkyries and other nefarious manifestations of the Dark Ages - none of whom think he is right for the job ...

Expecting Someone Taller Details

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B says

Interesting perspective. Not sure why she can read the data better than the other scientists though. It seems like that's a cross-disciplinary skill among people who work with samples rather than an economic skill.

Iona says

Enjoyed this, as I knew I would. Tom Holt's style of writing is just so easy to get sucked into. He's just so matter-of-fact and very funny. Just appeals to my sense of humour. You really end up on Malcolm's side, wanting him to win in the end and he does.

Elizabeth says

Malcolm Fisher reminds me of Arthur Dent in Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Malcolm inadvertently runs over a badger, and the result is that he attains the Ring of the Neibelung and the cap of invisibility/metamorphosis. Wotan and the other gods are after him in order to get the Ring while Malcolm takes his power as the Force of the universe very seriously.

If I'd read Expecting Someone Taller in 1987 when it was published, I would appreciate it more; now, I'm coming to it after having read all Terry Pratchett's Discworld tales. In contrast, Tom Holt's story is lighter and simpler.

This is the right book to take on a trip.

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Full disclosure: I know *The Lord of the Rings* better than the mythological stories behind the Ring Cycle. Holt provides a very short synopsis of the myths for folks like me and I was grateful for it. Otherwise, I would have not understood what on earth was going on.

Holt is an English fantasy-humorist and, like Pratchett's many offerings, I enjoy books like this but I never have laugh out loud moments. I don't know if the humor is lost-in-translation or what my deal is. I expect that those who are familiar with the Norse myths and who are British might really love this rather silly tale of Malcolm and the ring.

There were some memorable lines like: *"Ingolf eased the plain gold ring off his finger and passed it to Malcolm, who accepted it rather as one might accept some delicacy made from the unspeakable parts of a rare amphibian at an embassy function."* pg 7 Nice.

"The next morning, Malcolm thought long and hard before waking up, for he had come to recognise over the

past quarter of a century that rather less can go wrong if you are asleep." pg 15 Absolutely true in my experience too.

Malcolm figuring out how the Tarnhelm (a hat that can change the wearer into anything) works: *"Make me," he said aloud, "as handsome as it is possible to be."... He stood for awhile and stared... "We'll call that one Richard" (he had always wanted to be called Richard). He resumed his own shape (which came as a bitter disappointment) then said "Richard," firmly. At once, the Most Handsome Man reappeared in the mirror, which proved that the Tarnhelm had a memory, like a pocket calculator.*" pg 20-21 :) For my friend, Richard.

The difference between smiles: *"The girl looked at him and smiled. Malcolm had come to believe that he was fairly well equipped to deal with smiles, but this was a new sort; not a happy, optimistic smile but a sad, wistful smile. It didn't say, "Wouldn't it be nice if..." like the stock delivery of a Rhinemaiden, but, "It would have been nice if..." which is quite different."* pg 117

Why humans are the worst pick for ring bearing: *"And so you give this irregularity in your minds a name of its own. You call it Love, which is meant to make everything all right. Rather than try to sort it out or find a vaccine, you go out of your way to glorify it. I mentioned your art and your poetry just now. What are your favourite themes? Love and War."... "Now be fair," he continued, "can you honestly say that a member of a species with this ancestral fallibility should be allowed to rule the universe?"* pg 160 Fair question.

If you enjoyed *Expecting Someone Taller*, you may want to pick up *The Good Fairies of New York* by Martin Millar (a modern day fantasy with fairies) or *Anansi Boys* by Neal Gaiman.

Marcus says

K. J. Parker (Tom Holt's pseudonym) is one of my favorite authors, and he typically writes "speculative fiction" as opposed to straight fantasy - imaginary worlds, but non-magical. Books under Parker's name tend to have a wry sense of humor and a cynical, morally complex outlook. As Holt, he keeps the wry sense of humor, but loses the rest in favor of somewhat silly magical stories. This one's based heavily on Wagner's Ring Cycle, and it's an enjoyable, if rather lightweight, read. If you like Discworld or Douglas Adams, you'll find something to like here. (However I would much rather direct you to Parker's work.)

Jon says

This was a good read even though it was on it's way to 3 star at most review until the last 3 chapters when I realized the author had duped me and I didn't realize it. The main character together gets annoying I mean insufferably ANNOYING during the resolution, to the point I want that I found myself siding with the test of the characters as him being an absolute idiot . However, it ended well.. it's a good quick read.

Brent says

I was a little put off at first, afraid that Malcolm would remain clueless throughout the plot like Arthur Dent in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series. Fortunately, he didn't try my patience for long and was soon addressing the challenges of his new life.

The humor was not laugh-out-loud caliber (for me), but pretty consistently funny with a main character I found myself surprisingly attached to.

Lydia says

When the legendary Ring of the Nibelings becomes the possession of a mild-mannered, rather forgettable, not very driven, almost middle-aged Englishman, the pantheon knows *something* must be done to stop the inevitable madness. When the world starts going through an unparalleled time of peace and prosperity, Woten and the rest know their worst fears are being realized and decide to stop at nothing to fix this horror.

Humorously sarcastic view of "If the meek *did* inherit the earth"; reminded me strongly of DWJ's "Eight Days of Luke", Connie Willis' "To Say Nothing of the Dog" and Douglas Adams' "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" in style and content. A fairly funny read, I now know much more about Wagner's *Ring* and characters than I knew before. Not really laugh out loud funny (no swans), but I was chuckling a good bit.

Content notes: language is very british; Wodehouse style swearing, somewhat frequently. Sensuality is not present in deed, but the meaning of "Love" is explored by many different characters some wandering into the emotional and mental side, with others delving into the physical; however, it is kept pretty clean. Violence is almost no-existent, there is a car accident at the beginning which causes all the trouble, but everything else is nipped in the bud before it can come to blows.

Faith Jones says

Usually I review exciting new indies, not reprints of ancient texts that underpin Waterstones, but I have re-visited *Expecting Someone Taller* by Tom Holt because I remember it as an effortlessly entertaining and informative read, yet couldn't quite recall what it was about the style and technicalities that left such an impression in my mind. Having done so now, re-read it with a brain that's a few years more developed, I have noted:

The writing is conversational, with a sort of fifty-fifty split of description to quotation. It has an irreverence to it, chatty and self-deprecating. It's also a parody, where the author has taken a classic international story, many generations old, which already has a set of deeply established characters and has continued that piece of world building in the style of an anecdote he might tell to a friend in a village pub. Holt has put his stamp on this, so it is no longer "heavy" and by doing that he's slid it along from the dusty classics section to inhabit the fresh-faced young adult shelf, yet it still conveys tons of legendary information and entertains broader bands above and below that simplistic YA demographic.

The hero is a timid everyman in the shadow of his sister, who excels at nothing that we value in modern life and doesn't even measure up as a self-assured male but, uniquely, would be exceptionally good at a specific role in a fantasy reality (i.e. ruling everything). He, Malcolm, fits the pattern that if you were that exceptionally rare kind of person that could hold absolute power without hurting anybody (ideally never using it at all), then you'd be a stunning success in comparison with just about everyone else, who would use it to apply all their petty prejudices and therefore submerge into the minus column. To be the best, you wouldn't even need to improve anything – just play for a draw, neutralise the dangerously unlimited

god/boss role and move small measures of necessary power down the ladder to those functionaries who need it, usually to fix things on a daily basis and keep them moving. Malcolm does try things out, in a minimum and apologetic kind of way, feels guilty and leaves compensation to balance his experimental actions. Meaning no harm to anyone, even subconsciously, he's perfect in the sense of perfectly harmless.

The exceptional trick that this novel pulls is in its introductory nature; to continue the plot of Wagner's Ring Cycle operas and get the reader accidentally educated in the Teutonic myths and legendary activities of Wotan, the Valkyries, Loge, Siegfried & Brunhilde, the frost giants and the Rhinemaidens etc. It's the Bayreuth Festival in bite-size humorous form, without the Germanic language, nasty lager and two hundred quid tickets. As Stephen Fry observed: "You can tell the Germans are a cruel nation because their operas last for four days and they have no word for fluffy."

I like opera. There, I've said it. Not musicals. Both forms are theatre with singing but opera has the gravitas to tremble the heart and rouse the soul. If you've gone a year without crying, go to an opera. Ok, so why do I like opera? That would be because of THIS BOOK. As an incidental note, I realise that I also like Icelandic poetic sagas and kennings, which were introduced to me by this same author in *Who's Afraid of Beowulf*. The point I'm making is that Tom Holt has a way of insinuating great and otherwise unapproachable cultural monoliths into porous young minds in such a way that his readers spill out into the confusing blue yonder and become better and more rounded people, with a keen interest in developing their knowledge and widening their cultural ambitions – probably forgetting the original influence that set them onto their path. I read this, I wasn't scared of awesome culture in another language and I tootled off to enjoy that confidence. Now, who says this is a silly story?

Another thing I got from re-reading this book is how much Tolkien copied from Wagner who copied from legend. Does any of this sound familiar? One ring is forged in a secret fire and the power to rule them all gets decanted into it. The ring is mute but has a treacherous personality that actively wants to cause harm. The ring is passed from one ring-bearer to another by the act of murder, e.g. drowning or a spear in the back. Dark forces are searching for the ring because they are hungry for that power to rule the world. If the ring-bearer is mentally strong enough, that person can bend the ring to their will, but... the ring eventually turns them into something they don't like. They're changed by the experience and can't go back to how they were before they had the adventure. In this sense, Malcolm is a hobbit, the only race strong enough to offer to give up the ring, representing all power, and hand it away by an act of free will. It's the ability to defeat an opponent and then stop, not become as bad as your opponent by using your advantage to oppress and thus become them, everything you detested in the first place. There's a saying that if anyone wants to wield power, that should disqualify them from ever being allowed to have it. Malcolm, the anti-protagonist, doesn't think he is at all suitable for the job, is terrified of taking any action that might upset anyone, even the ducks on a pond, so is therefore the ideal candidate. I'd trust him with my life. I'd also trust Tom Holt to run my cultural information desk. This book should be on the curriculum because, if you see what I mean, it's bigger than it is.

James Titterton says

'Expecting Someone Taller' is a book with a great premise that it never really lives up to.

Malcolm Fisher, a pathetic young Englishman, accidentally kills the last holder of the Ring of the Nieblungs and finds himself unwillingly responsible for the well being of the entire world. A variety of supernatural beings then descend on him to try and claim the Ring for themselves.

Placing the ridiculous characters from Wagner's Ring Cycle in the sleepy English countryside should be a riotously surreal yomp akin to Monty Python at their best, but 'Expecting Someone Taller' never rises above gently amusing. The plot feels like it's meandering along, waiting for the real story to begin.

One might excuse Holt for failing to make the most of his initial premise, as this was his first published novel, but on its own merits it just isn't funny or inventive enough.

Ann says

Wow. This was an awesome book! I loved the way the mythology and real life melded together so well. I was a bit worried if I'd get confused since I didn't know much about the myth of The Ring, but Holt did a really good job explaining it with Malcolm. I also loved the idea of Happiness and Love - how you can't have one without the other.

I'm definitely going to read more of Holt's books!

Gerry says

My first exposure to the literary genius teetering on madness that is the mind of Tom Holt. I got this from the library way back around the late '80s, not knowing quite what to expect and was more than pleasantly surprised by it.

It tells of Malcolm Fisher; just an ordinary guy trying to get home one night when he drives over a badger. So far, so ordinary. But the badger turns out to be nothing more than a Norse giant in disguise and before he realises what is happening, Malcolm becomes embroiled in the ongoing struggles of the Norse pantheon. At least he'd managed to pick up some of the gods' powers, which must be helpful, right? Riiight...

If the story of Wagner's Ring Cycle interests you, but you don't want to sit through hours of big women wailing in a foreign language, then this could be the book for you. All the fun of the Niebelung without the 4-hour arias and unfortunate arian undertones :)

Edwina Harvey says

Our unlikely hero, Malcolm Fisher, runs over a badger, discovers he's inherited the Ring of the Tarnhelm, and the magical powers that come with being the rightful Ruler of the World, and suddenly has a whole lot of hitherto unnoticed Norse Gods and legends to contend with.

This book is written as "a comic variation of Wagner's Ring Cycle" (according to Kirkus Review) which is where I felt I let the book down, rather than the other way around as I only have a cursory knowledge of The Ring Cycle, and kept wondering if there were parts of the backstories and undertow that I was failing to grasp.

It was grin-worthy rather than laughing out loud, but a pleasant read. And the phrase "he took to it like a duck to petrol" is one I hope I never forget!

Steve Mitchell says

Expecting Someone Taller is based around Wagner's Ring Cycle; the first thing to realise is that it is a story based upon real events and genuine characters. The hero - Malcolm Fisher - finds that he has inherited the mantle of Siegfried, that is the shape-shifting and teleporting Tarnhelm plus the riches-inducing (but ultimately cursed) Nibelung's Ring after he runs over a badger. Can a man known affectionately by his family as 'Only Malcolm' come to terms with his new found position as the ruler of the world before Wotan and his cronies manage to dupe our hapless hero out of his mystical and mythical possessions?

As a mix of comedy and fantasy this book is just about as spot on as you can hope for; if you are a fan of Douglas Adams or Terry Pratchett then there is no reason why you should not really enjoy this and Tom Holt's other additions to the genre.

Quinten says

This was a fun, light read that explored Wagner's Ring Cycle in "modern" (to when the book was written in the 1980s) times.

The author has a distinctive voice for parody that is similar to Terry Pratchett's, although slightly less absurdist.

Scott says

Maybe the funniest novel I've ever read.

Emma Sea says

Nostalgia rating. I think this was the book of 1988, for me.

Roderick Ellem says

Funny book based on the Norse mythologies and Wagner Operas. Well worth a read!

Chuck says

Badgers are not always what they appear to be. If you tried reading Lord of the Rings and felt guilty because you couldn't get through it, read this hilarious retelling of the real Ring Cycle, the one Wagner made so

famous a long, long time before Tolkein ever picked up pen and paper.

James Dyar says

yes. trees can experience anger :D
