



The Gutter Prayer

Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

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A group of three young thieves are pulled into a centuries old magical war between ancient beings, mages, and humanity in this wildly original debut epic fantasy.

The city has always been. The city must finally end.

When three thieves - an orphan, a ghoul, and a cursed man - are betrayed by the master of the thieves guild, their quest for revenge uncovers dark truths about their city and exposes a dangerous conspiracy, the seeds of which were sown long before they were born. Cari is a drifter whose past and future are darker than she can know.

Rat is a Ghoul, whose people haunt the city's underworld.

Spar is a Stone Man, subject to a terrible disease that is slowly petrifying his flesh.

Chance has brought them together, but their friendship could be all that stands in the way of total armageddon

The Gutter Prayer Details

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Author : Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

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From Reader Review The Gutter Prayer for online ebook

Michael Fletcher says

From carrion gods to alchemical warfare, this is genre-defying fantasy at its very best. An absolutely stunning debut. Insanely inventive and deeply twisted. I loved it! Highly recommended.

Lukasz says

How do I even describe it? **Was it just insane or insanely good?**

Enter Guerdon. Mad deities and divinely powered saints fight, Lovecraftian horrors awake and crawl out from below. Shape-shifting Ravellers, servants of the ancient and evil Black Iron Gods, bring mayhem to the streets for the first time in decades and it can only mean one thing - **Doomsday approaches.**

Meanwhile, a new member of the Thieves' Brotherhood, **Carillon Thay**, experiences unnerving visions that place her in the centre of the conflict between mad deities. She navigates the city in the company of **Rat**, a corpse-eating ghoul, and **Spar**, a Stoneman, whose flesh is slowly calcifying into rock.

Rules mean nothing to Hanrahan - he plays with the language, world-building, and usual genre's tropes. He twists them and offers something fresh and new. Examples? Gutter Prayer opens with a prologue written in the second person pro-noun, a thing considered a huge no-no. And yet, it works. Hanrahan's lyrical prose contains a lot of archaisms and rare words, it yells for a reader's attention and yet it only makes the experience more immersive. His visual and visceral style blew my mind. I usually dislike detailed world-building, but his world, with all its minutiae, immersed me.

A note to aspiring writers - don't read this book; it'll make you loathe your unimaginative, bland phrases.

The setting lives from the very first pages. It feels real, and dynamic. It changes and affects the characters in the story. It's a prime example of a powerfully portrayed city that seems to have a life of its own. I sincerely hope I'll never visit Guerdon, though. I still have a long TBR list and things to do in life and I wouldn't last five minutes there. Check this description of one of the city's hidden places (it gives a good example of the setting and Hanrahan's prose):

Pipes hiss and gurgle like the intestines of a flayed man. The air is hot and thick with fumes. Through portholes lined with green-tinted glass, she can spy on the things growing inside the vats - embryonic Gullheads, raptequines, disembodied organs. A thing that might be the heart and circulatory system of a man swims past one viewport, like a ghastly jellyfish that squirts blood with every spasm of its artery limbs.

All characters feel realised and three dimensional. Carillon is impulsive, and she acts too fast regularly getting into trouble. Her emotionally charged chapters contrast slightly with other POV's. although each POV character faces traumatic situations. Take Spar, a Stoneman. He's dying. His disease will win in the

end - there's no cure. He'll turn into a stone, but not before he experiences all his joints and organs calcify slowly and painfully. Then we have Rat - a young ghoul who experiences extreme, nauseating transformation.

Secondary characters shine as well. A lovely mentor who's secretly a manipulative monster, a teleporting boy with insane speed and agility, tallowmen whose minds are a flickering candle flames, burning within the waxy hollow of their skulls captured my imagination. That said, the character I liked most was Aleena - a brutally honest saint who swears like a trooper in an angelic voice (literally - angels speak through her). Hanrahan's saints don't remind our saints. They're deeply traumatised embodiments of divine madness.

I'm sure **people will speak about Gutter Prayer in years to come**. I suspect it'll divide the audience a bit. A casual fantasy reader may feel lost in the plot for a significant part of the book. Hanrahan's distinct, rich writing style won't appeal to everyone. But it did work for me. A brilliant, imaginative debut. Absolutely worth the read and insanely good.

ARC through NetGalley

Hiu Gregg says

I like a lot of the books I read, but *The Gutter Prayer* is one of the few that I can say I actually loved.

It's almost hard to put it into words. I want to rant, I want to squee, and I want to just spew out superlatives until you go ahead and pre-order the damned thing just to shut me the hell up.

I've tried to describe to my friends just how great it is, and I feel like I owe them an apology for some of the manic nonsense that they had to listen to. This book is so good that it reduced me to a blithering, complimentary mess. I was enjoying myself from literally the first page — the prologue is truly incredible — and honestly the most accurate metaphor I can think of to describe the reading experience is that it was like a really really good night out with good friends and better alcohol. In other words, I enjoyed myself for the duration, but spent half the time worrying about the hangover that would come after.

The Gutter Prayer is a crazy, high-concept epic fantasy with an emphasis on the "crazy". There's alchemy, ghouls, stone men, saints with god-like powers, creepy candle-wax golems, and creepier sorcerers made from writhing masses of worms. There's so many more aspects of this world (So. Many) that I could gush about, but it's really the kind of thing that's best read with as few preconceptions as possible. Just know that the worldbuilding is truly incredible. It's like... well, it's like nothing else I've ever read before. Perhaps it's like a more stylised, serious, and contained version of Nicholas Eames' *Kings of the Wyld*, but that comparison doesn't do justice to either book. *The Gutter Prayer* is entirely its own thing, and it's brilliant for it.

Coming back to that "stylised" comment — I refuse to believe that this is a debut novel. It is far too well written. In fact, at one point I put the book down mid-paragraph (okay, I exaggerate, I read until the end of the chapter and even then it was hard to tear my eyes away) to check the author's credentials. Turns out that Gareth Hanrahan has been writing for role-playing games for a number of years, but that *The Gutter Prayer* is indeed his debut novel.

Well. If he's this good out of the gate, then he's earned himself a fan for life.

Character-wise, there's a lot to like about the Gutter Prayer. The three thieves mentioned in the blurb are our "main" point-of-view characters, but we also get a few chapters from other perspectives. The character exploration isn't the slow and deep introspective kind, but more the kind that rolls with the story. You start off knowing next to nothing about the characters and the world, but you learn through context and drip-fed details as you read on. There's a sizeable cast of personalities here, and it's a mark of a multi-point-of-view fantasy done well that I didn't mind when the perspective changed. All of the characters were interesting, all of them engaging. In that sense and others, this book was a unicorn in my eyes.

In terms of the story... yeah, I'm not telling you anything. Trust me when I say that it's a book best read with as little pre-existing knowledge as possible. What I will say is that this is remarkably well contained for what is apparently book 1 in a series. If you want to read this as a standalone, then you wouldn't be disappointed.

The Gutter Prayer is already one of my favourite books from 2019. It's original, incredibly well-written, and honestly just so much fun to read.

This is for anyone who likes crazy worlds, colourful and roguish characters, and exciting action sequences. It's the battlecry of an exciting new author who I feel has the potential to hit the very top of the genre.

Put simply, you need to read this.

James Lafayette Tivendale says

I received an uncorrected bound proof copy of The Gutter Prayer in exchange for an honest review. I would like to thank Gareth Hanrahan and Orbit Books for the opportunity. This was recommended to me by Grimdark author and general legend Michael R. Fletcher.

Hanrahan's highly anticipated fantasy debut is a real breath of fresh air. We follow three thieves who are affiliated with the underground Brotherhood. The gang's leader - Henreil - orders Carillon, Spar and Rat to steal some documentation from the House of Law. Little did the ensemble know that the master of the thieves guild had other plans that evening involving this building and another group of thieves. The three thieves are betrayed, the House of Law - one of the cities finest monuments - burns to the ground, and the consequences are dire. In the aftermath, our trio decides to deal out revenge but in doing so uncover numerous conspiracies, dark truths, and learn often unwanted knowledge about the Gods of this world. Mixing that with visions, hallucinations, and out-of-body experiences that Carillon starts witnessing and Spar's need for a drug Alkahest as he is slowly petrifying since being diagnosed with the stone plague equals an exciting and ambitious prospect from the very start.

At approximately 510 pages Hanrahan composes a unique, stimulating and three-dimension hauntingly dark fantasy world. The Gutter Prayer is low fantasy at it's finest. I'm not sure if it was the author's intention yet I read this as if it was set in a Victorian-inspired city where all of the action takes place. The complex, labyrinthine city of Guerdon includes trains, canals, main roads, thieves passages, underground warrens, a university town and many houses of religion.

In a fantasy world where grimdark seems to be the most popular sub-genre at the moment, I can confirm that fans of the said genre will find a great amount to enjoy here. That being said, it doesn't fit exactly under that specification. For however dark, extreme and violent sections may be, The Gutter Prayer also oozes an aura of heart and hope mainly led by the three intriguing and intricately developed but likable main characters.

Cari is a thief who is the daughter of a wealthy family and has started having unspeakably strange visions when bells ring. Rat is a Ghoul, that is like a concoction of a human and a wolf and finally, Spar is the son of the former master of the thieves guild who is infected by the stone-plague. The team have an amazing comradeship and really care for each other and that is present throughout the whole narrative.

I adore fantasy stories that flaunt originality, especially when the author creates new creatures, races, and Gods that have not been featured in other books beforehand. Like Malazan where Erikson created Tiste Andii, K'Chain Che'Malle amongst others - here we have Tallowmen, Gullheads, Ravellers, and Saints. Three of these creatures are utterly terrifying and you wouldn't want to cross their paths in the small damp alleyways of Guerdon at night time.

One of my favourite aspect of The Gutter Prayer was the way that Cari's out-of-body experiences and visions were written. Unfortunately, in the past, I've suffered from mental health, hallucinations, visions, and out-of-body experiences and Cari's experiences rang completely true and where presented brilliantly. I had a personal connection with these segments and it was like reading about someone who has felt the same sort of emotions I had previously. Her suffering, confusion but also the way her eyes are opened to hidden details about the city and its inhabitants were really eye-opening and enlightening.

It took me about one-hundred-pages to get completely engrossed in this novel but at that point when events start to get a bit more complex I was engrossed and couldn't put the book down. The last one-hundred-and-fifty-page were so thrilling that my brain had to work expertly hard to keep up with the pace that my eyes were making it read the words! The Gutter Prayer features a skilfully crafted world, with masterful drama, expert dialogue, brilliant characters, and an ending I did not see coming. Debut release of 2019? Perhaps. A book that every fantasy fan should read? Absolutely.

????? ? says

If Leonardo DiCaprio can wait 23 years for his Oscar then I sure as hell can wait a few more weeks for this book

BUT I NEED IT

Emma says

You know things aren't going to plan when you're in the middle of a robbery and the building blows up around you, alchemical fire turning what was already a pretty difficult job into complete chaos, threatening a fiery death, and possibly getting you nicked to boot. If that was part of the game plan, nobody told Cari, Spar, or Rat. It's almost like no-one cared whether they lived or died. Or if they got caught... Yet the man who sent them isn't the kind of whom you ask hard questions, unless you want blade-sharp answers. That or worse, an unfriendly visit from the Fever Knight. But now they're being sought by all kinds of interested parties, from the Brotherhood to the Watch, from hidden gods to mythical monsters, and they're running low on people to trust. They've been pitched into the middle of an ongoing battle with no idea of the rules, or even who's playing, and they desperately need to find out what's going on. With THIS IS NOT THE LAST chillingly painted at the scene of the explosion, it seems like there's way more destruction to come - and these three stand right at its heart, whether they like it or not. Their choices are going to change the world, so

they better be good ones...

To say this book is imaginative is to undersell it, the author's inventiveness is showcased on every page, from the ghoulish depths below the city to the dirty streets and dirtier politics of the streets above. It's a thoroughly lived-in place, each new generation of occupation layered on the remains of the past, creating a stratified history and material culture that's only partly visible. Guerdon has the feel of an old, old city, the kind that's as much a character as those who live there. Its secrets sit just out of sight, snapping into focus only when you look deeper. It works as much for the plot and the characters as it does for the worldbuilding. The expected path is rarely taken and it brings some thrilling challenges for the reader. So you're putting a ghoul who eats rotting human flesh as a main character? *Interesting...* I like where this is going. Nobody is who you expect them to be, flawed at the very least, and often much worse than that. There's a seedy immorality to it all, superbly contrasted by the bonds of friendship between the main three. Their willingness to fight for each other is what keeps this from being as grim as it might seem at first glance, in their relationship is enough hope and trust and faithfulness to counter the dark.

Even so, the writing sometimes had a jerkiness, an indecisiveness, a fumbling in the movement from scene to scene that nullified the overall impact. In flicking from one to the next, sometimes repeating the same moment from another character angle, going for the quick shock and terse explanation, any emotional effect was lost. People died at the end, but they did so almost by the wayside, an oops-they're-gone shrug of the shoulders and it's the End. Perhaps this reflected the fleeting nature of human experience when measured against the weighty, layered past of the city itself, but it fed into my general lack of feeling for anyone involved. I just didn't really care who was going to come though it and when some of them didn't, I barely noticed. I had to go back and reread a few bits because I was wondering about people who were already dead. In all honesty, I was skimming by this point, the prioritisation of action over feeling (and maybe over cohesion too) meant I'd lost my connection to the story. For all the imagination and creativity on display here, I already know I won't be rereading the book. These are not characters to love and come back to. They're interesting but distant. Nevertheless, this does nothing to undermine my admiration of the author's talent in creating something original. Definitely one to try for yourself.

ARC via Netgalley

Esmerelda Weatherwax says

This book wasn't initially on my radar, but the people over at Fantasy Inn really enjoyed it and talked about it a lot. Then I saw some other friends with similar taste start to rave about this book over on Goodreads so I decided to give it a go.

I was very taken aback by the use of second-person narration in the prologue, I don't typically click with that writing style, but strangely enough, I was sad when it ended. After just a few paragraphs, I had sunk into the prose and didn't want it to end, I was blown away right from the beginning by the imagination used in this book. This was the first of many "exceptions" this book had in store for me, this broke all of the rules I have for my own taste – or thought I had, anyway.

This starts out with a robbery gone wrong, three thieves are tasked by their leader to bring something out of a vault in the Tower of Law. They make their way through the building checking every room looking for something that they can't find. By no fault of their own, something in the building explodes, spreading alchemical fire throughout the tower which eventually brings it down. All of the noise and commotion alerts

the guards, both of the Tallowman and human variety. The three thieves are chased down through the city, one, the ghoul named Rat gets away. The other two of the thieves, Cari and Spar, get arrested and are hauled off to a flooded prison located on an island.

Cari is a young girl who's run away from home and become a thief, she's quick and light on her feet which is handy for her trade. After being put in prison Cari is bailed out by a professor, Ongent, an archeologist and historian at the University. It's not said at first why he did this, but he clearly had a purpose and intent. Cari has been having dreams lately that aren't just dreams. While asleep she mumbled her way through the origins of the ghoul race in some kind of trance. She's had a vision of a young priest who was melted away by some unknown force, a being that disguised itself as a woman interested in him only to ambush and kill him once she got him alone. Ongent doesn't know what to make of it yet, but Cari is clearly special. She also has bravery about her and not just the 'fighting' kind of bravery, she lives with the Stone Man thief which most people wouldn't do even if it was a family member. Stone Men suffer from a plague that started about 30 years ago turning their bodies into statues and acting as a slow death sentence. People afflicted with the disease have to keep moving or their bodies will calcify more quickly, in this world a good night's sleep could result in you waking up paralyzed and near death.

Rat is a young ghoul, and as such he lives mostly underground in the dark damp caves and tunnels that number in the thousands below the city. He thinks of his kind as the true inhabitants of the city, with the people on top being like "flies" skittering only on the surface. His race is an ancient one that has three distinct life phases. Young ghouls can pass for human in low light, despite the fact they have hooves they are relatively human shaped and can communicate, they can also tolerate sunlight for short periods of time and are able to control their more basal instincts. Middle-aged ghouls tend to be mostly feral, communicating only in howls and screams, living in swarms deep below the earth. Then there are the Elders, ancient beings of unimaginable power that hijack the bodies of others to speak for them. (Independence day shit). When Rat was being chased by a Tallowman through the city he made it into his caves, where he ran into a woman named Aleena. She works for the Church of the Keepers on the surface and the Church has maintained a tenuous agreement between themselves and the ghouls for thousands of years. Something has brought her down to the depths searching for the Elders, something urgent. It takes hours to get down through the dark with tunnels made of the deepest blacks, so black that even Rat is unnerved. When they reach the Elders there's an exchange with Aleena that Rat didn't fully understand, however, he does know that the Elders are scared, what horrors could possibly scare the Elders? Who are these Ravellers that are supposed to be kept at bay? And could it have anything to do with Cari's visions of a man unraveling before her eyes?

The characters stood out to me right away, which was exception number two this book threw at me. I usually take a while to warm up to characters, and since I know that I don't let it bother me if I'm not connecting right at the beginning. I'm only irked if I don't get to know them well enough before I switch POV's, preferring to sink my teeth into a character before it switches. Again, this book makes an exception. I loved switching from character to character even right at the beginning. They were all so unique with clear, distinct voices and personalities that it was easy to go back and forth while enjoying myself every time the character changed. I loved the side characters as well, which is a huge plus. When side characters feel bland or boring it makes the world a little less polished and real. Aleena was fucking fantastic, I don't think anyone who knows me would be surprised by my love for this character. Sassy older woman that curses like a sailor? Just, yes. Take all of my yes.

I'm a big fan of originality, (hence why it gets its own category in my scoring system) and since I read about 200 books a year when I hit something I haven't seen done before I can't help but get extra excited. Typically when I call a book unique I'm referring to something like a new magic system, a trope turned on its head, a new aspect of world building I hadn't seen before, or maybe a particularly unusual POV. In this

book I'm referring to all of the above, every aspect of this book was something new and different. The 'monsters' are original – my two favorites in this one are the Tallowmen, men made of wax and burning from within, they make for extremely surreal foes and we even get to see inside one of their heads as a POV for a short time. I loved it. There are also things known as the Crawling Ones, a huge group of worms that's sentient and feeds on the dead, except when they eat the dead they also steal their memories, knowledge, and souls.

The writing in this was great, it flowed very nicely for me and kept me turning pages. I would say this is much more stylized than what I typically read, however, I absolutely adored it. Kind of like Bancroft, I just love the way this was done and thought it was gorgeous. The world building is absolutely incredible and worked hand in hand with the characters for me. Sometimes when I get hit in the head with too much world building and don't get to know the characters enough I lose interest. This had a great deal of world building that helped you understand the characters so it was an even flow of new info but also character development.

I am so stoked I'm ending my year on a string of amazing books. I can't recommend this one highly enough to those that like darker fantasy in an entirely unique world. This was like falling for fantasy all over again.

Audience:

multi pov
non human pov
original monsters/races
darker fantasy
female pov
stylized prose
genre mashups

Ratings:

Plot: 14/15
Characters: 14/15
World Building: 15/15
Writing: 14/15
Pacing: 13/15
Originality: 15/15
Personal Enjoyment: 10/10

Final Score: 95/100 – 5 Stars, second highest rating of the year that's not Pratchett.

Eon ?Windrunner? says

I received an ARC of The Gutter Prayer in exchange for an honest review. I would like to thank Gareth Hanrahan and Orbit Books for the opportunity.

The Gutter Prayer is something very rare. It is a fantasy book treading new ground, forging its own path.

From the first page, the writing lets you know that this is something very different. Not only is the narration very unusual (don't even ask me what this narrative voice is called), Hanrahan's voice is so unique, it is truly hard to believe that this is a debut effort. Unpublished writers beware! Judging by the talent on display here, every aspiring writer should up their game.

The main plot has us following three thieves with a mission, only for everything to go spectacularly wrong. What starts out as a simple little heist quickly unravels, and I mean very quickly, into a rabbit warren of mystery, magic, dark secrets and horrific truths. I will not even begin to try and explain the plot further than that, as it is dark delight best left unspoiled.

This is a world conjured up by some mad genius in possession of mind boggling creativity. Layer upon layer of rich, detailed elements, fascinating history, vivid imagery and unique characters cements this as an original world that I absolutely, unequivocally, emphatically, would never want to live in. It is scary as hell. The creativity on display here would warrant a read of this book all by itself, if not for the masterful crescendo of tension weaved into the story, making for a real page turner and culminating in a unputdownable finale.

Gareth Hanrahan topples your expectations and perceptions like dominoes, page by page, until you are left with nothing but pure, unadulterated awe.

All right then. High praise aside, I did have an issue with the book that killed any chance it had of becoming a favourite of mine.

The truth is, I did not care for the characters much. They were well written, and interesting, but somewhere along the lines, the magic that writers do to make you feel for the characters just did not happen for me. There were one or two instances where I started to get the barest inkling that I was starting to care for a character when they were summarily killed off. Maybe that was part of the problem. Main characters met sudden deaths and were gone from the story just like that. Or maybe it was just a timing thing on my part. Gone before I could care and those still present were not as much to my liking. It is a small thing, but it can have a huge influence. I still liked reading about what they were up to, but just did not care about them like I should have. It says a lot though that I still rate this as highly. Either way, I suspect that this won't be a problem for the majority of readers, so once again it's more a case of it's me, not you. ?

To finish off with I need to reiterate. This is a very special book my friends. The Gutter Prayer is an absolutely phenomenal debut and with this first attempt Gareth Hanrahan has proven himself exceptionally talented. If the author's mantelpiece (I hope you have one Mr Hanrahan) is not stacked with awards by the end of 2019 I will be shocked and dismayed, as this effort deserves it. Yep, it's that good. This book will undoubtedly be one of the best fantasy books you will read in 2019 and heralds the start of something absurdly promising. While I had my issues with it, I do not hesitate to call it fantastic and a must read for all who love fantasy. Be sure to mark the release date on your calendar.

PS: There is a gorgeous hardcover of this book available from Goldsboro already. (Release date everywhere else is 15 January 2019) It has beautiful blue edges and to top it all is signed by the author. YES PLEASE! [Link](#)

You can find this review at [Booksprens](#)

Petrik says

ARC provided by the publisher—Orbit—in exchange for an honest review.

I don't think it's too soon for me to say that *The Gutter Prayer* will be the best fantasy debut of 2019.

I have been anticipating this book ever since I first laid my eyes upon the gorgeous cover art by Richard Anderson. You see, I have this perception that any fantasy book with Richard Anderson's art gracing its cover will most likely reflect that beauty with amazing content inside; once again I was proven right. In my opinion, Orbit is one of the best modern fantasy publishers these days. This is even more evident if we're speaking about debuts released over the past two years, such as *Kings of the Wyld* by Nicholas Eames and *Age of Assassins* by R.J. Barker. *The Gutter Prayer* by Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan has strengthened that notion.

I haven't read a dark fantasy novel as original and riveting as *The Gutter Prayer* since Michael Fletcher's *Manifest Delusions*. I'm serious, this is a must read for every dark fantasy enthusiast. The only other form of escapism I can think of that's similar to this triumphant book is the critically acclaimed video game, *Bloodborne*. The main plot of the book revolves around a group of three young thieves as they are involuntarily caught in an ancient magical war between gods, monsters, ghouls, worm-men, Tallowmen, and sorcerers. As you can probably guess from terms like worm-man and Tallowman, this book was freaking bizarre, twisted, and insane in fantastic ways. Hanrahan's imagination is a sacred blessing for the fantasy genre and I demand more fantasy books as original as this one. The prologue was immediately intriguing, and from there the book relentlessly elevates itself to a phenomenal level of quality by making sure every element for a great fantasy was offered within each new chapter.

“Change is simultaneously a fast and a slow process. The great forces of history are slow-moving and unnoticed by those surrounded by them, visible only in hindsight where they appear inevitable.”

Unpredictable and incredibly well-told story aside, the characters were fascinatingly original. The main characters, Carillon, Rat the Ghoul, and Spar the Stone Man, have a dynamic and interesting friendship going on between them. Like many great SFF authors, Hanrahan imbued life into the naming of the characters. It did take me more or less 100 pages to fully warm up to the characters, as there was a bit of a learning curve in the beginning; readers were immediately put into a chaotic situation and had to make sense of things along the way. If you find yourself a bit confused, I strongly suggest being patient. This book is superbly rewarding and totally worth finishing. Once I made it through the first 100 pages, I realized that I had become invested in both the main and side characters, and was genuinely curious about their fates; the three young thieves in particular really stole my heart.

As much as I loved the characters, IF I had to choose one favorite aspect from this book I would personally choose the world-building, which is something rare for me because I usually prioritize characterizations over everything else, but this novel is a special case. I loved how efficiently, intricately, and effectively the world-building was presented. However, it was the sheer originality regarding the creation of the world in this book that completely awed me. Gods, catastrophic alchemical weaponry, divine and terrifying monstrosities,

saints, humans, ghouls, and eldritch horrors filled these pages exceptionally. Plus, the rich history and lore of the city of Guerdon made the world feel fully realized and vividly constructed. The City of Guerdon was not just a simple setting, but was almost as an additional and crucial character around which every great factor of the book revolved. There's still so much I want to talk about regarding the world-building but I really have to stop. Trust me, it will be exponentially better for you to read Hanrahan's terrific vision without knowing anything about it, as I did.

“But there are moments when things can change, when the forces balance and it's possible for people – individual people – to make a big difference. To – realign things. Remake the world.”

You don't have to worry about the book having a weak conclusion. Satisfying and rewarding ending aside, the blasting final action scenes were an absolute masterwork that cemented the novel into 5-star territory with finesse. Both world-building and pulse-pounding action worked harmoniously to create unputdownable, cataclysmic scenes in the last 100 pages of the book. There was so much chaos going on and yet they were miraculously easy to follow. It was during this final section that I started thinking of the author as a mad genius. Hanrahan painted breathtaking scenes of Armageddon with a blazing lance that pierced through my fortress of empathy. I also felt that the voices in my reality were muted by the descending avatar of God's wrath that inflicted devastating calamity with palpable tensions. Honestly speaking, the final brutal action sequences of this book could've even worked as the final battle of the series itself if the author had chosen. I have no doubt that the explosive hurricane of malevolence and the conflagration of light in the city of Guerdon will give readers a wild and unforgettable experience.

This was all possible because Hanrahan is an immensely gifted writer. The book was told in multi third-person perspective in the present tense and his prose absolutely didn't feel like something produced by a debut author; it was rich in quality and extremely well-written. Seriously, most of the passages and sentences he came up with were simplistically written and yet conjured impactful, evocative, and vivid imagery. Here's a little passage from the first page of the novel so you can get a tiny glimpse of what I'm talking about:

“From here, you see the heart of the old city, its palaces and churches and towers reaching up like the hands of a man drowning, trying to break free of the warren of alley ways and hovels that surrounds them.”

How awesome is that? I've never read any author described a skyscraper as the hands of a man drowning and I thought it conveyed a clear image and vision of what kind of book readers are getting into right from the start. If you're experiencing fantasy fatigue because you feel like most books in the genre is starting to feel too familiar, this book shall be your ambrosia. It was perpetually earth-shattering and it provided a healthy injection of escapist euphoria when I needed a full dose.

I'm going to close my review here by saying that *The Gutter Prayer* is mind-blowingly stellar in every respect; full of seductive creativity, marvelously intelligent, innovative, and frankly revolutionary. This dark and enchanting debut contained no shortage of alluring madness and wondrous imagination that manifests itself gloriously within the pages. Fantasy readers, be wise and buy this book, because there's simply nothing

like it. It worked incredibly well as a standalone, but anyone who've read it will know that THIS IS NOT THE LAST installment and I absolutely can't wait for the sequel. With this superlative debut, Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan has established himself as the newest virtuoso to enter the pantheon of fantasy greats. I envision that *The Gutter Prayer* will not only win many readers' hearts but also win multiple fantasy awards in the near future. Yes, it was THAT good. Read it. Thank me later.

Official release date: January 17th (UK) and 22th (US), 2019

Sidenote:

You can get this book more than a month early if you purchase the signed and numbered limited edition (with sprayed edges too!) from [Goldsboro Books!](#)

You can pre-order the book with free shipping by clicking [this link!](#)

The quotes in this review were taken from an ARC and are subject to change upon publication.

You can find [this](#) and the rest of my reviews at [Novel Notions](#)

Melissa ♥ Dog/Wolf Lover ♥ Martin says

OMG! Look at this beautiful stained edge & signed/numbered book! I'm in love !!!

Omg! This book freaking rocked! I have never read anything like it!!

I CAN NOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT BOOK!!

Highly recommend!

Happy Reading!

Mel ????

BLOG

Anna Stephens says

This book is bonkers from start to finish. Monsters, magic, thieves, alchemists, saints and gods rub shoulders

and pick pockets in the city of Guerdon while across the sea the Godswar rages on, saints and avatars and alchemical bombs making a wasteland of the paradise the gods created for their followers and now destroy. A ghoul, a man suffering from the Stone Plague and a young woman team up to rob a building and inadvertently get dragged into a plot to bring back some very nasty gods. None of them are exactly what they seem as they stumble unknowingly from one disaster to the next in a bid to prevent the return of the gods and to wrest control of the Brotherhood of Thieves from the vicious master, Heinreil. This has lashings of black humour and some truly disgusting monsters and morals. If you like your fantasy turned up to 11 and stuffed with every weird thing you can think of - and a lot more you can't - then this is the Lovecraftian, eldritch book of the damned for you.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2019/01/14/...>

The Gutter Prayer is a novel that got a lot of pre-publication attention; even half a year before it was due to come out, I was already hearing readers sing its praises. This was THE fantasy novel all fans should be checking out in 2019, apparently—especially if your predilections run towards grimdark.

So I read it. And now I understand where all the love is coming from.

Our story, for the most part, is centered on the lives of three thieves. Cari, Spar and Rat have not known each other for long, but by the time they were called upon to work together in a secret plot hatched up by Heinreil, the city of Guerdon's most notorious crime boss, the three of them were already...well, as thick as thieves. Spar is the son of a late gang leader, but he is also a Stone Man—the term given to someone afflicted with a degenerative disease which slowly petrifies the body and its organs, turning them hard as rock. Rat is a Ghoul, a member of a race of underground people who live in the old tunnels and crypts of the city, subsisting on the flesh of the dead. And Cari is an orphan and a drifter who feels like she owes a lot to her other two companions, who took her into their gang even though she arrived with nothing to her name.

Their job together was supposed to be quick and simple: a smash-and-grab at the city's House of Law, where the three of them were tasked to steal an important document. But little did they know, Heinreil had other plans, and their little group was only meant to be a distraction. The night ends in disaster, with a great fire that levels a good chunk of Guerdon and claims lives. And Cari, who was injured and knocked out in the commotion, wakes up in a thieftaker's prison with a new power in her head.

The Gutter Prayer, in many ways, is the perfect marriage of grimdark and epic fantasy. Here you will find the grittiness and cynicism one might expect from a Joe Abercrombie or Scott Lynch novel, but also the kind of unique and imaginative world-building that wouldn't feel out of place in a Brandon Sanderson story. Clearly Gareth Hanrahan's experience as a game designer and RPG writer has also served him well in writing his debut, for many of the ideas in here—particularly those related to creatures and theistic myths—reminded me a lot of elements from fantasy tabletop campaigns.

The world of this novel is, in a word, incredible. While most of the story is confined to Guerdon, the narrative never lets you forget that this little corner of the universe is just one piece of a greater puzzle, so not once does the setting ever feel small. The place is rich with history, its culture influenced by the diversity of its peoples and religions. The city becomes a character in its own right; from the dank gutters to the well-kept university district, every little slice of Guerdon we get to see is another side of its personality. The best

sights, however, lie in its underbelly. There you find the Ghouls, hiding in the shadows. The Stone Men, who are feared and shunned. The Tallowmen, menacing wax golems that are magically bound to serve as the city's enforcers. The Crawling Ones, disgusting monstrosities made up of a wriggling mass of sentient worms. And if you're really unlucky, you might even run afoul of a Raveller, a shapeshifting predator aligned with the Black Iron Gods.

In the face of all this originality, the characters are almost overshadowed. The perspectives of Cari, Spar, and Rat are compelling enough, but in a way, I also felt that their development took a backseat to the world-building. As protagonists, they didn't inspire much attachment, and individually, their voices did not really stand out. In fact, I thought Hanrahan did better with his supporting characters in this regard, exploring strong personalities like Jere, Eladora, or Professor Ongent. More than once I wished a couple of these characters had gotten more attention or a bigger role. The Gutter Prayer being a debut, it also exhibits a few signs of what I feel are common new author mistakes. One is the compulsion to throw in unnecessary flourishes like random narrative shifts when it might have been better just to keep things simple.

However, the criticisms I have are minor. Ideally, I would have preferred a bit more balance between story, characters, and world-building, where one aspect isn't disproportionately overrepresented to eclipse the others, which was partly the issue here. But overall, *The Gutter Prayer* was an impressive debut, one that is certain to make a lot of dark fantasy fans ecstatic. Boldly ambitious and innovative in equal measure, Hanrahan's daring entry into the genre is guaranteed to captivate and enthrall.

Petros Triantafyllou says

It usually takes me two to three days to finish an average-sized book. *The Gutter Prayer* took me two weeks. Now you may think that I struggled to finish it, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I tried to savor it for as long as I could, because although this is just my first read for 2019 and we're only in January, I'm confident that I won't find a greater book this year.

Ghouls who feed on rotting flesh. People who slowly turn to stone, becoming living statues with incredible strength before they petrify completely. Minions made of wax, burning like living candles, capable of inhuman feats. Ethereal creatures that can absorb both body and soul. Beings made out of living worms, commanding powers so terrible that could melt the flesh from your bones. Immortal Gods who can alter reality. Take a stroll around Guerdon and chances are you'll stumble across half of those creatures at the same night.

"Change is simultaneously a fast and a slow process. The great forces of history are slow-moving and unnoticed by those surrounded by them, visible only in hindsight where they appear inevitable."

Grimdark is a loose term. A lot of people have tried to define this relatively new sub-genre of speculative fiction, but opinions vary. What makes a work grimdark? Does it have to be nihilistic, immoral or violent? Should the protagonist be an anti-hero or even a straight up villain? Does the world portrayed have to be a cynical, disillusioned or dystopian place? Should it all be grey and not at all black or white? Should there be no hope? Ask ten people and you'll get ten different answers. And yet, if you ask those same people what they think about *Prince of Thorns*, *The Darkness that Comes Before*, or *Beyond Redemption*, you'll get one

answer. Grimdark. They may not agree as to why, each one of them may list a different reason, but in the end all of them will agree that it's Grimdark. They'll just know. Because Grimdark isn't something that you can define. Grimdark is something you feel. Now if you go around and ask those few people who've read *The Gutter Prayer*, or if you're patient enough to wait a few years before asking thousands of people the same question, chances are you'll get the exact same answer. Grimdark. Pure, unadulterated Grimdark.

What makes *The Gutter Prayer* so special though isn't that it's Grimdark. It's that it's weird. And I mean weird in every kind of sense. The narrative is unorthodox. The plot is bizarre and grotesque. The characters are eccentric and the world is peculiar and borderline absurd. I uttered "whaaaaaaat", "oh come on!" and "what the actual fuck did I just read..." more times than I can count, and yet... And yet, when I finished I knew that everything was exactly as it should be. This was a crazy ride, the craziest one I've been in a while, and I wouldn't change it for the world. The only thing I could possibly ask for is "more".

The Gutter Prayer is, undoubtedly, the debut of the year, and I won't be surprised to see it sweeping every award next year.

TS Chan says

This is an ARC provided by the publisher, Orbit, in exchange for an honest review.

4.5 stars.

A truly extraordinary debut, *The Gutter Prayer* strikes an intense chord with its powerful worldbuilding, vivid imagery and evocative prose.

Two things about this book caught my attention. Firstly, the blurb which indicated that the main characters comprise three thieves (I have such a weakness for stories with thieves). And then, my coblogger's review which raved about the dark worldbuilding. Alright! I'll admit that the gorgeous cover also played some part in this.

It has been quite a while since I've read fantasy which employed such dark elements reminiscent of horror stories. I'll just give you these three terms - Tallowmen, Raveller and Crawling Ones. You might form an idea what these might be, but I can tell you for a fact that they are much worse than what they sound like. A world where divine powers and alchemical advancement co-exist on an uneasy balance, the history behind the creations and eldritch horrors is dark, twisted and perversely captivating. My advice to readers is to avoid reading this book while you're eating.

The main characters themselves are also... uncommon. Rat is a ghoul, a carrion-eating race and the original inhabitants of the city. The deep layers of history, bloodier and darker than one can possibly imagine, pushed these transformed people and their dwelling into the depths of the city. Spar is a Stone Man, cursed by an incurable plague, which slowly calcifies all living tissue until it kills. Cari has a mysterious past - a legacy - which may spell the doom of the city.

As far as I am concerned, the star of the story is the city of Guerdon itself. Hanharan wrote the city like it is a living, breathing organism that has seen generations of the good, the bad and the ugly. To describe the writing as immersive, vivid and evocative is like saying that sugar is sweet. Guerdon is a scary place to live in, and the author made sure that I feel so through every alleyway, street corner, tunnel, stairway and tower.

There's a sick energy in the air, the sour adrenaline running through the streets. The city's sleep has been disturbed; like some giant animal with stone sinews and nerves made of living people, Guerdon paces back and forth, testing the limits of its cage.

While the narrative can be considered to be fast-paced, the plot itself took some time to materialise cohesively. The story, written in present tense third person, is told from the perspectives of the main characters, who are pulled in myriad directions (and misdirections) following a disastrous thieving attempt at the start of the book. The mystery behind the disaster was so obfuscated that I simply had no clue what was happening until almost midway into the book. In fact, I was initially a bit concerned. In spite of the stupendous worldbuilding, I did not find myself eager to get back to reading the book after putting it down. I chalk this down to the characterisation which I found less compelling than the rest of the story. Don't get me wrong, the characters are not badly written at all. They could have been overshadowed by the worldbuilding and the drawing out of the plot. I just didn't care for them as much as what crazy thing is going to happen next.

Notwithstanding, the intensity really took off in the second half of the book. When the building blocks of the subplots finally came together, the pace became relentless and the narrative more engrossing. As the truths were revealed, events escalated from catastrophic to apocalyptic. I will describe the climactic sequence simply as breathtaking. Whatever prior reservations I had about this novel was alleviated by its denouement. I needed emotional resonance for a read to be amazing for me, and that was what I found lacking for a large part of this book. That is, until the final chapters and that poignant ending which was superbly satisfying.

Lastly, I have to commend the author for his writing skills. There are flashes of brilliance in his prose and occasional mitigated streams of consciousness (the Irish influence perhaps) from the characters' POVs. Altogether Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan has developed a unique voice with his unconventional style and created something extraordinary in the realm of modern dark fantasy.

The official release date is Jan 17th in the UK and Jan 22nd in the US.

You can order this book from: [Amazon UK](#) / [Book Depository](#) (Free shipping)

You can also find this and my other reviews at [Novel Notions](#).

Bookdragon Sean says

With his imaginative characters, creative plot and twisted creatures, Hanrahan proves that fantasy can still be original.

This is an exceedingly exciting adventure of thievery and treachery. It's immediate and gripping. It doesn't mess around and quickly launched me into an extraordinary new fantasy world. Hanrahan is an exceptionally talented writer, and I do not hesitate to say that this book will receive heaps of claim from readers and critics alike. It truly deserves it.

The story begins with an explosion, an explosion that ruins the heist the three protagonists, Cari, Spar and Rat were undertaking. They have no idea what has happened or why it has happened. They have been set up

as the world descends into fire and chaotic madness. They have been left for dead and without any answers. It's a sign of things to come, of the powerlessness they possess in a game where they are only considered as mere pawns. The plot only becomes darker as the world becomes richer and more vivid. There are secrets to be unearthed in the dark streets of Guerdon, and I was surprised on several occasions with the direction this took.

I don't want to give anything away but let me say that this book contains some of the coolest creatures I have read about in years. The Tallowmen are wax constructs made to resemble men and created by mages to carry out their bidding. And they are quite terrifying. They are such a great idea. Fantasy novels that depict new and interesting creatures, that are completely original, are always worthy of attention. Just think about it, how many original fantasy monsters are still being created? Not many, at times it all feels like the same regurgitated versions of the same thing.

So, I was delighted to read about new and interesting monsters that were accompanied by such successful and strong world building. This world is loaded with history, and it's slowly revealed as the characters navigate its dark depths. It ticks all the boxes as the characters are also complicated and interesting individuals. Spar is plagued by a disease that will end in his ultimate demise as he slowly turns into stone, Rat is a ghoul that feeds off dead human flesh and Cari has a secret past that threatens to topple everything she is. And the dynamic between the three is electric.

Hanrahan is a strong new voice in fantasy, one that will resonate very loudly with fans of Scott Lynch. Both writers have a keen eye for detail when conjuring up their respective worlds, and they both know how to create complex plots that go in unexpected directions. They both write about thieves and cut-throats in a grimdark fantasy setting, so if you like *The Lies of Locke Lamora* then *The Gutter Prayer* is certainly the book for you. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

There are simply not enough books that focus on thieves in fantasy, and this helps to fill the gap tremendously - **A very strong 9/10**

This book was sent to me in exchange for an honest review, thank you Orbit!

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