



Priest

Matthew Colville

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For centuries the people of Ollghum Keep relied on the knights of the Green Order to protect them from the horrors of the haunted wood. Now, as before, a monstrous army marches on their small town. But this time, the Green Order is nowhere to be found.

The Bishop sends the priest Heden into the wood, to find out why. Arriving at their secret priory, Heden discovers their commander is dead, the remaining knights paralyzed with despair. They will not act, they will not tell him what happened, and with each hour the monstrous army gets closer to Ollghum Keep. Thousands will die if the priest fails.

When the knights start dying one by one, Heden must race to unravel the conspiracy of silence and save the knights from themselves so they can save the people they were sworn to guard.

Priest Details

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From Reader Review Priest for online ebook

E.W. Pierce says

I'm a huge fan of Matt Colville's YouTube channel, and of Matt himself, so this review especially pains me. Given how eloquently Matt talks about story crafting and how well read he seems to be in the genre, I went into this book with high hopes. Alas.

This book is an overwritten mess. The plot is convoluted and meanders all over the place. Characters do things for reasons that aren't clearly understood. The writing is passive, awkwardly so in some places. And, most damning of all, it's just boring.

Some of Matt's strengths do shine through. The world building is top shelf. I liked the idea of the priest protagonist in a D&D-esque world (more so than the actual implementation). There's enough good here to lift this above a 1 star rating.

I've heard the second book is far superior. Such is my esteem for Mr. Colville that I'm still seriously considering reading it.

Jon Van says

Thoroughly enjoyed it

Found this through the authors YouTube DM series. So interesting to “know” the author in this way before reading his book. Action, emotion, Drama, surprise. It was a blast to read.

G.R. Matthews says

You have a book here that takes an old fashioned, classical form of fantasy and updates it for a more modern taste.

The author uses some of the legends of King Arthur, aspects of LOTR, a pinch of Feist and sprinkle of many other influences. All of these he mixes into a story that carries you through the events with a pace that ensures your interest doesn't wander.

Occasionally, the author's cleverness takes over and there is one chapter, near the end, which I thought could have been said fewer words, but then you're back into the action. Also, the main character has a great deal of compassion for individuals, but when there is a larger loss of life he seems to shrug it off.

However, what you do get, when you read this book, is a clear story, a compelling set of characters, some great interaction, and a story that leads to a sound finale.

It is well worth your time.

Mark Lawrence says

I haven't read this book (yet), but it is one of the 10 finalists in the Self-Published Fantasy Blog-Off. That's 10 out of 270+ hopefuls!

Read about the competition here

<http://mark---lawrence.blogspot.co.uk...>

See the list of finalists so far here:

<http://mark---lawrence.blogspot.co.uk...>

Becky says

I enjoyed this so much more than I thought I would! I thought this was great tale that suffered from some typical flaws seen in a lot of self-published works - typos, clunky prose here and there, a few dropped storyline (Aderyn's gone you'll never see her again oh well!), and a bit of inconsistent characterization. Now, I know that sounds like a lot of flaws, but really, the good parts of this book FAR outweighed the bad in my opinion. This is a very good book.

I enjoyed that this felt like a very old, mythic fantasy tale at times, but also very gritty. The knight's cant, the Welsh (maybe?) names, the forest that is alive, the myriad of various nonhuman races...it all felt very vast, even though we're only introduced to a couple different settings. But it was still very now and very fun. Characters cursed, characters were annoyed by the knight's cant, there were flying carpets! This could've been a very dark book, and at points it was, but overall, it felt like kind of like a fantasy thriller murder mystery story. It's a weird cross of genres, I'm not sure how to define it, but I know I like it.

The magic system, if it can be called that, is great. You pray to the saint you patron and the prayers act as spells should the saint decide to grant you the power. I just really like that idea, although I do wish we'd gotten more details on what a prayer was. Is it an invocation? A ritual? Spoken or silent? Whenever a character prayed, it pretty much went like "Heden said a prayer to cast wards around himself." I'll admit, I'm one of the people who likes to know the details about the magic system in my universe, so I'm a little bummed there was more details regarding the magic system here.

I REALLY liked the mystery. I'm a big fan of a good mystery, and I consider a good mystery one I can't solve. My biggest pet peeve in mysteries is when I figure out the twist 1/3 of the way through the book. It makes for a boring reveal. For the life of me, I could not figure out what was going on in this book. I didn't know the twist when it was revealed, yet the mystery of the Order makes sense looking back on it.

Also that cliffhanger! Matt knows how to end a book and leave you wanting more, that's all I'm going to say.

So onto things I didn't like so much - Oh good lord the first few chapters of this book were awful. My husband bought this book for me because he really enjoyed it, so I was determined to push through, but had that not been the case, I may have DNFed it in the first 5% or so. The prose felt extremely clunky in the beginning, like Matt was trying to get his footing and establish a voice. The action felt kind of disjointed, episodic, and just not....good, honestly. Heden didn't feel like a real character. I just, overall, felt really distant from the story. I could suspend my disbelief and immerse myself. Between 5% and 10% of the way through the book though, that changed drastically and I found myself completely engrossed. But it does pay to be aware that the beginning is the weakest part of the story in my opinion.

Prose-wise, this isn't super elegant. I got a little annoyed with the phrase "It seemed he realized that such and such had happened." Matt can get repetitive, and that's one of the phrases he's apparently quite fond of. Also, the point of view seemed to bounce back and forth between third person limited and third person omniscient, which aggravated me. Mostly, the POV was Heden's, third person but with access to his thought processes and feelings. But there's be a random paragraph in the middle of a chapter that was suddenly in another character's POV, and then it'd go right back to Heden.

Last point I want to make is that sometimes Heden felt like he had an inconsistent characterization. I get that he's suffering from some sort of PTSD, but trauma aside, he just felt off at times. He makes a comment in the beginning of the book that only a few people in the city would be able to stand up to him, insinuating that he's a very powerful man, but he's constantly faltering in battle and being rescued by others. He's a very stoic, unemotional man most of the time, but then he'd break down emotionally later on or have a random bout of extreme anger and just cut a guy's head off. I just didn't know what to make of him. I like to feel, at the end of a book, like I know how the characters would react in certain situations, but I don't think I'd be able to predict Heden's actions in any situation. I'm looking forward to Thief - hopefully we'll get to see more of Heden's past, which might help make his actions seem clearer.

So, despite flaws, this was a really fun, good book to read! I've already purchased Thief and can't wait to see what Heden's going to do next!

Bob Milne says

I really expected to enjoy Priest more than I did. Based on everything I'd read about it, I just thought Matthew Colville and I would click a little better. It's a serviceable tale, and there were some moments that made me smile, but overall it just left me with a feeling of strained *deja vu* rather than genuine nostalgia.

The biggest issue for me comes down to Heden, the titular priest. I just didn't like the guy. He didn't engage me, didn't appeal to me, and didn't inspire me as a protagonist to follow. I gave him every benefit of the doubt, but we just never clicked. It didn't help that he seemed to discover himself at just the right time, and that his power was so over-the-top, it drained his quest of all tension.

In terms of narrative, I've seen some people complain about its episodic nature, but I had no issues with that. In fact, I suspect it made for a better read. There was some strong dialogue at times, and some of the monsters/villains were painted upon the page very well. Ultimately, though, it was more hard boiled detective novel than epic fantasy, with a priest/gumshoe who didn't quite do it for me.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Disclaimer: I received a complimentary copy of this title from the author in exchange for review consideration. This does not in any way affect the honesty or sincerity of my review.

J.R. says

I devoured this book in a week solid, starting with caution and then purposefully making time for it. That in itself is the sign of a good story well told.

Priest isn't a coming of age tale, instead its protagonist is the priestly Heden, an older man that has lived his life and has now slumped into quiet seclusion. He owns an inn that he never opens but keeps stocked, a strange combination that has you questioning his thought processes immediately.

Heden himself is a complicated man, and the tale is told entirely through his actions save for a brief flashback. He is a priest in a polytheistic society, and the goddess he is empowered by only has one worshipper: him.

The story is further complicated by the young whore he gives safe haven to, which you immediately believe sets up for the youth/experience duo fighting for their lives against the world.

Only, it doesn't at all. Heden is given orders to head off into a forest and leaves the girl in the inn for the next three days. We hear little from her for the bulk of the book.

There are brief tales on Heden's way to the forest, but they're largely for the benefit of establishing this single character

Instead we are introduced to The Green Order, a small group of solitary knights that are protectors of the forest. Something has gone horribly wrong within said order and it is up to Heden to determine what has happened.

Priest throws a proverbial curveball with this forest, evoking an almost twisted Arthurian feel to the proceedings. It's like a façade of medieval fantasy under which lies a more contemporary tale.

There are monsters in this tale, but they largely serve as a plot point. There is little development of the world, most of it mentioned in passing rather than regurgitated history being spread out over multiple paragraphs. This lends the tale an aura of intrigue as you're venturing into a land unknown with Heden in tow.

The knights are chivalrous to a fault and their deeply held convictions coupled with their hermetic existence outside of the order make their initial interactions with our hero seem almost alien. An undercurrent of animosity is soon given voice and things start falling apart soon after.

The underlying mystery of the problems with the order and the relationships that Heden develops with the order are what propels the bulk of this book, with a particularly poignant scene involving one of the squires that had me silently applauding.

For all its excellence, the introduction of the young girl and subsequent banishing of her from the text seemed needless, whilst the book also had a tendency to cut away from certain action scenes and

immediately jumping to the aftermath. The tale felt bookended in an unnecessary fashion and the powers on display did border on Deus Ex Machina at times.

The mystery was unfolded at an infuriating pace, which is both laudable as it left the reader mirroring the hero's own frustrations and a point of contention as it often felt under-exposed. I felt like I was clutching at straws too many times before it was finally spelt out for me.

The characterisation was strong for the most part, with all the knights and the principle characters getting the time needed. It was non-existent for some other critical characters which left me confused as they only appeared sporadically and at completely opposite ends of the tale. In all honesty I had forgotten about them by that point and would have needed a primer to keep all the names right.

There were also no paragraph indentations in my copy, but I assume the author will rectify this. The number of typos in the text were minimal, a sign of good proof-reading and editing.

Overall I highly recommend this book for anyone who likes a protagonist with baggage and introspection. People who are tired of the coming of age stories but who also want something a little different from the clones masquerading as adult fantasy clogging up the shelves in the book stores.

Matt Colville considers his work a hard-boiled throwback to books that he read in the 1980s. I'm not sure what books he was reading back then but if Priest is the result then perhaps I need to contact him for a reading list.

Note: upon completion of this review I immediately bought the sequel, Thief. I look forward to reading it and can safely say that Colville has gained a new fan. Here's hoping this is the beginning of a successful career and his writing continues to improve book by book.

Daniel says

I am a Matt Colville fan. I don't think he has been a pen and paper roleplayer as long as I have but its gotta be close. His YouTube videos should be required watching for old and new hobbyists. He has an imaginative brain and a way of looking at gaming, even in its most basic form, that GMs and players alike should subscribe to. I'm not sure if this is his first book, because I know he works on videogames as a profession, I believe.

If this is his first book its great.

Heden is a cleric who no longer is in favor from his church. He serves a female form goddess who is ridiculed and made light of, though she seems to have been at one point a mover and shaker. The church uses Heden now to perform rituals and deal with things such as curses, possessions and other magical and threatening maladies that the 'regular' clergy doesn't want to deal with.

He gets asked to proceed to a dangerous wood some days distant and the nearby walled town. There is problems with the Green Order, a group of almost Green Knight kind of circle of warriors. Their leader has been killed and Heden has been asked to go and relieve them of their grief so they can return to their previous unity and power. What he runs into here begins weirdly and turns to a deep plot of intrigue, betrayal and heart rending sadness very quickly. The back and forth Heden has with the Knights is thick with questions and I simply couldn't put the book down to find out the truth crux of what was going on. Add to this a massive army of sub-man, almost Orcs bearing down on the forest and planning on destroying the walled town nearby, and you have a powerful story here.

Heden is powerful and magic in this book is directed and has some muscle. He sings and sometimes whispers his prayers to devastating results. Add to this that he has basically borrowed a Dwarven relic blade that can draw down starlight and sometimes a meteor to destroy foes, and the power level of Heden and the Knights of the Green Order becomes quickly evident.

What this book is becomes apparent halfway through it. This is a fantasy murder-mystery, and it is well done. Heden is a flawed and yet heroic character. He is foul mouthed and yet pious and so warm of heart in other circumstances. The panic attack he suffers after first entering the wood is strange and yet shows his traumatic past and frailty from where he has been and what he has had to do.

Overall this book was refreshing and solid, deep and gratifying to read. I truly enjoyed it and have the second book, Thief to start very soon. Also, if you wonder why these books are called the Ratcatchers books, there is a reason. Regular people refer to adventurers as Ratcatchers. They fear and despise them because they know when they appear that trouble is going to be stirred or they are bringing it with them. I kind of like this approach and it has a good feel to it, a real feel. I can't wait to dig into Thief!

Fine Job, Matt!

Leona says

We picked up Priest in order to support the author whom we'd been watching on Twitch. I was a bit skeptical as to the book mainly because it's another fantasy book, but I wanted to give it a shot as I love his streams, his other videos, and just his outlook on many things. That being said, I read it in a day! It's also one of the few books that my husband has read in a long time. It's rough at times and lacks extra descriptions, yet it felt spot on with the emotions and character development, and I'm still able to visualize the characters and their motivations. I'm struggling to put into words how I feel about the ending, so I know I recommend it! Now that it's been a couple of days since I finished the book, I can say that I'm still digesting the book and the ending which is rare for me. I love the discussion I'm having with myself.

Kenny Kimberly says

I was genuinely anticipating loving this book. I, like many who are familiar with Colville, learned of him through his series on YouTube and a few other places. It was the want to support him and the acknowledgement of how ingrained into literature and fantasy he was that led me to believe I would love this book, and so I ordered it. There will also be immense spoilers ahead, as I intend to dig into the book in its entirety. In short, the story is aggravatingly vague, inconsistent, and often simply obnoxious. Let me repeat that there will be SPOILERS ON THE ENTIRE STORY AHEAD OF THIS POINT.

I will start by flat out saying I despised this book. I had to force myself to finish it and I cannot fathom any reason why I would want to read any of the sequels. The main character is a Priest named Heden, of whom is every bit the angsty mysterious protagonist you read in every first draft on a writing forum. He has power through prayer and is the owner of an enormous Inn that is literally never open. I'm not going to sum up the plot, but there are some details that need to be known.

Heden is the first problem, and that's because everything else revolves around him. It's made very clear that he's a retired adventurer, and that much has happened before this book was written. That's perfectly fine, but

the book often acts as if you should know these things. Heden will ponder something that happened long ago with only vague hints as to what happened. This is clearly supposed to make him seem mysterious and experienced, but as a reader you would much rather know what happened than wonder about something that has no true bearing on the plot. The main story is based around him being sent into The Woad to absolve the Knights of the Green Order of a grievous sin, or something along those lines.

He then spends the majority of the book trying to persuade the Knights of the Green Order (of which sounds like something out of a Monty Python skit) to return to their duty and save a town from an enormous army. These knights speak in an obnoxious fantasy "thou art" type cadence, which is obnoxious for several reasons. Among these is a young woman of whom's name I have thoroughly forgotten, a squire that seems to be doomed to spend the rest of her life as one. She is incredibly devoted to the teachings of her order and is normally depicted performing her duty or reciting teachings word for word.

The rest of the knights are nothing special, and some make little sense. It's made very clear that the knights are rumored to be great mythical knights, so powerful and archetypal that the citizens of the doomed town won't even evacuate out of their faith to them. One is a literal playground bully, complete with two sniveling lackeys that are depicted as slimy and second-hand bullies yet also are somehow prestigious knights. The others are pretty much textbook valiant and stoic knights. Each one responds to Heden's questions by insisting that he talk to another knight, for an unnecessarily amount of time. Literal every question he asks - which are questions the reader is also asking - is met with them saying "wait until ___ shows up. Talk to him!"

This is awful for several reasons. For one, it goes on way too long. He asks every knight and they all say this. He isn't even asking complicated questions, he's literally just asking them what happened and other base questions so that he can find out what the horrible issue is that had him sent out. I repeat that these are questions THE READER HAS AS WELL, because NOTHING WHATSOEVER HAS BEEN EXPLAINED DESPITE BEING SEVERAL HUNDRED PAGES INTO THE BOOK. At this point we know literally nothing other than the top level of the most shallow characters ever seen. Every single time a knight tells Heden to wait and ask the other knight, it reads as if it's Matt Colville telling the reader to hold on while he builds suspense for another knight.

So then that knight pops up, and he won't fucking tell Heden what happened. Matt still won't tell you what happened. More, that knight reveals that Heden isn't a priest but rather a type of priest that has all but shamed his church and now has to atone for this, or something along those lines. At this, the knights kick him out, and he's no longer welcome to the woad.

So now he's escorted out by the Squire that we met earlier, the only one who has shown any human characteristics out of all of these. At this point the only things we know about her are that she's beautiful and incredibly devoted to the code the knights follow. I should mention as well that each knight took an oath, and hers is Chastity.

Her oath is Chastity. The oath that her future knighthood is based around is the oath of Chastity. I want you to let that sink in as deep as it can. The extremely devoted female Squire. Of whom wants to be a Knight more than anything. Has taken her oath. On the basis of maintaining absolute Chastity.

Okay.

So the squire escorts Heden back out of the mysterious Woad. They approach a river to bathe, and she IMMEDIATELY tries to fuck him. Why in the absolute name of God does this happen? What is the excuse for this? It's obviously an attempt to humanize her further, as well as trying to show how strong Heden's will is as he struggles but eventually succeeds to refuse her, but it does NOTHING other than tear down what tiny bit we know of her character. ALL we know of her is her name, her extreme desire to be a knight, her unspeakable devotion to her Order, and that her vow is not to have sex with people. In this single scene, she admits that she no longer believes in the order, and immediately forsakes her oath in an attempt to bang Heden.

Furthermore, this is literally the most typical plot line ever. A male and female stop somewhere to wash up and bathe. They go separately because its indecent to see each other naked. Somehow, they end up near each other, and a sexually tense scene emerges as they either bang or almost bang. As a funny sidenote, I read Pat Rothfuss's two Kingkiller Chronicle novels, and there's actually a scene where the main character and a female character bathe in a river and the main character notes that normally in this situation, a sex scene arises. Not related to this, but thought I should mention it.

So Heden leaves. Wonderful. Who wouldn't have? He was sent to judge these knights to see if they were worthy of being forgiven, and they end up completely sucking and refusing to even give him the most base knowledge on what happened so he can forgive them. Heden has also made it very clear from the start of the novel he wants NOTHING more than to just leave and call it a day, return to his Inn and just live his life. This is one of the things extremely consistent in his character.

So, as consistency cannot be allowed, he goes back. He attempts and fails to get them to tell him until he eventually finds out what happened on his own. I'm not going to drone on and on with every detail of the book, but one knight kills another in a jousting duel and breaks her oath in doing so, and the rest of the knights begin to break their oaths one by one.

Here's the kicker. Heden reveals through conversation with the psuedo-leader of knights that the main reason he's still there trying to convince the knights of their duty to save the town isn't to help them but because he doesn't believe so many innocents will be killed. I have neglected to mention that Heden took at the beginning of the novel an extremely powerful sword from a dwarf that hates him. It's one of those things thats hinted to have a long story to it, but we don't get to know it, only that he now possesses what is hinted to be an unspeakably rare and incredibly powerful weapon.

In a handful of combat scenes, we see Heden fight, and we see him use this weapon. He's incredibly powerful, even without the sword. He literally blows up heads with some of his prayers. He's the archetypal strong and silent type. The sword, we find, has the ability to use spells that literally just fucking annihilate everything. At one point he whispers Starfall to it or something along those lines, and flares of energy begin destroying his opponents. I don't recall the exact scene but he does something even more powerful with it later.

One of the knights points out something that the reader undoubtedly realizes now. Heden is 100% capable of saving the town on his own. No question about it. Heden says that he could save some, could defeat some of the army, but he couldn't do it all. Thing is, we see him do things that could undoubtedly destroy the approaching army, and as logical people we acknowledge that he wouldn't be the only person fighting. It's an undeniable fact that Heden could fight alongside the town's military force, or muster up some of the people that we've seen him converse with through the story, and save the town. He is undoubtedly strong enough to do this.

Honestly I now run the risk of repeating myself on things. The story is filled with plot holes, downright awful characters, and inconsistencies on an extreme level. The one thing I haven't mentioned is the mechanical issue of the writing. You would assume that someone with Colville's experience and expertise would be a phenomenal writer, and I will admit that this is completely my opinion and not something that could ever be proven, but this is not the case. Sentences are short and clipped, adjectives simple and general vocabulary juvenile. It's not something that can be easily explained or shown in evidence without reading the book and comparing it to another novel, but I can honestly say I often felt myself feeling like the writing was outsourced to a highschooler in a creative writing class.

I was thoroughly and unspeakably disappointed by this book. I can honestly say that I fully intended to love it. I almost ordered the other two in the trilogy immediately because I was that sure that I would love it. Now, I can't even fathom the thought of exploring these characters or the storyline any further. I am fully willing to acknowledge that the sequels could be fantastic, but I just have no reason to believe so. I feel that the reviews for this book are slanted by people who, like me, wanted to support Colville and gave a positive score to do so. I cannot in good faith suggest this book to anyone, and I readily rate it among my least favorite books.

I'm tossing in this edit because in reading through other reviews for this I realized something I forgot to say. The book literally feels like a Word document that wasn't proofread and sent in for printing. There are places where there are large gaps between paragraphs without there being a break in the story and other general issues that make it feel as if it wasn't even checked for spacing or other simple mistakes.

To those of you who enjoyed this, I'm happy that you were able to. This is obviously my own opinion and I have obviously neglected any sort of upsides there may be. If you ask someone else, I'm sure this book is phenomenal, and I have no desire whatsoever to take that away from anyone. Do not let my review stop you from supporting Colville. However, also be aware that if you're a fan of fantasy and appreciate the works of Tolkien, of Rothfuss, of Sanderson, and of all of the other famous fantasy writers, I can't see any way that you could ever enjoy this novel on the same level.

Steph Azevedo says

4.5/5.

I read Priest. I hated Priest. Never have I wanted to throw something so hard.

Here's my problem (other than the book being on my phone and therefore not being able to throw it): Every single drop of happiness and joy that is potentially offered by this plot is sucked out and spat into a deep pit of hopelessness and despair. And it's good. I mean, it is so good: the characters are well developed, the plot is driven with plenty of twists and turns, and the settings are fantastic. I would love to explore this world.

(Spoilers ahead, kinda maybe?)

If I had to categorize it, give it a specific niche, I'd say fantasy tragedy. It plays itself as dark, brooding and angsty. Worse, every single death actually made me mad. Which is strange, usually I can spot that sort of thing coming a mile away and not be particularly bothered but the deaths here *angered* me. The ending...

Mmgh. I finished this a week ago and I'm still upset.

I don't honestly know if I can read the next book. I expect it will be brilliant, yet I don't know if my poor heart can handle another emotional rollercoaster like this one.

Mat Kwok says

Very enthralling read. Even though at times it feels like I was inserted into the world in the middle of a story, it never failed to keep my interest and never dived down a rabbit hole too far to lose me. The emotion behind the characters are so relatable and real that I couldn't help but be drawn along in the roller coaster ride. The characterization is great as well. I'm usually not a fan of orcs, dwarves, and elves stories but this one keeps things far enough away from high fantasy to be palatable. It reminds me a lot of the Acts of Caine books by Matthew Stover, minus the sci-fi aspect. I think I picked up the book a total of 5 times before I finished it. Great read and cannot wait to start the next one.

Ari says

Finalist of #SPFBO. Read the full list of finalists here: <http://mark---lawrence.blogspot.co.uk...>

Summary: Our reluctant hero type, Heden, is sent to investigate a murder among a reclusive order of knights.

Thoughts: First I'd like to say this is solid writing and generally compelling. This is one of those books that is both cleverly written and easy to read.

I'm lead to believe the author was deliberately channeling books that he read in the 1980s when he wrote this, to which I say he did that well. But one persons classic is another's dated, and I'm sorry to say in this case I fall in the second category. I'm afraid I have no nostalgia (and have read too many Tolkien derivatives) to be able to enjoy the sometimes cheesy tropes and scenes at play here. If however, you suspect you'll fall into the first category, I think you'll like this book much more than I did.

I also didn't care for the somewhat episodic nature of Heden's quest. I would have rather the book just got on with it, and it left me with the impression that the book was much longer than it could have been (as did the inclusion of certain characters that had little/no bearing on the plot). Again, your mileage may vary, I'm aware other reviews have praised this facet of the book.

As for worldbuilding you have the inclusion of the standard giants, orcs (by another name), dragons, etc. etc. The author changes things up a little, and manages to give the book a unique feel.

I'm afraid that outside of Heden, characterization was limited. And Heden himself was... over powered to say the least. It really gutted the tension for me when he demonstrates just how powerful he is near the middle of the book. His characterization was also somewhat inconsistent to the point where I never knew what he was going to do next, and not in a good way.

Not bad, not great. All that said, I enjoyed it more than some of the other SPFBO finalists, and while I wouldn't put it in my top three, it's definitely close to them.

Verdict: 6/10

Lindsay says

I like Matthew Colville, so it pains me to give this book such a poor rating. Even if I didn't know that he is an avid D&D player, I would have been able to guess based on this book.

Matt is an independent fantasy author, which I'm guessing means he had no editor. No outside insight to tell him "the back and forth of these conversations isn't advancing the plot and will be boring/annoying to your audience" or "the dialogue exchange isn't believable enough" or "you are using too many terms that haven't been previously explained and your readers (at least the ones that don't play D&D) will get confused".

To much telling and not enough showing (ex: too many times in the story we are told "Heden likes ____" and blatantly spelled out things rather than having the reader piece stuff together.)

This is his first book, and he will hopefully learn and get better. He seems so smart, charismatic and confident on his Youtube channel, and I hope that never stops. He has some really great creative ideas (as evident from his campaign diaries) but he could really use an editor to help polish his work so it can shine.

George says

After following Matt's youtube videos, I got excited on the prospect of reading one of his books. I didn't read any reviews beforehand, but I took his word for it and tried it out. Ultimately I was a bit disappointed. Now, I gave it 2/5, since Goodreads rating system is on a scale of 5, when I'd actually want a 5/10, or a 2.5/5, but that's just me being weirdly nitpicking about ratings.

The book was actually quite easy to read and if I had the time, I could have gone through it, probably, in something less than a week. Its language isn't anything challenging which is a good thing, but it's also not really interesting in any way. I found it sort of lacks the somewhat poetic or artistic feeling I'm used to in some other works of fantasy, I've come to love.

Another thing that I didn't really enjoy was the characters. I got the feeling that Matt wanted to do a more realistic and/or gritty approach on his characters, but I felt like they were really trying to be edgy, than actually being cool and/or hardcore. Heden, the protagonist seems to suffer from some PTSD, but he's so seriously overpowered and angst-y all the time that it only shows up once in the book and it's not even such a strong scene, so I couldn't bring myself to care. By the end of the book, I actually came to disliking Heden quite a lot, though the author did manage to get me to like a few of his other characters enough to feel sad about them.

On to the good things of the book though: the plot was quite interesting. A dead knight means a mystery to be solved and that was actually quite fun. There were some strong scenes and quite a lot of interesting ideas about the setting which isn't your typical high fantasy setting. As I said before, it was very easy to read and the way it closes, really left me wanting to see what happens next. So, I will go on to read the next one, though probably not right away.

