



Prayers in Steel

Michael McClung

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I am a wheel whose edge is death.

This is the mantra that Andines are taught from their first day as novices. Their swords are their souls, and their patron saint, Andos, was the living embodiment of their tenets - Protect the helpless. Obey the emperor in Axumwiste. Pray for guidance in times of peace, and pray with steel in times of strife.

A time of strife has come once more.

Brother Caida is sent on a quest to rescue a princess kidnapped by bandits en route to her wedding. Armed with a great sword and armored in his faith, Caida soon finds both tested beyond endurance - for nothing is as it seems, and it is the world that needs to be rescued from the princess, not the princess from anything or any one. And waiting in the darkness, behind stolen faces, are the skin walkers - an ancient evil long thought banished from the world of men...

Prayers in Steel Details

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From Reader Review Prayers in Steel for online ebook

Phillip Ramm says

*Disclaimer: I have known the author for many years and he was a flatmate for a while.

Even so, his are the only fantasy books I read these days because:

I am hooked.

I loved his previous Amra Thetys series, at least one of which I read in MS and no doubt detracted from by suggesting things, but it survived my ill-informed intervention nonetheless, and the books went on to great things, like awards, etc...

This is the start of a new series about a sword wielding monk whose untested killing prowess is needed for a dubious cause, involving much magic, bloodshed, and political intrigue. Between the pious and innocent monk who prays with his sword, the beautiful witch who tempts his all too human flesh and whose ambitions are monumental yet uncertain, and a cast of grumpy mages, battle-scarred mercenaries, and netherworld characters long thought extinct, plus a large stone of mysterious power, the tension keeps building as the schemes and the battles spiral. Despite these dark themes, a few chuckles here and there lighten the slaughter, and I am craving the next episode.

If you've read Glenn Cook's Black Company series or Gene Wolfe's Book Of The Long Sun series, then you'll have an idea of where we are, but with Michael's lighter touch. No lugubrious explication in his books, he just gets on with it!

(One anatomical oversight -I am a radiographer after all; a broken leg bone is unlikely to be a humerus. Missed because *I* didn't have the opportunity to read this one in MS!)

Jonathan Wilson says

4.25 Stars

Martin Dick says

Absolute treat for lovers of swords and sorcery

Mike McClung has an absolute gift for complex world building and multilayered characters. He takes some well used tropes (the orphan sword monk, the princess pining for self determination) and breathes new life into them. His characters, while powerful, are naive and it is their awakening to what the true cost of having power in their war-torn empire is, that makes them believable and interesting. Some characters are undoubtedly evil yet the reader may still feel a sympathy at the way the realities of life have forced them to either wither or find strength where ever it is offered. This complexity of the "good" guys vs "bad guys" will

be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the Skin Walker War and looking forwards to book 2, An Unclean Strength.

Simon Howard says

Prayers In Steel is the first book I've read by this author and I have to say I'm impressed. Throwing you straight into the action. We meet Caida, Caida is a warrior Monk of the Andines who follows the tenants of their patron saint Andos.....When Caida is asked/ told to rescue a princess who has been kidnapped on the road to her wedding.....It seems simple enough and donning his armour and great sword he sets off firm in his faith and beliefs.

Of course nothing is ever that simple and Caida and his sword are to be tested to the limit.... There is a great amount of action in this book, some very clever world building and the pace as I've said is fast. However it's the wonderfully fleshed out characters that make this a great work of fantasy..... You have a complexed Princess in Anya, some corruptible Mages..... Jaga Khun and his band of mercenaries could of just been one dimensional, but some great action scenes and some clever witty banter between them had me really rooting for them and of course in the background for the moment we have the skin walkers bidding their time. But what sets this book above others of its kind is its leading man.... Caida.. The author manages to strike just the right note between his (Caida's) rock solid belief in his faith and abilities and struggles within about the questions life outside of the monastery are asking of him.....it's a journey I hope we can continue in book two which I am very much looking forward to.

Darren McGowan says

Not for me

I very much like the author, his writing ability and the characters he comes up with. This story just wasn't for me. Not a knock on the author, just me.

Colby Blake says

Short

Really enjoyed it. Lots of surprising wisdom in this book too. Hope the next one is a little beefier than this one

Jon says

If you've never read Michael McClung's work, this is a fantastic stepping stone into his world. Eminently relatable characters that act like real people instead of cardboard cutouts reading a script, solid world building without drowning you in Tolkien-esque detail, and the plot and pacing of a cinematic master.

McClung gets in his trademark wit and humor, although this book is a bit darker than his Amra Thetys

novels (which, honestly, weren't exactly bright and shiny either lol). I've been lucky enough to beta read this through its various revisions, and can easily say that if you dig David Gemmell or Glen Cook then you'll devour this novel. It's just as packed with swords and sorcery and sheer kickass as anything produced by those authors.

Solid 5 stars, ready for the next installment!

E.Y.E.-D says

Another really good story by Michael McClung. Until the end of last year I had only read his Amra series. This year I gave been reading as much of his other work as I can get my hands on and have been enjoying all of it.

This is the start of a new series that has some interesting characters that I can't wait to learn more about. Anya the extremely powerful witch is my favorite among them so far. Caida could turn out to be another I like depending on how his story plays out but so far not so much. The world is pretty standard fantasy but who knows if we have met everything that inhabits it so far.

This was a very fast once I actually had some time to sit down with it. I would recommend this to anyone that has enjoyed Mr. McClung's previous books as well as any fans of fantasy in general. He is an excellent author and I am looking forward to reading more in his both his current series.

Agnes Conway says

A real page-turner. Can't wait for the next book in the series!

Rituranjan Gogoi says

Grimdark Sword and Sorcery fun. The complaint that I have about this book is that, it felt too short and rushed. It is hardly 170 pages long, and that qualifies it as a novella which I finished reading within an hour or so. It is full of action and magic, it is brutal and bloody. I wanted a prologue and an epilogue which was missing, and hence it didn't manage to hold the element of threat and suspense that usually looms in a fantasy story. But, it was entertaining, with the pacing of a race horse with occasional bouts of cranky indecent humor that lightens the gloomy mood.

There is very little worldbuilding, and we don't get much of the setting and the lore. The backdrop of the story is also vague that hints at a great war fought between the humans and an otherworldly race. There is very little character development, except for snippets which we get as backstories. As for myself, I would have liked to know more about the origin of the skinwalkers, who the Auxumite really was, and also a brief history about the warrior monks of Andine. The politics between the kingdoms is only spoken of, but never focused upon, and the Empire just remains as an unseen force in the background that narrows the scope of the story and costs its depth.

The characters are well thought, but they remain flat, and it is difficult to emotionally engage with their

actions. I liked Brother Caida, the sword monk. By the end, he seems to overcome his naivete about his views, his faith, and begins to question everything he was taught. I wanted to see his backstory brought more carefully, rather than dumping it like information in the middle. Anya is the princess who has no qualms in destroying those that comes against her, by using any means as possible. She is a powerful sorceress, but her motives are pretty arbitrary. She lacks the complexity of a grey character, and has something lacking that gives a shade of moral ambiguity. Juga Khan, the mercenary, I'm eager to see what he has in store for Anya.

There were some interesting ideas floating around this thin shell of a story. The sword of Caida is infused with the user's spirit, and hence is the prowess and dexterity of Caida with a blade. I want to know about the mysterious power of the Numen. The mages in the story are woefully underused. The idea of an immortal guardian bound to the book of a wizard is pretty fascinating. I think that McClung should have focused a little more on the worldbuilding, rather than narrowing his focus to the events only. It's like getting the red meat without the little portion of fat, it's healthy, but it lacks the watering taste and aroma.

I will definitely read the second book, as the story takes an intriguing turn towards the end. I think that McClung revealed some surprises early in the midst which spoiled the thrill. Those should have been reserved for the later books. This new series definitely has potential, but, I think that McClung should rewrite it if it seems possible for him, because it is lacking the qualities of a fantasy story that is enduring, and brilliant. The full imaginative power of the author is absent here, which makes the book uninspiring. I hope that the author will address the issues properly in the later book.

Rob Hayes says

I read this book both in its Alpha stage, and the finished article, and I loved it both times.

We follow along behind 2 main characters. The first is pissed off princess, Anya, who is not very taken with the idea of being married off for political gain. Luckily for her she spent most of her childhood in a convent of nuns who held a number of ancient dark magic books in the library. Whether Anya was meant to read them or not... she did, and now she's angry and armed to the teeth with magics the world hasn't seen in a very long time. So, instead of heading off to marry Prince Charming, Anya decides to break the world. It's a fairly extreme measure, but then Anya isn't your standard Disney princess.

Our second character is Caida, a sword monk with a tragic backstory. The sword monks believe that the sword they wield is a representation (both literally and figuratively) of both their soul and their faith. Caida wields a great sword that most men would struggle to lift. There's a metaphor somewhere around here. Caida is young and inexperienced, but the best warrior the monastery has seen in generations, and the monks in charge have a mission for him. There's a princess needs rescuing... You can probably see where things are going from here.

The concept of Caida's sword being his soul is a brilliant one with a lot of scope for interesting development, especially as his faith begins to waver some. McClung does an excellent job of getting across Caida's reverence both for his sword and his faith, and regularly hints at something deeper within Caida's heart, something he doesn't quite know is there himself.

The story is set against the backdrop of a battle that is a prelude to war, a war which Anya is trying to instigate. She's a strong character, hiding naivety and a subtle fragility behind anger and bouts of magical ultraviolence. But McClung hints that she may be as much a pawn as a player in the game she is trying to

break.

The story is fast paced and there is always action around the corner. There's some really imaginative ideas scattered around the place as well, including a magical book that has its own immortal bodyguard, regardless of who is in possession of the book.

It's a fascinating read and I loved it both times I read it. But it has a couple of issues. It feels a bit rushed in some ways. The story doesn't feel like it kicks off at a natural point and just kind of starts out of nowhere. In some ways this is good as there's little scene setting or character development before we get to the plot, but it feels a bit off because of it. The character development also feels a bit rushed with backstories thrown in in info dumps that feel a little out of place.

Regardless of its issues, Prayers in Steel is a fantastic book full of devilish magic, high octane battles, and hints at a much grander story waiting to unfold. A well earned 4 out of 5 from me.

Lukasz says

Breaking the world appeals to Princess Anya more than staged marriage with a man she doesn't know, much less desire.

As she spent her childhood in a convent of nuns who held a number of ancient dark magic books in the library, she's gained some impressive skills and powers. It's quite possible she may have the power to bring an empire to the knees.

Early in the story, she meets warrior monk Caida. His sword is his soul and when it's needed he prays with steel wreaking havoc amongst his opponents.

Brother Caida was raised by Andines and he's a dedicated monk. Soon his faith and worldview will be challenged. It's possible that what he believes in is twisted and false.

Also, even though he's taken celibacy vows Anya may have the power to challenge them as well.

Skin Walkers, as the title suggest, do appear in the book. They're not the folks you would want to mess with. Unless you want your body taken and becoming a skin-walker mount.

It's the first book in McClung's newest series. The book was enjoyable and fast-paced. There wasn't much world-building and we're thrown in the middle of the action fast. The pacing doesn't really slow down. Blood is spilled, people die, dark secrets are revealed.

Some ideas were really nice. I enjoy Andine monks mythos and the magic book and its secrets. Skin Walkers are intriguing and their plan remains to be fully uncovered in the future.

On the other hand, I didn't relate to any of the characters. I don't particularly like Caida who's a bit of a naive oaf. Anya is quite interesting, but not fully fleshed. The character development feels rushed. Truth be told, I just don't buy it.

All in all, it's a decent book that I liked more than not. I didn't love it and I didn't find characters genuinely fascinating. While it won't make it to my favorite books of the month, it's worth considering in between longer, more difficult reads. Especially when you look for something shorter and fast - paced.

Lin says

Reeally enjoyed it. The characters were brilliant. The pacing was brilliant. Haven't enjoyed an epic fantasy this much in a long while, I just wish it was longer!!

XX Sarah XX (former Nefarious Breeder of Murderous Crustaceans) says

Actual rating: 4.75 stars. *And one quarter.*

Michael McClung, you have ruined my High Security Harem forever. First, there was Holgren Angrado (which was ~~delicious~~ bad enough considering the guy is a **semi-retired one-eyed mage** with ~~no~~ little social skills). Then there was Lhiewyn (which was quite ~~entirely~~ worrying given the guy is a **super extra grumpy, foul-mouthed, creakily decrepit ancient priest**). And now this. A bloody shrimping **ascetic, abstinent, chastity-embracing yummy monk**. That's it. This is the end of the harem. I mean, can you imagine for just one second the **lickable likes** of His Furriness and Mad Rogan rooming with **crippled old dudes and habit-wearing cenobites?**!

My thoughts exactly.

Pretty sure mutiny and revolution would ensue. Inconceivable! Unacceptable! *Kerf's testicles!* **Do you realize what you've done**, Michael McClung?! Do you know what this means?! I'll tell you what it means: I now have to build a **brand new Harem wing** for the exclusive use of your ~~Titillating Trio~~ **Unsavoury Bunch!** You're footing the bill for this one, **yes you are!** (view spoiler)

Sooooo. Yes, it is true, my Little Barnacles, I have revoltingly fallen for a **bald, robe-wearing monk**. And a virginal one at that *shudders* (view spoiler). **BUT:**

① **As seen above** ↑↑↑, his **beloved father** Mr McClung is quite the renowned manufacturer of **Most Unlikely yet Most Scrumptious Harem Material Ever** (MUyMSHME™).

② **He is a** ~~perk-sword~~ greatsword-wielding, **lean mean killing machine**. A badass warrior in a deceitful monk's frock. **YUM and stuff.**

③ He is **straightforward** and upfront and **persistent as fish** and upstanding and honest and **tells it like it is**. And that is **slightly sexy indeed**.

④ **He doesn't look entirely unappealing**. Just ask the damsel in little distress he's supposed to rescue. From what I've heard, she thinks he's pretty, um, **mouth-watering** and stuff. Then again, maybe it's just that she has a **habit fetish**. Because maybe she knows that habits are to monks what **kilts are to lack-of-underwear**

Scotsmen and stuff.

Conclusion: Beguiling Brother Caida (my new boyfriend's name, in case you were wondering) is **somewhat hot and somewhat mine.**

So. At the beginning of this **delightful little story**, my boyfriend is busy doing **slightly blah monk stuff** in his monastery when his **oh-so-non-harem-worthy abbot** sends him on a mission: "Off to rescue a damsel in distress you go, Young Padawan!" he tells Caida (more or less). The **lovely, innocent damsel** in question is Princess Anya. The **poor, defenseless girl** has been shamelessly **kidnapped** by a bunch of vile mercenaries while on the way to her wedding, you see. **Or so Caida thinks.**

Turns out the damsel is not in so much distress. Turns out it's the mercenaries who might need rescuing **from her.** Turns out Anya is a beautifully **cunning, homicidal bitch witch** you don't want to piss off. I think I'm in lurve. I mean, how can you resist a **merciless, bloodthirsty chick** who will go to any lengths to have her way? That's bloody shrimping impossible, if you ask me. Oh, and by the way: if you're thinking of having your **darling little girl** brought up by a religious order in a remote nunnery, **think again.** Unless you want to end up with a **spell-casting murderous maniac** on your hands. I personally think it's the **bestest education a girl can get**, but I have an idea you people might disagree with me on that one. You tend to be **weird like that.**

But anyway. So Caida sets off on his rescue-or-not mission, finds Sweet Anya and then **gore-spattered chaos, mayhem, sorcery, severed body parts** and spoiler spoiler spoiler ensue. It's pretty glorious, really. There's intense scheming, **villainously evil villains**, hahaha mercenaries, not-so-hahaha mercenaries, **a lovely siege**, bloody-fish-I-didn't-see-that-coming stuff, **creative soldier-making 101**, most wondrous fights and battles, blood-soaked everything, and did I mention severed limbs? Also, the story is **intriguing and compelling and exciting and page-turning and most excellent and fresh and sensational and stuff.** Also, yummy **skin walkers.** Obviously, duh and stuff. All in all, I did not entirely **dislike** this book. **Not quite completely, no.**

» And the moral of this **Get Those Pincers Moving Post Haste Murderous Shrimpy Children of Mine We Need to Get that New Harem Wing Up and Running Before Mr McClung Afflicts Us with More Improbable Yet Irresistible Harem Candidates Crappy Non Review** (GTPMPHMSCoMWNtGtNHWUaRBMMAUwMIYIHCCNR™) is: this book is **short.** This book is **cheap.** This book is **bloody shrimping awesome. So go buy it now and stuff!**

ARC kindly provided by the author in exchange for nothing, naught, nada. No review, no soul, not even a tiny body part. Because Michael McClung is kinda sorta cool like that.

· **Book 2: An Unclean Strength ★★★★★**

[Pre-review nonsense]

There are monks.

And then there are ~~super hot, greatsword-wielding dudes *cue heavy breathing*~~ **MONKS**.

► **Full Bloody Shrimping Hell I Just Fell for a Bloody Shrimping Monk What Have You Bloody Shrimping Done to Me Michael McClung Life Will Never Be the Bloody Shrimping Same Crappy Non Review** (BSHIJFfaBSMWHYBSDtMMMcCLWNBtBSSCNR™) to come.

[December 27, 2017]

I really couldn't care less about this ARC. I mean, it's not like I enjoy reading Michael McClung's books, or as if ~~I'd shamelessly begged asked for this one~~ or anything. Don't be ridiculous now, that would obviously be **beneath me**. What happened is that Michael McClung **forced me to accept this ARC**. He actually threatened to kill my murderous babies dead if I didn't! What was I to do? Deny him and see my homicidal offspring **perish in agony**? Of course not. So I accepted his ~~kind~~ mandatory offer. **And here we are.**

(view spoiler)

Glaiza Champion says

"You know what is happening, then."

"Yes, Andine. We are about to be besieged."

"How do you know?"

She stood, and gently knocked her own king over with a single, slender finger. She had just conceded the game that she was decisively winning.

"I know every move being made, brother Caida. By Roumney, by Ardesh, by the empire. Even by Jaga Khun. I know exactly what they will do, and to a great degree, when they will do it. The only piece I did not account for is you."

Brother Caida is a monk with a sword that follows the rules of the religion of Andos. The monastery serves the emperor and therefore so does Brother Caida. He is called upon to save the Princess Anya from an apparent kidnapping while she was travelling to her wedding. He soon realizes that not everything is what it seems, not his brothers, not his beliefs, and especially not the headstrong Princess Anya.

Caida is my smart, strong, loyal and easily confused Paladin™ and Anya is my sexy, badass, wicked, so-not-the-damsel-in-distress Sorceror™ and man, do I want them to "a bang, bang, bangity, bang. I said a bang,

bang, bangity, bang, bang, bang, bangity bang."

Now that I've gotten that out of my system - I must say that I definitely love this book, in almost every single way possible. The characters are more than just interesting, they're hilarious, creepy and so very compelling.

It's hard to know who and what to cheer for - do you cheer for the "good" imperial position that seems to be about order or for what appears to be the "bad" magical position that possesses people and possibly includes zombies? You'd think the answer is simple, but definitely not in this book.

Also: the world. The world is tantalizing and I want to just find a textbook that just talks about this world. I want to know more about Andos, and that nunnery that Anya grew up in. I want to know about guardian and the book that he guards. I want to know about the College of the Magi.

My only problem - and this is just a personal preference, to be honest - is that the book just jumps right into it. I like my fantasy with a little world building at the start. But, as I said, it's a personal preference and I believe doesn't take away from my eventual enjoyment of the book.

I definitely will look forward to the second book.
