



# Vegas Knights

*Matt Forbeck*

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**Vegas Knights** Matt Forbeck

Ocean's Eleven meets Harry Potter as two student wizards try to scam a Vegas casino... using **magic!**

When two college freshmen decide to use Spring Break making magic on the gambling tables of Las Vegas, little do they imagine that Vegas harbours a dark magical secret of its own... the whole place is run by magic, and they won't believe who's in charge...

## Vegas Knights Details

Date : Published March 2011 by Angry Robot (first published January 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780061994166

Author : Matt Forbeck

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Urban Fantasy, Fiction, Horror, Zombies, Magic, Science Fiction

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## From Reader Review Vegas Knights for online ebook

### Stefan says

The cover of Matt Forbeck's Vegas Knights describes the novel as "Harry Potter meets Ocean's Eleven," but it may be slightly more accurate (if not quite as effective, marketing-wise) to replace Harry Potter with Lev Grossman's The Magicians. Vegas Knights' main characters, Bill and Jackson, are two college students on Spring Break in Las Vegas. Sounds fairly normal — except the topic of their studies is magic, and they're not just in Vegas to party. Instead, they're planning to use their magic skills to become rich by cheating at the gambling tables. However, they quickly find out that this is easier said than done, because Vegas is very different from what they expected...

Vegas Knights is a fun, entertaining urban fantasy novel that starts off with a bang and rarely slows down. Matt Forbeck gives the reader a great feel for what it's like to gamble and party in Vegas, and combines this with an exciting and action-packed plot. As someone who's spent a good amount of time in the "City of Lost Wages," I felt that Matt Forbeck recreated the atmosphere of the place very effectively, even while adding a few fictional casinos (and of course, well, magic) on the Strip.

A large part of the first half of Vegas Knights is one long and excellent action scene that's genuinely exciting and impossible to put down. Starting from Bill and Jackson's second gambling adventure and running through their first meeting with the primary antagonist (whose identity is one of the best surprises of the novel), the story rarely slows down and is jam-packed with action and excitement. The pacing is so hectic that it occasionally feels as if this could have been turned into a much longer novel, but on the plus side, this also means there's not a dull moment to be found. (And how rare is it nowadays to find a fantasy novel that could have used more padding?)

Unfortunately things take a turn for the worse in the second half of Vegas Knights. The novel starts out as a fun, somewhat shallow but very entertaining magic-in-Vegas caper, but it turns just a bit too silly and frankly verging on the ridiculous towards the end. Saying exactly where and how this happens would spoil the story, but there's one specific moment where I just couldn't take the novel seriously anymore. Early on, it's easy to ignore the flat characters and occasionally clunky dialogue because the plot moves so quickly and offers lots of action and several surprising twists along the way, but after the turning point the book unfortunately strays into pure cartoon territory.

Still, if you don't take it too seriously, you'll have a blast with this novel. Vegas Knights is far from perfect, especially towards the end, but it's hard to imagine a more appropriate book to bring along and read by the pool if you're planning a Vegas trip.

(This review also appeared at Fantasy Literature - [www.fantasyliterature.com](http://www.fantasyliterature.com))

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### George Riggs says

A good magic fantasy set in modern times.

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## **Paul Barrett says**

VEGAS KNIGHTS is the story of Jackson and Bill, two college age guys who also happen to be magicians. So, like any smart kids with mystical powers, they decide to head to Vegas and use the Art to cheat at Blackjack and win lots of money. This all goes really well...for one night. Then things begin to go horribly wrong. The boys learn that they aren't the only magicians in Vegas. In fact, the town is practically overrun with them. All actual stage magicians are real magicians, and their leader is...well, that would be spoiling the trick.

But this magician isn't happy with the status quo. He has in mind to break down the barrier between the living and the dead. He's enlisted the help of Jackson's father, and would dearly love to have Jackson, one of the most powerful magicians he's seen, on his side. Jackson doesn't want to cooperate, and things get ugly.

There's much more to this engaging tale, but I can't say too much else without giving things away, so hopefully what I've written above is enough to intrigue you. Because VEGAS KNIGHTS is an intriguing tale. It's a wonderful idea well told by writer Matt Forbeck, full of cool characters, both living and dead, and an action packed plot that makes great use of the Sin City setting.

The character of Jackson is well-drawn. The story is told in first person from his POV, and he is an engaging character that you like. He's not perfect, and has been badly wounded by a family betrayal, which gives him nice motivation and makes his actions at the end both believable and touching. The action is tight and the book is well-paced.

Now Matt is a Twitter acquaintance and a really nice guy, so that makes criticism tough, but I hope he'll take it in the spirit in which it's intended. The problems I had with the book were minor, but they did detract from the enjoyment.

First was the character of Bill. He's one of those guys that you know is going to be annoying, and he was. He's a smart ass, which is fine, but he was a smart ass in situations where he should have known better. The boys get into some really dangerous (as in potentially fatal) situations, and Bill makes with the pithy remarks. This can work in a movie, but in a book it makes me wonder why the bad guys just didn't shoot him (or at least punch him in the mouth). This cavalier attitude occasionally rubbed off on Jackson, but was nowhere near as annoying or prevalent.

This was my biggest issue. The other two are more personal and may not bother you as much. The first was the main bad guy. He's a figure and one of the book's best ideas. I wanted to know more about him, about his past, what happened when he left where history left him (that will make sense if you read the book) and how he came into the position of power he did. Perhaps Matt will write a prequel that gives us some of that.

The other thing was the ending. I give Matt credit for going with an unconventional ending (and one that leaves things open for a second book) but it left me feeling a bit let down. If anything called for the ending you expect, it was this story.

But make no mistake, this is a good book that will keep you engaged and is well worth your time. I really would love to see it made into a movie, because it would be a good one. Pick it up and give it a read. Score: 7/10

Be sure to pick up a copy of my novel, GODCHILD. Available on Kindle. Thanks

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## **Ruth Ellen says**

I finally read one of Matt Forbeck's books and really liked it. It could definitely be made into an interesting and exciting movie. I hope that someone picks it up to read who is in a position to turn it into a top-notch movie experience.

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## **Nathan says**

During the height of Pottermania I heard the same old mantra trotted out time after time: "Well, at least it's got people reading!" - True, it certainly did and that has to be a good thing right? No, not necessarily.

The problem with creating a reading audience for a very specific kind of fiction is that once the source has been drained new sources need to take its place. This can lead to great things and amazing advances in literature both high and low brow or, as in this case, it can lead to Vegas Knights which, if I am to continue my analogy would be the equivalent of a bottle of Dasani.

The concept is quite a good one: two students try to make their fortune in Vegas via the judicial use of sorcery only to find that magic is the force that keeps the dark heart of the city beating. That, unfortunately ends the list of positives.

There are real and insurmountable issues with this book not least of which lies in the almost complete absence of characterisation. We never learn anything from or, indeed, about our protagonists. They are faintly jockish and seem to represent, knowingly or not, extensions of Harry Potter and Ron Weasley. We learn that our hero, Jackson, has survived Katrina but we are never furnished with any details that may have informed his character. The bad guys are, without giving too much away, famous people who are so clichéd and feeble as to make you question your previous opinions of them. Women feature in the book but they are almost laughable. Few exist in their own right and even the leading lady is a poorly conceived piece of arm-candy for our protagonist.

The plot stumbles and stutters and you can't help feeling that obvious plot-holes were raised with the author who went out of his way, jarringly in most cases, to plug them in the most convenient manner possible. It is when outlining the plot that the book becomes laughable. At one point, rather than relying on exposition or deft writing, we are pretty much told that the plot will make sense if we have read Lord of the Rings which leads me to the next problem.

Forbeck goes out of his way to reach his target audience and this rapidly becomes turgid and tedious. There is a constant barrage of references and name checks to popular culture icons. In one piece of dialogue alone two characters communicate almost entirely in references to Star Wars and The Princess Bride. It feels like there is a game of pop culture bingo going on...

Star Wars – check

Harry Potter – check

Lord of the Rings – check

Magic: The Gathering – check

The Princess Bride – house!

I'll admit I didn't see any Star Trek references but these could just have gone over my head or passed me by whilst I tried to work out what the latest in a litany of typos was actually meant to say. I understand that Matt Forbeck is deeply entrenched in the world of pop culture but I just feel he was relying on his status just a little too much.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't come to this book expecting a literary masterpiece but I had expected it to be worthy of publishing, sadly it wasn't. I think some of the blame for this should be levelled at Angry Robot. I know they are a Start-up publisher but they really need to take a look at their editorial staff. This isn't the first novel of theirs that I have read (in fact I would urge you to check out the massively superior *The Damned Busters* by Matthew Hughes) so I know they are capable of good things but they seem to be lacking in consistency and need to plug a few gaps especially when it comes to proof-reading.

Overall, I could see this being a not too bad movie or even a pretty good game but as a novel it falls flat – avoid it.

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## **Benni says**

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/vegas-kn...>

Vegas Knights is a standalone novel, described on the cover as “Ocean’s Eleven meets Harry Potter as two student wizards try to scam a Vegas casino...using magic!” Harry Potter is the go-to cover blurb shorthand for wizardry nowadays, and while in Vegas Knights we follow students of magic, the similarities to Harry Potter end there. Vegas Knights reads more like a supernatural *Bringing Down the House*.

The aforementioned students of magic, Jackson and Bill, are earning secret degrees in magic studies (publicly titled “trans-quantum postulating”) at University of Michigan’s Residential College. The boys are interested in putting their studies to practical use, however, and decide to spend spring break in Vegas. Since they have magical powers that can alter the faces of cards, they plan on winning big at card games. Unfortunately for them, they didn't pay enough attention in their Magical Logic 101 class, where they should have learned that (1) if they have magic powers, so must others, and (2) if they can bet on anything, it's that other wizards must have dreamed up the same get-rich-quick schemes. When they learn these lessons the hard way, Jackson and Bill will have to figure out how to escape Sin City alive.

### **Fast-paced action**

The action sequences in Vegas Knights put to shame even the highest-budgeted action movies. Where directors need millions of dollars in special effects and stunts, Forbeck uses language to much greater effect. Forbeck, rather than plucking words from the dictionary like the rest of us, forms his language from distilling the most potent shots of adrenaline. I have held my breath before; I have felt my heartbeat rise before; but never have I physically shaken from the rush generated from the action contained in a book until I read Vegas Knights. When the Author's Note at the end of the book mentioned that Forbeck once tried to develop this concept as a movie, the only surprising fact was that he never got far.

### **Never-ending excitement**

Even when the action stops, the excitement never abates. I enjoyed the Mojo Poker showdown, and even yearned to have my own copy of *Mojo Poker: The Game and the Rules*. Without spoiling too much, Vegas

Knights pleasantly surprises with its incorporation of real life magic lore and figures, as well as gaming references.

### **Little character development**

Just as you don't walk into the theater expecting in-depth character development from *The Fast and the Furious*, don't expect too much character development in *Vegas Knights*. The characters are a little one-note—for example, Jackson is the hero whose powers are greater than he could have imagined, and Bill is the sidekick who gets distracted by the glitz and the glamor. The emotions rely more on paradigmatic relationships—that is, we can relate to a mother loving her son without much explanation—than the author's careful construction. But this is a book where the story and the action take the front seat—and what story and action they are!

### **Why should you read this book?**

If you're craving a fast-paced action adventure, skip a movie and grab a copy of *Vegas Knights* instead. If you don't mind characters that never break their archetypal molds, you'll savor the magic rocket ride that is *Vegas Knights* and its action in spades. This is popcorn fantasy at its best.

Benni received a review copy of this book courtesy of Angry Robot.

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### **Matthew Gill says**

Ante Up Gentleman

Matt, Beloit is what his name tag reads. And he has dealt one amazing hand. So grab your Mojo and put on your best Poker face because this at this table, your cards can change at any time.

Matt Forbeck delivers an electrifying roller coaster ride, filled with Magic, Poker, and so much more. I am dying to spoil but I just can't spill too many beans! *Vegas Knights* had me racing through it's pages, something a book hasn't done to me in quite awhile. Matt had me lost in the imaginary landscape of Vegas, I could almost smell the clay poker chips and hear the sounds of slots. You couldn't help but get carried away by Bill and Jackson in their naive adventure to con the casinos of Vegas using Magic.

And the Magic itself, is simply put, masterfully done. There is enough flash and flair to have you on the edge of your seat amazed, but it is grounded enough that find yourself actually pondering the mechanics of reality. This clearly is not Harry Potter gone on a romp through Las Vegas. But as with any good stage magician, Matt gives you enough distraction that your left gasping and giggling as you flip the pages.

Even when the story turns to Bill and Jackson playing cards, I couldn't help but find myself gripped with excitement. Each hand had me on edge with suspense and everything is explained so well and with such detail you almost feel like your being tutored by a pro card shark.

This book was just a blast to read, I can't even begin to do it justice. But I can say one thing for it that anyone who knows me can use to gauge it's worth; No matter what, I will somehow have this book on my book shelf and treasure it for years. So if you see it on a shelf soon, buy it. Cause the chances of borrowing it from me will probably be about as much as striking it rich in Vegas.

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## **Ryan says**

I like urban fantasy. I like heist stories, and I especially like stories about gambling. This book, then, was right up my alley.

Two college kids go on a spring break trip to Vegas, hoping to use their newly-acquired skill as wizards to hit some big jackpots and make themselves rich. Seems like a safe bet, until they realize that there are other wizards already in Vegas, and that by doing so they're getting themselves caught in the middle of an epic magical conflict.

The gambling/Vegas bits were a lot of fun - I almost wish Forbeck had focused exclusively on those, rather than adding in the Epic Fantasy Elements; those bits don't feel out of place, but they don't necessarily add a lot to the story.

The only drawback I found was that Jackson and Bill, the two main characters, are both a bit stupid, and the plot hinges at several points on them making stupid decisions, which gets a bit frustrating at times.

On the whole, though, this was a very fun read, one that fans of the genres being mashed up should really dig.

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## **Paul says**

From the moment I laid my eyes on the cover of Vegas Knights by Matt Forbeck I had high hopes for what lay within. The cover boasts an eye-catching reworking of the famous Las Vegas sign and this perfectly sets the tone for what to expect. I'm glad to say that in this case my expectations were not only met, but also exceeded.

The novel follows the fortunes of two college students as they attempt to break the bank in Vegas using magic. Jackson and Bill arrive in Sin City with plans to slowly, and as subtly as possible, win as much money as they can from the all the casinos. Needless to say their plans go awry and in a little less than a twenty-four hours they are way out of their depth and embroiled in the midst of a magical turf war.

The pair discover that Vegas is the center for all magic in the United States, and that stage magicians are actually real magical practitioners hiding in plain sight. The majority of the city is controlled by a mysterious figure known as Mr. Weiss and Jackson and Bill's get rich quick scheme brings them directly to his attention. He makes them an offer that would be against their best interests to refuse.

By this stage in the proceedings I was thoroughly engrossed, and just when I thought I couldn't enjoy things any more, that's the moment that the author unleashes the zombies. As an aside, I have often suspected any novel can only be enhanced by the addition of rampaging hordes of undead. I should note that their presence in the novel is not done randomly. They are a necessary plot element and I was surprised and pleased by their unexpected inclusion.

I found myself rooting for Jackson and Bill as they moved from one disastrous decision to another. Both have differing motivations for going to Vegas. Jackson is not well off and in need of cash to continue his college education while Bill is wealthy and just in it for the thrill. During the novel the pair occasionally



come to loggerheads, and this added a nice undercurrent of tension between the two.

When I started reading the novel I was reminded of a short I read many years ago, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar* by Roald Dahl, which has a similar premise, but Matt Forbeck quickly goes in a completely different direction from Dahl and creates something that is uniquely his own. As a reader I was drawn in by the vivid descriptions of the glitz and glamour of the city but the author also takes time to expose the dark, magical underbelly of Las Vegas. I admit I was disappointed when I realized I only had thirty pages left to read, as I wanted the story to just keep going.

If Hollywood is listening, someone needs to snap up the rights to the movie version of this sharpish. It's a sure fire winner. I've never been to Las Vegas but if I did go there I would be heartily disappointed if it wasn't exactly the way it's described in *Vegas Knights*.

*Vegas Knights* is published by Angry Robot Books on March 3rd 2011.

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### **Joanna says**

I'd say that whoever came with the "Harry Potter meets Ocean's Eleven" tagline (probably the author himself) did not read/see neither of them...

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### **Ranting Dragon says**

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/vegas-kn...>

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### **Ole Imsen says**

As you perhaps can see from the cover image, this book has been called "Ocean's Eleven meets Harry Potter". I don't disagree much with that assessment, and it is certainly a good description of the basics of the story for anyone not well versed in the genre.

But I would rather describe it as Neil Gaiman's Books of Magic meets Las Vegas meets [good] Hollywood Action-Thriller.

At first this seems to be a pretty standard story of two friends going to break the bank in Vegas, with the only added ingredient being the use of real magic. But it doesn't take long before you realize this novel is much more than that.

Forbeck quickly pulls you into the story, I was hooked by the end of the first chapter. It doesn't take long before you realize there is quite a complex back story here, and it is one that is revealed over the course of the novel. Something that works very well. You always feel that there is more to be revealed, and that makes this a book that is hard to put down once you have started it.

It is a fast-paced story, there is lots of action and that is why I used Hollywood action-thriller as a description at the beginning of this review. But it doesn't feel like the action is placed there just to "up the ante", it is an integral part of the whole.

Another strength of this novel is that Forbeck is very good at adding that little magical twist to our world that signifies good Urban Fantasy. Everything is slightly different from the reality we know, but never so much that it becomes too implausible. A couple of the revelations were of the kind that made perfect sense, and I actually wouldn't be too surprised if it really was the way Forbeck tells it in this book.

The characters in this book are interesting, especially the main character. And even those that seem pretty typical have something fresh about them. I enjoyed following Jackson and Bill's journey through this version of Vegas, and I wouldn't mind following them to other places in the future.

Overall this is a fresh and suspenseful Urban Fantasy novel. It is great entertainment, and if you have a taste for fantasy in a contemporary setting this is definitely worth checking out.

This will also make a great read for anyone interested in stage-magic, Las Vegas, and casino card games.

Review originally published on my blog: <http://weirdmage.blogspot.com>

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### **Martin says**

Action start to finish with some good laughs and clever twists.

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### **Naberius says**

GREAT book!! Full review here: <http://fluidityoftime.blogspot.com/20...>

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### **Sam says**

The story meanders a bit to start with and the main plot doesn't really get going until you're well into the second half of the book. This is great if you like reading about college kids living it large (magically) in Vegas, but not so much if you're me. There's also a part where the author appears to claim (could be a prose issue) that a straight beats a full house....

At times Vegas Knights wants to be a modern pulp adventure, but other times it seems to take itself incredibly seriously. The protagonist's memories of Hurricane Katrina are tragic and affecting, but the balance didn't entirely work for me.

The last quarter is much stronger with a lot of fun action and the characters really come into their own. The final scenes force some really creative and tragic decisions on the protagonist. Then it ends. Quite abruptly. I'm assuming there will be a sequel.

In summary: I almost gave up on this one around the halfway mark, but I'm glad I didn't.

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