

# Review of The Blood Knight

Review of The Blood Knight, Book Three of The Kingdoms of Thorn and Bone

by Greg Keyes

Fans of George R.R. Martin's *Storm of Swords* and Tad Williams' *Shadowplay?*, Then you'll enjoy this fantasy adventure set in a Medieval-type world bristling with sharp, pointy weapons and creatures with pointy, sharp teeth... Keyes' third book in the series certainly packs a punch as he continues to whisk us through the plot at a breathless pace.

Something is badly wrong in the kingdom of Crotheny. Half the royal family have been assassinated, monsters roam the countryside, naked villagers are running around in mindless packs and hooded thugs are busy eviscerating innocent victims for the purposes of their dark magic. With our cast of characters valiantly battling to try and put things right...

And that's as much of a plot outline as I'm going to give – not because I'm being unduly coy about it – but because if you want to make sense of *The Blood Knight*, my strong advice is to read *The Briar King* and *The Charnel Prince* first. Keyes doesn't go in for any kind of prologue giving you 'this-is-what's-happened-so-far'. It's always a judgement call whether the author should update a reader who might happen to pick up a volume and read it out of sequence. But as Keyes doesn't slow the pace down by doing much in the way of backtracking either, I do wonder how said reader would manage. And it would also be a real shame to miss out on all the twisty plot turns that Keyes has set up in the previous two volumes – as well as the entertaining and intelligent development of the extremely well-drawn characters that people this world.

For me, this is the main strength of the series. Written in third person, multiple viewpoint, the plot and action all flow through the cast of three-dimensional characters. One or two are, inevitably, staple fantasy fare – the gutsy and determined young princess on the run, with her loyal companion, for instance. But Keyes manages to nuance their relationship sufficiently so that there are tensions about their different stations in life – and some of his other characters are excellent. My particular favourites are Aspar White, the king's holter, who is the Medieval equivalent of a Park ranger, with his grumpy dislike of people; and Queen Murielle, whose snappy sarcasm when confronted by the suitably slimy villain manages to elevate her from being yet another drooping female victim.

For those of you interested in sharp, pointy things, the detailed descriptions of the duels and fights certainly display a knowledge and interest in swordplay that should satisfy even the most ardent fan.

Through Keyes' character Stephen Darige, a language scholar and ex-monk, the author examines the way history is rewritten by victors to suit their own version of events – and how ruthlessly other accounts are expunged. Keyes also explores the linguistic twists caused by different peoples looking at epic events and creatures through the dimming lens of time, which often leaves only garbled folk tales and placenames as scattered clues as to what actually occurred.

All in all, this is a slickly written, engrossing fantasy epic - not quite comparable to the scale and grandeur of Kate Elliott's *Crown of Stars* series – but nevertheless, a worthwhile and highly enjoyable four star read. I look forward to reading *Book Four*.

8/10