



The Outsorcerer's Apprentice

Tom Holt

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A happy workforce, it is said, is a productive workforce.

Mmmm.

Try telling that to an army of belligerent goblins. Or the Big Bad Wolf. Or a professional dragonslayer. Who is looking after their well-being? Who gives a damn about their intolerable working conditions, lack of adequate health insurance, and terrible coffee in the canteen?

Thankfully, with access to an astonishingly diverse workforce and limitless natural resources, maximizing revenue and improving operating profit has never really been an issue for the one they call "the Wizard." Until now.

Because now a perfectly good business model -- based on sound fiscal planning, entrepreneurial flair, and only one or two of the infinite parallel worlds that make up our universe -- is about to be disrupted by a young man not entirely aware of what's going on.

There's also a slight risk that the fabric of reality will be torn to shreds. You really do have to be awfully careful with these things.

The Outsorcerer's Apprentice Details

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Author : Tom Holt

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From Reader Review *The Outsorcerer's Apprentice* for online ebook

Robert Cubitt says

Once upon a time there was a really creative and innovative author by the name of Tom Holt. He wrote really interesting and funny books about ordinary people finding themselves in extraordinary worlds and having to learn how to deal with them. Usually they learnt something about themselves on the way, such as how brave or how clever they really were.

Then Tom Holt created the multiverse (well, started writing about it anyway) and his books got really boring and samey. Why? Probably because in the multiverse you can do anything or be anywhere just by looking through the hole in a doughnut. If that doesn't work then you use an old man and his tall but hungry nephew to solve the problem for you. It led to lazy and uninteresting writing with little drama and even less humour.

Please go back your roots, Tom. You're better than this.

For those of you who do want to read it, its about a man called Gordon who outsources work to an uses an alternative universe while making huge profits by exploiting the people of that universe. This would actually be a good morality tale if it wasn't so poorly told. Gordon's nephew Benny turns up (trying to escape the tedium of revision for his exams) and as a consequence some of the people of the world start to think about what is going on around them and realise it isn't quite right. Throw in some elves, dwarves and goblins and stir till the reader gets bored. You never do find out what happens to all the dead wolves. And they all live happily ever after, I suppose.

Maggie Salisbury says

Just okay. I had fun reading it--but it was uncohesive. While the concept was wonderful--outsource menial work in this world to a parallel universe with lots of mythic familiarity for the reader--there was too much going on and it lacked a plot structure to pull together all the cleverness into a real story line. I actually liked the LOTR parody parts and I loved the very liberal snooty elves criticizing one another's "slim volumes." The simultaneous mockery of heartless corporate culture (ready to exploit all and sundry for the almighty dollar) meant that the parody was nicely even-handed across the spectrum of modern viewpoints.

Justin says

The Outsorcerer's Apprentice commits one of my cardinal sins of writing right off the bat: nowhere does it say that this is part of a series. The synopsis on the back makes it sound like a completely standalone story, the list of other books by the author at the beginning does absolutely nothing to indicate that this is connected to any of them, and even the little intro paragraph makes it seem like this is a self-contained novel.

That said, it's going to be hard to review this, because (I sure as hell hope) some things that are confusing here, are explained in the first two books. So, for example, while the donuts-as-portals plot device is still an rather stupid idea attempting to be funny, maybe it's better-established in earlier volumes. Even so, I can't

bring myself to rate this more than a 2.

Purely on the merits and flaws of its writing, *The Outsorcerer's Apprentice* is a very mixed bag. While there are some truly inventive turns of phrase sprinkled throughout, they're outweighed by dull characters who tend to all sound the same (King Mordak as a notable exception), and a plot that meanders around pontificating for far too long.

For the characters, we've got Benny (a well-meaning imbecile, except when the plot calls for him to be brilliant), his uncle Gordon (a real bastard, whose one attempt to justify his actions is laughable--and not in a good way), Buttercup (a Red Riding Hood-esque girl who spends FAR too much time unsuccessfully trying to convince wolves to stop attacking her), King Mordak (a goblin, who's really the only likable character), a stereotypical human attorney, a unicorn who used to be a man (explained in earlier books?), and a uncle/nephew pair of mercenaries, whose only defining characteristics are that the uncle is smug and knows everything, while the nephew eats all the time. Riveting pair, those two. The real problem is that you could take a random line of dialog from the book, and it could feasibly have come from any of them.

As for the plot, the bulk of it boils down to, "There are far too many dragons and wolves and woodcutters in this fantasy land, and nobody's wondering how this is sustainable." And that's pretty much the gist of it for most of the book, with some goblin/dwarf negotiations thrown in here and there. It's just...lacking, and the humor is far too hit or miss to shore up the tedium. It doesn't help that the book is riddled with spelling/grammatical errors.

Perhaps I would've liked *The Outsorcerer's Apprentice* more, if I'd read the first two books in the series, but if they're written at all like this, I somehow doubt it. I went into this, hoping to find the next Terry Pratchett or Douglas Adams. Tom Holt is clearly trying to fill that void, but if anything, he's trying too hard; humor has to roll off the cuff naturally, and when you try to force it, it's painful.

Michael says

This was not a good book, despite an amazing premise. I so desperately wanted it to get good, but it stalled for hundreds of pages before a lame ending capped off a less than fun experience.

Final Recommendation: Don't bother.

Just_ann_now says

THE CHEESIEST OF ALL THE CHEESES

but every time I'd start to think, "This is just ridiculous," I'd come to something like,

"He'd let the annoying, common-sense deficient, ludicrously over-tall waste of oxygen crawl in through the cat flap of his affection and curl up in front of the radiator of his priorities"

or

"Benny is gormless - more than that, he's a black hole into which gorm falls and is utterly consumed"

and how could I quit that?

Anna says

Nope sorry.

I've tried to give this book a chance but I just can't keep it up anymore.

Bye, book, sorry we didn't understand each other. I certainly didn't understand what was happening and why was it worthy of writing about.

Diana Davis says

I really wanted to enjoy this book more than I did. There are some funny bits and I kept reading trying to get into the story but unfortunately this book has a few issues. (small spoiler at end of review)

Almost all of the characters are male. Of the main characters only one is female. I'm sick of this sort of thing.

There is one female character who seems to be an important character for the first part of the book but she completely disappears. Apparently she was only there to get a male character involved in the story.

There's a major Deus ex Machina - an old man and his nephew - that come in at the end and tidy everything up (or most everything).

Amanda says

I forgot how much I like Tom Holt! I accidentally picked up the third in this series first - need to go back and start from the beginning.

Liz N says

What would happen if you asked a bemused economist to narrate and examine your favorite childhood fairytales? Well, I have a feeling it would look something like *The Outsorcerer's Apprentice*. For years, a realm of magical creatures have been going about their business without any regard for rationality or basic market economics until a young woodcutter's daughter starts realizing opportunities for arbitrage, a knight starts examining dragon populations, a goblin makes some un-goblin like decisions, and a young man starts an adventure that was never meant to be, well, quite so adventurous.

While I was excited by the premise of the *Outsorcerer's Apprentice*, the wacky jokes and playful humor failed to get to a deeper level of emotionality, leading to Terry Pratchett-esque humor without the deeper bedrock of emotional depth. Holt writes some truly fun mash-ups of fantastical creatures running some of the most amusing corporate schemes, but after awhile, it feels a bit like reading a string of stand-up acts rather than a cohesive plot. For clever book to lighten your mind before bed, this might be a gem, but don't expect

a riveting page-turner.

Matthew says

Really was hoping for something a little more than this book ended up delivering. I've read Tom Holt in the past and in hindsight shouldn't have been so suprised. His books are often a real hit or miss affair. I don't know that I'll bother with the other two in this series.

Kitvaria Sarene says

First of - this is not a book for everybody.

If you love silly, crazy and over the top humor - then go for it! You'll love it as much as me! If you don't - keep clear of this one...

Scenes like this one, made me absolutely fall in love with the book:

"In order to fulfill your quest -"

"Would you please not use that word? It's so Robert E. Howard."

"Fine. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to travel to the far ends of the earth...?"

"What? In these shoes? You must be joking."

"Crossing arid desserts and steaming jungles," the unicorn continued grimly, "fording mighty rivers and climbing snow-capped mountains-"

"I take it scheduled public transport isn't an option."

"Until you reach the Cradle of All Goblins, interrupt just once more and I wash my hooves of you, where you will encounter three trials. You must uncover the great truth that was hidden, you must right the ancestral wrong, and you must throw the fire into the ring of power. Only when you have done that -"

"Excuse me-"

"I warned you. Only when you have done that will you -"

"Excuse me," Benny said firmly, "but I think you may have got the last one a bit turned round. Surely it should be throw the ring-"

If you enjoy such silliness, this is the right book for you. If you are looking for "serious epic fantasy" or something of the like - just back of slowly :P

Holt combines a magical fairytale with economics, lots and lots of humor and perfectly crazy characters.

Just my cup of tea!

Andie says

I liked this more in theory than I did in practice. While it created an interesting world to a certain extent, it didn't live up to my expectations in terms of story. I felt like it was such a wandering plot, that they never really got to the point. The book spent more time asking the same questions over and over again than answering any of them. All in all... meh. Kind of boring.

T.O. Munro says

Writing is hard, writing comedy is harder, I think even harder than stand up comedy. The stand up comedian has the immediate feedback of audience reaction. He or she can tailor their material, shuffle the gags and decide if something needs to be cut. The writer of comedy sends their work beyond a veil and, beta-readers apart, gets feedback only once the work is complete, the jokes all told, the bid for funny made.

In my review of "Apocalypse Cow" I thought the humour a little strained with the effort of walking the borderline between ha ha and peculiar

"The Outsorcerer's Apprentice" by Tom Holt is another book that tries on the Terry Pratchett mantle of real world satire in a fantasy setting. However in Holt's work the links between reality and fantasy are more explicit than the chuckle inducing cross-references of the Discworld novels. This is a book revelling in a multiverse of parallel worlds with reality exploiting and distorting fantasy for the baldest of economic advantage.

That is the central joke of the book, the ultimate in outsourcing, forget call centres in Mumbai and sweatshops in Bangladesh, let's exploit a low paid fantasy workforce of elves, dwarves and goblins.

It's an interesting and clever idea and it sustains a lot of narrative thread. But a book needs more than one funny idea to sustain the reader interest. There are some smile inducing characters and some clever lines. Personally I liked "The other one when pulled is a campanological delight" For most of my reading I veered between thinking 3 stars and 4 stars.

The story was what kept me reading, the old questions of What will happen next? When will these two people meet up? Who is the strange man in a flat cap? Why would a unicorn do that? What is it with wolves and tea sets?

The story is the thing, and in the end I felt the story was just a bit messy for my taste. A tangled ball of interesting and colourful wool more than a fully knitted article. So I settled on three stars, I liked it but in the end I thought that there were too many loose ends that the story tripped over in its eagerness to cleverly amuse. .

Doc Opp says

I picked up this book because I like clever wordplay, and the title amused me. And early on, I was consistently impressed by the cleverness of the writing, the snarky observational satire, and generally the wittiness. It reminded me a bit of Terry Pratchett, or A. Lee Martinez, or Douglas Adams. I had high hopes of finding a new fantasy humorist and a dozen book reading list to look forward to.

Only... it was readable but it wasn't all that engaging. Maybe it was the pacing. Maybe it was that there were too many forced elements of the plot. Maybe I was just tired when I was reading it. For whatever reason, the book felt like it was less than the sum of its part. For such clever writing, it was surprising how much I didn't look forward to reading it.

I'm going to give Tom Holt another chance - it's possible I stumbled across the dud in what is otherwise a collection of excellence. Certainly the potential is there (and many of his other books have witty titles too - I'm a sucker for that). But this one was just ok.

Chira says

I got this from the library because it looked light and funny and quick, and in those respects I was not disappointed.

However, nothing warned or prepared me for the fact that it was the third on a series, a fact I didn't know until I came to add it here, in fact.

It's technically fine to pick it up without reading the other two - from what I can tell, they take place on different parallel realities anyway - but there are many terms and short in-jokes that I'd shrugged off as just another part of the author's wink-knudge approach to humor.

There's really only one running joke that makes up the book, and it gets a little tired by the fourth iteration of it, but all I was looking for was a quick, light read for the laundromat, and it performed that function admirably.

Hez says

Thought I would try this author as he seems to have written a lot of books and was looking for sci-fi fantasy series I could get into.

It was a pretty light read, storyline was new and a bit funny but not a book I would say was particularly high on my must read list.

It reminded me a lot of a modern take on Terry Pratchett and Pier Anthony (both whom I've read A LOT of their books)...

If I was looking for a change up from something heavy, I'd probably read another of his books.

Jess says

I absolutely loved this book... at first. About halfway through something changed, though I can't quite put my finger on what. The Outsourcerer's Apprentice has a great premise, but halfway through it loses it's teeth and all lose ends are wrapped up by a mysterious duo instead of the large cast of "heroes".

As it turns out this is the third in a series, not a standalone novel, so perhaps the previous two books would shed some light on these characters and the world they inhabit. Though I wasn't amazed by this novel, I liked it enough that I plan to read Doughnut and When It's a Jar. Perhaps then I will realise The Outsourcerer's Apprentice was filled with "A-ha!" moments and self-referential humour. But then again, maybe not.

Heddwyn Creaney says

I really enjoyed this as a book to read during my lunch breaks at work. Wasn't impressed with the ending, but it was a good laugh and a pleasant, light hearted break. It made me genuinely laugh out loud quite a few times. I would read another novel by this author, although probably not for quite a few years.

Amy Rijk says

I'm still not really sure if this series is meant as a series of stand alone books or as a full on series. It doesn't ever mention it being part of a series. At the end there's even two previews for the previous books with a 'if you enjoyed this book you'll enjoy these'-message. So I guess they are stand alone? But then this book explains a lot of things I didn't get while I was reading The Good, The Bad and the Smug, so I'd say it would be smart to read this before that book. So it's a series? I dunno...

I really like the first 50-60% of this book. The characters are pretty fun, but a little bland. I mostly liked King Mordak who will always remain my favourite in this and The Good, The Bad and the Bold. I do however think the tie in with the real world wasn't as succesfull. It became a little preachy at times and less funny. While that does give this book a bit more of a story to tell, it felt a little tone deaf to me compared to the very humouristic start. Apart from that it's a pretty fun, easy read with a little bit of mystery. The last bit of the book didn't really work for me, but the majority was worth it.

Celia says

Ah... Only now, that I go to add this on goodreads, do I see that it's in fact the third in a series...

Overall, Outsorcerer's Apprentice was a fun little "beach read" for people who like snarky fantasy. It went by quickly and was enjoyable, maybe even more so for the fact that I hadn't read these other ones. You did get the sense that some unexplained characters are meant to be call backs to other books, but other than that it was a good time. Some of the characters are a little one dimensional, but the main uncle/nephew pair were surprisingly great once I read to the end.

Probably an nice 3.5 stars.
